

LETTING GO OF PAST PAINS

Awhile ago I got caught looking at my past – things like my traumatic childhood and my experience with psychosis. At first it was kind of interesting to look back and see where the anxieties that had been plaguing me had come from. Anxieties had been causing some big and – even embarrassing problems. I found myself hurting all over again. I felt like the little child I used to be, and I even behaved a bit like her.

- How do you feel when you think back to your past? Did you have a good childhood or was it traumatic?
- How has your past affected who you are today?

There is great value in looking back. Psychologists have us do that all the time to help us see what has made us into the people we've become. We look back to learn.

In *The Sacred Journey*, Frederick Buechner writes, "it is mainly for some clue to where I am going that I search through where I've been; for some hint as to whom I am becoming or failing to become that I delve into what used to be." Looking back is good if it carries with it a positive purpose.

The apostle Paul had done some terrible things in his life, things he was later sorry for. In Acts 8:3 we read, *"But Saul [Paul's name before his conversion] began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison."*

Paul had lots of ugly stuff in his past to look back on. But listen to what he said in Philippians 3:13-14: *"Brothers and sisters... one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus".*

- Can you too forget the past and reach for what God has in store for you?
- What can you learn from your past and use to create a better future?

I want to remind you of a wonderful verse that I think has come to hold a lot of meaning for most of us. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 Paul writes: *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus*

Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God."

In Isaiah 43:18-19, the Lord says:

*"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.
See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland."*

God isn't concerned with who we were or what we did in the past. The important thing to Him is what we do with today and tomorrow.

A great story about someone who had been through hard times was the one about Joseph. We all know the story of how his brothers were jealous of him and sold him into slavery. I'm guessing they had been jealous of him for a long time. This was probably not the first mistreatment he suffered at their hands. His childhood was most likely not all rosy either.

But Joseph forgave. But Joseph forgave in an amazing way. He made peace with his past. He let it go. He chose to live for the new day and for tomorrow.

How was Joseph able to make peace with the past? He saw how, through his past, God had made him into the person he was. He could see how – if he had not been sold into slavery – God would probably not be using him the way he was. He would not have become a leader in Egypt. God shaped Joseph through his life experiences.

- Can you see how God has shaped you through your life experiences?
- ...Or are you having trouble seeing that? Why?
- Like Joseph, we have been prepared for whatever ministry God has in store for us. Does that give you hope? Does that help you put the pain of the past behind so you can move forward and be of service to God today?
- Can you think of a way you can live for today and tomorrow?