Breaking the Power of the Past

Breaking the power of the past does have a personal cost to us, but it is for the sake of our children. My dad was 54 when he was shot, I will be 54 in October this year. I am putting that out there so you can start saving for my present. But seriously, I do see patterns from my dad attempting to repeat themselves in me, but as best I can I stand firm and rather struggle through and pay the price myself so that the unhealthy pattern stops with me and will go no further in terms of my children. So far and no further. It can be hard, it costs, but I do it for the sake of my children that they would have a better life. The reality is that you are always discipling your children, whether intentionally or not, they are always watching and will become who you are, not who you say they should be.

Get a Great Future Out of the Past

God's intention is that we get a great future out of our past. There isn't a biblical character who shows us this better than Joseph. As a seventeen-year-old boy, Joseph experienced great loss and tragedy at the hands of his family. He lost his family, his homeland, his language and culture, and his freedom. For thirteen years, he lived as a slave and then a prisoner.

No one would have blamed Joseph for complaining, "My family ruined my life. They robbed me of my best years!" But he never did that. Instead, he persevered through massive difficulty because he believed God's plan and purpose for him was good. We see this clearly when he later says to the brothers who betrayed him:

Gen 45:8 "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.

A while later Joseph reminds his brothers that:

Gen 50:20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Joseph knew, as scholar Walter Brueggemann writes:

"the evil plans of human folks do not defeat God's purpose. Instead, they unwittingly become ways in which God's plan is furthered."

In the same way, we can trust that God's plans and purposes for us are good, even when our circumstances are far from good. God placed each of us in a family at a particular moment in history, into a particular set of circumstances, in a particular city or town. Those particulars shape us into people who, like Joseph, might be a blessing to the world. God very often works in, through, and despite our family and past, in ways that are hidden and mysterious. Joseph never denies his painful past; in fact, he weeps over his losses. And yet, alongside his grief, he surrenders to God's will and trusts in God's goodness. We must do the same.

God has been at work in your life before you even took your first breath. He wants to take your history and build a great future out of it. God wastes nothing, especially your pain and failures, if you offer it all back to him.

In her book *Inner Compass*, author Margaret Silf gives us a powerful "prayer picture" of what it looks like to let go of the past to live into the future God has for us.

Imagine yourself standing on the banks of a wide, fast-flowing river. You must cross but there is no bridge. Jesus comes carrying a large stone and places it in the river right in front of you. He then invites you to step out onto it. Every day, he brings another stone, and then

another, and another. You move further out into the water each day. One day, however, you find yourself in the middle of the river with the water rushing all around you, and no new stone appears. When you cannot move forward, you feel a wave of panic. You look backward to the shore and only then do you realize where the stones are coming from. Jesus has been systematically dismantling the cottage on the shore behind you—that place in the past where you have lived your entire life—and is turning it, one stone at a time, into stepping stones for your future. You take a deep breath and wait for God. When your heart is still, he quietly places the next stone in front of you. He invites you to take yet another step across the fast-moving river. You realize now he will always bring one more stone—just one at a time—and then nudge you forward. You realize you can trust him as he continues to take the stones from your past and uses them to lead you into a good future.

God invites us to leave the past behind for a great future. But this too is a slow process. Yet, as we step out in faith to follow him to new places, we discover that he takes the broken parts of our history to create something beautiful we can offer to the world, just as he did with Joseph.

Break the Power of the Past in Every Area of Life

The implications of breaking the power of the past to embrace God's future are more far-reaching than we initially realize. Everything is fair game:

- The way you handle money
- How you navigate your relationships with authority figures
- The way you deal with conflict
- Your views of gender roles and sexuality
- How you understand holidays and rest
- How you approach death, and so much more.

Not only is the scope comprehensive, it's also ever changing. Every new season of life brings with it new situations and challenges that need to be addressed.

When we realize that each of us carries emotional and relational baggage from our family history, our approach to life should be transformed. Our family history, our past, has a significant impact on the present.

The Apostle Paul says to us:

2Co 5:17 Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons (Multiplies) my addition)! Look at it! (MSG)

I see at least three compelling themes:

1. New creation means living as a new inclusive community of God;
2. New creation means being recreated and transformed into the image of Christ.
3. New creation means living in the freedom of the Spirit rather than entrapped by our past

How do we break the power of the past? There are some pathways to help you break the power of your past: These pathways will serve you well on your journey in the years to come. But most important, listen to Jesus in the process. He is your rudder for navigating these deep waters.

Take a thoughtful look at your own motivations, goals, and family dynamics.

You need to know what you are feeling and thinking.

Psalm 27:4 "One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek Him in His temple."

The Good News: God's love and presence in your life should be the main thing that motivates you every day.

Create safety within the context 'safe' people

1Th 5:11 So speak encouraging words to one another. Build up hope so you'll all be together in this, no one left out, no one left behind. I know you're already doing this; just keep on doing it. (MSG)

Safe people that can honestly express their concerns. This will take time. Be curious. Listen. Ask questions and turn to wonder rather than judgment as you listen.

Invest in your spiritual/emotional development.

Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. 1 Timothy 4:15; 2 Peter 3:18

We all need discipling, particularly in how we do relationships, how our past impacts our present, and how to have a constructive dialogue rather than a criticizing argument.

Name and Tame the Negative Legacies of Your History

Exodus 20.5-6: You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, <u>but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments</u>.

Our families pass on patterns and legacies over multiple generations. The truth is that we cannot change what we are unaware of. However, once we name the root causes and expressions of our negative legacies, their power over us is diminished, if not broken. And when they are the Lord promises to show His love to our children and our children's children.

Some Negative Legacies from my past

- Distrustful
- Suspicious
- Viewing healthy critique as disloyalty
- Overly busy and fast moving
- Unwilling to address conflicts
- Unduly prideful
- Indifferent in addressing racial injustice, the poor and marginalized, and the environment

How continue to break the power of those negative legacies (a work in progress and I suspect it will always be)

- Generosity of spirit
- Inclusive
- Learning from healthy critique, and staying loyal
- Working from a place of rest and contemplation
- Kindly and gently addressing conflict

- Leaning as best I can into humility
- Working toward living a multi-cultural, multi-generational, non-sexist, caring for the marginalized and the environment life

Every time you make a choice to break the power of the past rather than ignore it, you are taking up your cross to follow Jesus. It often begins as an experience of pain, fear, and darkness that appears to be leading you into a bottomless abyss.

But let me encourage you: the truth will set you and your family free. I can promise you that you and your life will be reborn into a new place of maturity in Christ. Resurrection is a certainty—if we remain in Jesus, allowing ourselves to be held by him.

But remember the core principle of emotionally healthy discipleship: we always begin by looking at ourselves. Our families will never mature beyond the maturity of the parents. It is our responsibility to model working on our own "stuff" to be an example to our children and our children's children.

I love these words spoken by an old Hasidic rabbi on his deathbed:

When I was young, I set out to change the world. When I grew a little older, I perceived that this was too ambitious so I set out to change my state. This, too, I realized as I grew older was too ambitious, so I set out to change my town. When I realized I could not even do this, I tried to change my family. Now as an old man, I know that I should have started by changing myself. If I had started with myself, maybe then I would have succeeded in changing my family, the town, or even the state—and who knows, maybe even the world!

It is time to break the power of the past! Keep the pathways before you and your family, following through on at least one of them as a first step:

- Take a thoughtful look at your own motivations, goals, and family dynamics.
- Create safety within the context 'safe' people so they can honestly express their concerns.
- Invest in your spiritual/emotional development
- Name and Tame the Negative Legacies of Your History

These pathways will serve you well on your journey in the years to come. But most important, listen to Jesus in the process. He is your rudder for navigating these deep waters.