



Your Past Can Be One of Your Worst Enemies

- When I was a boy my family had a short wooden fence in our side yard.
 - One day several of us discovered that the wind had blown it down.
 - Being the creative youngsters we were, we spent hours carrying it around, riding on it, and doing all sorts of things my father would not have appreciated.
- That night the inside of my upper thigh began to hurt.
 - I mentioned the problem to my mother and even pointed out the spot on my leg that seemed especially tender.
 - She applied the same remedy that moms in those days used for practically any physical problem, a generous dose of mercurochrome.
 - For those unfamiliar with this miracle drug, mercurochrome was a red liquid that came in a bottle with an applicator brush.
 - That night I went to bed with a big red splotch on my leg and my mother's assurance that all would be well.
- However, the pain became worse.
 - I actually started to limp which was having serious impact on my outdoor playtime.
 - Even several additional applications of mercurochrome were not helping.
- About a week later I was soaking in the bathtub when I started squeezing around on the area that seemed to be causing the pain.
 - To my shock (and somewhat delight because, after all, I was a boy) a large splinter started coming out of my leg.
 - Apparently I had become closer to the picket fence than I realized.
 - The point is that my mother could have applied a fifty-five gallon drum of mercurochrome on my leg but until the splinter was addressed, all other attempted treatments were futile.
- now please think about this...what if you had a splinter, in your heart?...
 - in other words, what if there were issues from your past that had never been properly handled?...and as a result you were limping through life in a way that was painful or ineffective or both?...
 - does that possibility even exist?...**with that question in mind, please open your Bible to Habakkuk chapter 1...**

Introduction

Christians often fall into one of **Two extremes when considering the past:**

- **Those who Believe the Past Is Everything.** You fail today because you were abused in the past. Your love cup is only half full. Your deep personal needs were not adequately met. Your wounded inner child is creating emotional pain. Your memories need to be healed. Today's choices are not your fault because you are being ruthlessly driven by the past.
- but on the other hand are...
 - **Those who Believe the Past Is Nothing.** Do right. Suck it up. Serve more. The abuses of the past have nothing to do with your choices today. Jump through the

right behavioral hoops and you will soon be fine. Your former failures are irrelevant to today's struggles. Don't worry, be happy.

- I believe both extremes can be disproven by Scripture...and so our goal is to craft a biblical theology of this subject...
- and perhaps we should even define what that means – in biblical theology, we are trying to scour the Scripture for all that is said on a particular subject so our way of thinking and acting related to that topic is balanced and robust...

...Your Past Can Be One of Your Best Friends...

I. When You Need Strength and Confidence [we saw that in the example of David].

II. When You Need Encouragement and Balance [we saw that in the example of Job]...

III. When You Need the Ability to Forgive [Jesus parable in Matthew 18 about forgiveness].

IV. When You Are Struggling with Pride and the Need to Repent [Moses' words to the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 9:7 and Jesus' words to the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2]...

...

1. Ways God has strengthened you in the past – your bears and lions so you're prepared when a giant comes along...
 2. Ways God has been good to you in the past – so when a trial comes along (and perhaps someone is even encouraging you to curse God), you can say, like Job, "shall we accept good at the hand of God and calamity?"...
 3. Ways God has forgiven you in the past – so when it's time to forgive someone else, you do that quickly because you remember how much God has forgiven you – you understand that spiritual amnesia on that particular point is a very dangerous disease indeed...
 4. Ways you've failed in the past – and we have to be careful about this one because we don't want to just wallow around in our past failures, but the Scripture at least gives a place for recalling failures in the past as an antidote to the sin of pride...
- now let's try to tie that together...the issue of the 2 extremes (past is everything/past is nothing) and the matter of how your past can be one of your best friends...
 - which extreme does that point especially address?...
 - you could actually take the position that it addresses both groups...here's why...
 - the past is nothing crowd would be the kind of people who never think about their past...it's irrelevant...
 - well, people like that are not going to benefit from their pasts the way God desires...
 - and that essential aspect of the way God created us, with the capacity to remember, is not going to have the positive impact on that person God desires...
 - so, if you tend to be "a past is nothing kind of person"...you need to remember that your past can be one of your best friends...and you need to cultivate that part of who you are the way God desires...
 - on the other hand, that point also takes a swipe at "the past is everything kind of person"...
 - because when individuals like this discuss their pasts, it's almost exclusively in the negative...
 - their wounded inner child, their toxic pasts, etc....
 - they act as if they wish someone would invent a contraption similar to the x-ray machine you go through at the airport...but this one would erase all memories...

- we'd all be better off if we didn't have a past...
- if you lean toward that ditch, you too would need to remember that if Scripture is to be our guide, this subject is not entirely negative...
- your past can be one of your best friends...
- now, especially in light of the splinter in the leg story...you can probably guess what we're going to work on:**Your Past Can Be One of Your Worst Enemies...**
- this point especially addresses "the past is nothing" kind of person...
- and let's face it, some Christians (perhaps many) take the position that the past does not matter (are you like that?)...
- so they seldom consider how or if prior events might be affecting their current thoughts or behavior.
- Yet we're going to see this morning that the Scripture teaches several ways that one's past can dramatically impact the present in ways that are decidedly negative...
- and Christians who fail to factor such truths into their working theology often run out of behavioral steam because issues of the heart cannot be ignored forever.
- now one more point we need to make about this – and it's not an easy one to hear...
- Churches can exacerbate the problem [we can make it worse] by expecting external performance without offering solutions to the pain of disappointment, tragedy, abuse, failures, and suffering.
- Too often the church suggests and sometimes demands that its people jump through behavioral hoops without providing compassionate and effective care for the inner man.
- Our message can and must include a robust theology of the potentially negative impact of unaddressed issues of the past.

With the time we have remaining, let's think about **6 ways your past can be detrimental to your life and relationships today**...the first is, when you have...

I. Unanswered Questions.

- I want to ask you to do something unusual this morning...take a moment and...

A. Consider your greatest trials.

- and I realize that may be a painful thing for some, if not many in this room...
- but think about the questions you had as you walked through that experience...
- what troubled you the most?...What was so upsetting?...Why do those events even stand out in your memory?...now, here's the...

B. Key question – Have you ever spoken to God about these matters?

- look at **Habakkuk 1:2-4...READ**

C. Great example -- Habakkuk

- if you're not familiar with this book, Habakkuk is a prophet, and he is writing during a time in the history of the nation of Israel where God's people are behaving in a very sinful way...
- what is unusual is that the northern kingdom has already fallen to the nation of Assyria...and you would think that the remaining southern kingdom of Judah would take note of that and draw closer to God...
- but that wasn't happening...and Habakkuk was troubled by that...
- but here's the key point...he doesn't just stuff those questions inside...
 - he doesn't ignore what is troubling him...
 - he doesn't just "put on a happy face"...
 - he goes to the throne of God and he asks questions...[repeat the text...]

- Can you believe words like that are in the Bible?

- Can you picture this conversation taking place, where a human being looks to heaven, as if he truly believed he was having a literal conversation with a living Person, and asks why God has not yet answered him, and why God has allowed His people to continue in their sin without consequences?
- He is sickened by the violence and disobedience around him and he cannot understand why God has allowed all of this to continue.
- now here's the point – this man had the courage and the godliness to bring his questions directly to the throne of God...and the rest of the book would indicate that the Lord was honored by one of his servants who attempted to cultivate a relationship with Him that was honest and authentic.
- now let's turn that around to us...
- Some have grown up believing it is wrong to question God. They think such activity is disrespectful, immature, or unfaithful.
- and of course the ultimate appropriateness of any question involves issues such as content, tone of voice, heart motivation, etc.
- But posing questions to God in the right way can actually be an act of reverence and worship because it demonstrates that you want to use the trial of your faith to grow in your understanding of Him.

D. Does that mean that God is going to audibly answer?

- of course not...
- we speak to God in prayer, He speaks to us through His Word...
- **2 Peter 1:3 - seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.**
- but as we walk in the Spirit, we can have every reason to believe that He will give us the wisdom, direction, and answers we need (cf. John 14:16-17, 16:12-15).
- sometimes [perhaps often], this includes sitting down with someone and talking through Scripture's perspective on hard questions...but even that step will never occur for those who think the past is irrelevant...

E. What's at stake?

- What might have happened if Habakkuk had not been willing to follow these steps?
- What if he had agreed with those who taught that good people do not ask questions or that faithfulness is defined by outward conformity alone?...here's the response...
 - Those unanswered questions would have become part of Habakkuk's past.
 - The opportunity to grow deeper in his walk with God would have been lost.
 - and here's the greatest concern...probably his relationship with the Lord would have become more distant, formal, and shallow for reasons the prophet may not ever have fully comprehended.

F. What if the Lord chooses not to provide answers in His Word?

- that is a fair question...
- and the answer is – that's His business...because it is true that while the Scripture is sufficient...that does not mean that every question is answered...
- that's why we could label this category – unasked questions...
- but I wonder how many people will be with us today who have a splinter in their spiritual leg...and it's time this week to have some more direct, honest, and authentic conversations with the God of heaven...just like Habakkuk did in this great book...

- now, what's a second way your past can be detrimental?...it's when you've made...

II. Unwise Choices

- one of the reasons God has given us His Word is to make us wise...would you agree with that statement?...
- **Psalm 19:7 - The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.**
- well, how does God's Word do that?...one answer is – simple people (foolish people) do not consider the consequences tomorrow of their choices today...
- but the Scripture emphasizes a principle that is very important...

A. The cumulative nature of life.

- in other words, the choices you make today become part of your past...part of who you are....part of your DNA...
- here's a clear example...
- **1 Corinthians 6:15-20 - Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body *with her*? For He says, "THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH." But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*. Flee immorality. Every *other* sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.**
- do you see what Paul is trying to teach the men and women in the Corinthians church?...opening your life up to certain sins begins a cycle of habituation that is often very difficult to break...
- and the upshot is...don't even start...you've never looked at pornography...don't start...you've never taken drugs, don't start...you've never gotten drunk, don't start...you've never gossiped about someone else, don't start...you've never used profanity, don't start...you've never been sexually unfaithful to your spouse, don't start...
- the same principle could be stated like this...

B. The power of cause and effect.

- **Galatians 6:7 - Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.**
- and what's the lesson...if you don't want to reap it, don't sow it...
- the lie of the devil is – you can make certain choices today, and as time rolls on, it won't hurt you...
- and many of us who are older know how untrue that is...

- I'm not suggesting that you can't change...as long as you're willing to be honest about the existence of the splinter...if you keep rubbing the mercurochrome of behaviorism and busyness on it---it won't do any good...but you can get the splinter out – if the Scripture teaches anything, it teaches that people can change...
- but something better than that is never getting the splinter to begin with...
- and if you're operating on the premise that the past is nothing, you're more likely to make choices today that you are going to greatly regret tomorrow...
- a third way your past can be detrimental...

III. Unaddressed Hurts

- there is no question about the fact that's God's Word teaches that followers of Christ can be joyful in all circumstances...
- but that is not to suggest that we won't be hurt, and sometimes hurt deeply...

A. The upshot of living in a sin-cursed world.

- and sometimes I wonder if people hear us talk about joy and conclude that is somehow wrong to hurt...
- big boys don't cry...Christians only rejoice...just rub some dirt on it
- is that the best the church has to offer?...is such an approach even remotely consistent with God's Word?...

B. The example of our Savior.

t...**John 11:35 - Jesus wept.**

- and one of the things that is interesting about that passage is that John doesn't tell us all the reasons that occurred...but the fact that it did occur is very instructive...
- remember this also – the OT had promised that the Messiah would be a...
 - **Isaiah 53:3 - ...A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief...**
 - do you realize that...

C. Some of God's finest servants were "man enough to cry."

this is one of those many places where the pastor needs the sermon as much as the congregation...

- Job 16:16 - My face is flushed from weeping, And deep darkness is on my eyelids,

- what is interesting about that example is that he said it in front of his accusers, the three miserable counselors...but he was still willing to be honest about the depth of his hurt in front of these other men...who in this case because of their incompetence were actually adding to the pain...
- that's why he also said...**Job 16:20 - My friends are my scoffers; my eye weeps to God.**

- perhaps the way to summarize this point is to speak about...

D. The power of spiritual candor.

- I'm taking that phrase from the book *Soul Physicians* written by Bob Kelleman
- Bob defines this phrase as courageously telling oneself the truth about life, "**in which I come face-to-face with the reality of external and internal suffering.**" He goes on to say, "**In candor, I admit what is happening to me and I feel what is going on inside me.**" (*Soul Physicians*, p. 300). He then reminds the readers of King David's words in...
 - **Psalm 42:3-5 - My tears have been my food day and night, while *they* say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" These things I remember and I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go along with the throng *and* lead them in procession to the house of God, With the voice of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival. Why are you in despair, O my soul? And *why* have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him *for* the help of His presence.**
 - I think Bob is right to emphasize the importance of being honest about our hurts. This is part and parcel of what it means to be made in the image of God.
 - Yet how many of God's people have bought the lie that emotions are for sissies or that real Christians never cry?
 - What happens when hurts are never faced? Is it true that time heals all wounds?

- Or is it possible that some unaddressed hurts become a powerfully negative part of a person's past?

IV. Unsolved Problems

- this may be one of the biggest splinters for many followers of Christ...
- there has been some sort of breach, some sort of offense...and they (you?) have never sat down and communicated directly with that person...
- that is a direct violation of the Word of God...

A. Using anger in a timely fashion.

- **Ephesians 4:26-27 – Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger and do not give the devil an opportunity.**

- see, use the energy created by anger to solve problems biblically, and solve them today....
 - because if you don't, such issues become part of the past...
 - by the way, the end of that passage is a powerful principle to motivate us to act on what we're studying today...if we don't, we have done what?...given the devil an opportunity...
- please think carefully about what that means...we're not just talking about the possibility of limping around with a splinter in our legs...we're talking about cultivating a past in such a way that we have opened the door for the onslaught of the adversary...[develop, if time, spouses who open their lives up to "affairs" because they didn't solve problems in a timely fashion --- those unsolved problems inexorably become part of your past...]
- now, if you say...well, what's the danger of letting my anger go?...won't it just evaporate?...no, often it turns into bitterness...

B. The power of bitterness.

- **Hebrews 12:14-15 - Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;**

- there's our point yet again – your past can be one of your worst enemies...bitterness is likened to a plant that springs up...
 - it's like a poisonous mushroom that appears in a pile of manure...
 - Even an unkind word or a thoughtless deed can begin this process. Some Christians feel uncomfortable or disconnected from certain people in their life and they have never taken the time to consider why that is the case.
 - of course for others it was something far more significant. The abuse was real or the disappointment was significant. But the abuser has never been faced. The issue has never been discussed. As a result, the bitterness that resides is as thick and black as old motor oil.
 - and please also notice that the text explains that many other people can be "defiled" as a result. Entire families have been ruined by an unsolved problem.
 - Churches often split because men and women do not address problems in a biblical and timely fashion.
- We'll study in another time how to specifically go and speak to people about unsolved problems, but we first have to be honest about their existence...

- Friend, is it possible that an unsolved problem with another person in your life has made this aspect of the past your enemy?

V. Un-confessed Sin.

- do you remember...

A. God's counsel to Cain.

- after Cain disobeyed God and brought the wrong kind of offering, God had no choice but to reject it...His holiness allowed no other response...
- but then Cain's reaction should have been repentance, and a request for forgiveness, and a promise to do right...
- but instead Cain became angry (at God!) and his countenance fell (the first recorded occurrence of a pouchy lip)... but then God said...
- **Genesis 4:6-7 - Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? "If you do well, will not *your countenance* be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it."**
- do you see what God said right at the end...if you let this sin become part of your past...it will be like a lion, crouching at the door of your heart, waiting to pounce on you, and master you...

- that's why we read in Scripture...

B. The importance of keeping short accounts.

Proverbs 28:13 - He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes *them* will find compassion.

- if you have unconfessed sin in your past, where you have not asked forgiveness from God and the appropriate people, the lesson is clear...you've allowed the past to become your enemy...

VI. Unlearned Lessons

A. A graphic metaphor.

- **Proverbs 26:11 - Like a dog that returns to its vomit Is a fool who repeats his folly.**

B. The overall principle

Bad choices that are not recognized and corrected become part of who we are.

