



Getting Past Your Past

Brad Jersak

"I just can't take it anymore," she cried.

"When did this start?" I asked.

"When I was a child. When my parents..."

"Can we 'go there'?" I asked.

"I've already dealt with it!" she sobbed.

"Then why is the pain still so fresh?"

How many times have I had that conversation? Perhaps hundreds! We often imagine we've dealt with our past and yet when faced with it, find those old memories are storehouses for residual pain. We might wonder if we'll ever get past our past. I'm no guru on the subject. I only write about it because I'm so familiar with the battle myself.

OUR PAST

Our past can haunt us in many ways, but the three biggest categories are:

- (1) what others have done to us,
- (2) what we have done to others, and
- (3) what we have done to ourselves.

The common factors in all three scenarios are *me* and something that is *done*.

Wouldn't it be nice if past events truly were *done*? In one sense, what is *done* no longer exists. Yesterday has passed into non-existence. It's over. And yet what has happened is not simply *done* and *gone*, is it?

We store the past as memories in our hearts today—as narratives we reconstruct and retell ourselves over and over. And as stories, they are recollections—interpretations that vary in accuracy, in which we may paint ourselves much better or worse than we actually were.

Here's the hitch: even though the events of bygone days are many miles behind us, the emotions associated with the past remained housed within our minds in the present.

Unlike brick-and-mortar banks with airtight safes, our "memory banks"—even the "dark closets" we hoped to lock shut forever—may spill open when triggered by current events, by sounds and smells, by familiar places and faces.

We may find ourselves reliving our painful past again and again, stuck in a moment that we just can't get past. The most severe cases are diagnosed as *post-traumatic stress syndrome* (PTSD) but

the stubborn fact is that every one of us has some past to get past.

GETTING PAST

This begs the question: what does "*getting past*" our past even mean? And what needs to happen for us to do so?

Since Sigmund Freud coined the term "psychoanalysis" in 1896, modern psychology has developed many valuable treatments that help patients process their past. In Christian circles, there are also numerous schools of "inner healing" that introduce Jesus and prayer into the mix. I've been both a practitioner and grateful client of inner healing myself.

But long before our time, a Great Physician and Wonderful Counselor came onto the scene. No one before or since ministered the way he did.

Of course, I'm speaking of Jesus. Christ himself is the Key to the healing of our broken hearts. Others mimic him, some very effectively, but there is no one quite like Jesus.

He is the One who bore all our sins and all our sorrows. He is the "man of sorrows, acquainted with grief." He was the One who announced for all people in all times (and all memories), both

“Father forgive them” and “It is accomplished!”

LET IT GO

It will be no surprise when I say that the #1 ingredient to Jesus’ therapy is *forgiveness*—forgiving others for how they’ve hurt me, receiving God’s forgiveness for how I’ve hurt others and myself, and forgiving myself for the wrongs I’ve done.

We get past our past by forgiveness. That’s it.

But if that’s all there is to it, why is it so hard? I suspect we don’t really know how. I can only share my own process and hope it serves others.

1. Confession: I make an honest confession of my story and my feelings in the presence of God and someone safe who embodies his kindness. What I won’t reveal does not heal. Said another way, I *let him in*. I welcome Jesus into my memories to cleanse them of what torments me and replace it with himself.

2. Letting Go: The New Testament word “forgive” literally means “let go.” Specifically, I *hand over* the burdensome emotions of my past and all the people involved to Jesus. I actually picture opening my hands and releasing them to him.

3. Receiving: Having released the burden of guilt, shame, hurt, grief or anger—along with anyone who hurt me (or vice versa), I keep my hands open for a gift, a trade, an upgrade. I watch and listen in my heart for the good gifts Jesus has for me. I receive them with thanks and allow them to reshape my story. I no longer think of my past as if Christ were absent from it. And if he is there, maybe I don’t even need to get past it. □

Brad Jersak is a professor and author of numerous books, including his latest, “A More Christlike Word,” which is available at ptm.org/books.

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