

“I Need Help Resolving Past Stuff In My Life”

I need help resolving past stuff in my life. I'm stuck and I don't know where to go or what to. Can you help?

I can tell you that from my study over the years, as well as personal experience, I believe the key to emotional healing (which is what resolving past stuff is about) is a two-pronged effort: grieving and forgiving. That said, the overarching, “big picture goal” is what David realized in Psalm 51:6 when He told the Lord, “I know that You desire truth in my inmost parts.” God brings freedom and healing when we allow Him to show us the lies we have believed about what we've experienced and the conclusions we have come to about Him, about life, about other people and about ourselves. When we renounce the lies and embrace the truth, we actually experience Jesus' promise in John 8:32, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.” But it needs to be more than an intellectual assent to the truth; we also need to open our hearts to the freeing power of truth.

It's important to face our losses and our woundings, inviting Jesus into the process (absolutely essential), so that we give Him access to those places in our hearts that need healing. In fact, one of my mentors calls Christian denial “the refusal to give God access to the hurts He wants to heal for His glory and our benefit.” Instead of going digging, it's much better to ask the Holy Spirit, our Comforter and Counselor, to shine His light on which wounds and losses He wants to address, since He knows the best order for untangling our messes. As He brings memories to the surface, we ask for grace in facing them, experiencing the feelings again but this time in a redemptive way because we are giving them to God to heal, and grieving the ungrieved feelings we haven't yet dealt with. This means tears, and sometimes screams. (The best definition I've ever heard of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, the emotional debilitation that can follow an emotional trauma such as sexual abuse, or war, or observing something horrific like the workers who cleaned up the aftermath of 9/11, is “failure to scream.”) Journaling is one of the most important tools in grieving because there is something therapeutic about the layers of sensory experience in writing on paper: holding the pen, feeling the paper, smelling the ink and the paper, hearing the sounds of pen on paper. And somehow, the Holy Spirit seems to be able to direct our thoughts and our feelings in the process of writing out what's in our hearts, and He dislodges the shards and splinters of lies that are embedded in our souls so that we can recognize them, renounce them, and embrace the truth He shows us.

One of the things God has shown me about grieving is that there is a finite amount of grief for each wound and loss. He knows how many tears are attached to each wound, and once they're out of us, they are gone forever, collected by God Himself in His tear-bottle (Ps. 56:8). (Consider this: if you think about a childhood loss or painful experience that caused tears, have you cried about it lately? Probably not, because you finished grieving it years ago. There were a finite number of tears over losing a beloved pet in fourth grade, for example. And also consider that since there will be no sorrow or crying or pain in heaven for the believer (Rev. 21:4), all our grieving has a time limit.

The other part of healing is forgiving, where we face the wrongs done to us and choose to let go of them into God's hands for Him to deal with. There are good resources on understanding forgiveness and how to forgive (two of the best are *Total Forgiveness* by R.T Kendall and *I Should Forgive, But...* by Chuck Lynch), but bottom line, we forgive because the only one we hurt by refusing to forgive is ourselves. It's like someone tosses us a hot potato, and we clutch it to our chest exclaiming with pain, all the while continuing to hold it to ourselves. Forgiving means letting go of the hot potato so it no longer hurts us. When we forgive the people who caused us pain, we release them into God's hands for HIM to deal with them as He sees fit. Louis Smedes said that when we forgive someone, we set a prisoner free, and we discover that the prisoner was us.

Refusing to forgive has terrible repercussions. Unforgiveness is a bitter, corrosive poison that consumes a person's soul and diminishes their spirit. I watched a family member grow increasingly invalid and weak with the years of holding onto grudges and insults, whether real or perceived, as if they were treasures. By the time she died, all of her life and vitality was drained out, and there was nothing but a brittle shell of who she used to be. But failing to grieve also has painful consequences: uncried tears heighten stress and cause all kinds of physical diseases and maladies. Because we are a unit of body, soul and spirit, our bodies hold onto soulish pain and it comes out as physical pain and illness. This is why James 5 "connects the dots" between physical illness, confession of sins, and the need for prayer.

Hope you find this helpful.

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