

## Healing From the Past

This month is all about things of the past. Just a few days ago we celebrated the 4<sup>th</sup> of July and soon I'll be attending my 30<sup>th</sup> high school reunion. Wow! Time flies by-at least for some of us.

Sadly for many people their pasts seem to follow them. They have succumbed to the belief system that their past "determines" their future. I agree that our pasts impact our futures, but many times we give the "pasts" too much control of the "futures." Many who have lived difficult pasts give up hope. When hope is lost there is no "mental gasoline" left to fuel the journey to a brighter future.

It is not easy to stay positive when there has been pain, trauma, or adversity. Sometimes people simply run out of energy for the battles they face. It is not easy to keep getting up day after day only to be smacked down again. Eventually there can seem like no reason to try. Many of us are like elephants in this regard.

I am told that elephant trainers tie baby elephants. These young elephants learn that their strength is no match for the huge ropes and chains. Since the elephants have learned that they can not get free they eventually quit tugging at the ropes. Today giant elephants are confined by small ropes which could never really begin to hold them if they really knew that they could get free.

Often it is difficult to see why others are stuck in their pasts. We can not see the ropes which are holding them captive, but they still have power. Until these ropes are destroyed it does no good to simply tell them to "get over it." Usually these individuals really want to walk in freedom, but they lack the strength and knowledge to get there. They will be held captive to their pasts until they learn how they can get free.

Therapy can help clients to discover that they no longer have to live captive to the past. Belief systems which stunt growth can be challenged. Sometimes the past must be reframed. Recovery plans can be developed which include resources and support systems.

In cases of severe trauma such as war and abuse more intensive therapy may be needed. These victims often suffer from post traumatic stress disorder, PTSD. Those with PTSD frequently have flashbacks of the traumas they

have endured. These intense flashbacks feel so real that it is practically as if the traumas from years ago are occurring all over again. The International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation offers excellent resources for those needing to heal from severe trauma, [www.isst-d.org](http://www.isst-d.org)

Forgiveness is another requirement for healing. Clients must release their self hatred. They must be willing to forgive those who have harmed them and they must be willing to forgive themselves if healing is to begin. Clients often struggle with forgiveness since they erroneously think that to forgive means that it was alright for the transgression to have taken place. Without forgiveness the victim is spiritually connected to the abuser.

Clients must also be taught that God is a forgiving God. It can be hard to face each day feeling that no matter what they do, they are forever doomed because of something that happened in the past. This spiritual issue can become mentally haunting for them.

Scripture is full of encouragement that the past need not define us. I bet those fishermen never expected to become disciples. Saul didn't expect to transform from an enemy of Christianity to one of its greatest proponents. The blind man did not expect to see and Sarah did not really expect to have a son in her very old age.

In what ways is your past holding you captive and stealing your future?