

A Fresh Start with My Past

Lesson 03 of the series, "Fresh Start"

I. Many of us need a fresh start with our past.

a. Some of us need to let go of guilt/shame.

"My guilt overwhelms me— it is a burden too heavy to bear. My wounds fester and stink because of my foolish sins... I am exhausted and completely crushed. My groans come from an anguished heart."

Psalm 38:4-8 (NLT)

Life Application: We must confess our sins to God.

"When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long. Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat. Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, 'I will confess my rebellion to the LORD.' And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone." Psalm 32:3-5 (NLT)

Life Application: We must confess our sins to each other.

"Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results." James 5:16 (NLT)

Confession rules of thumb: We should confess our sins to: (1.) those we have hurt, (2.) those who can help us and (3.) those we can help.

b. Some of us need to let go of anger / hurt / bitterness

Esau exclaimed, "No wonder his name is Jacob, for now he has cheated me twice. First he took my rights as the firstborn, and now he has stolen my blessing." ...From that time on, Esau hated Jacob because their father had given Jacob the blessing. And Esau began to scheme: "I will soon be mourning my father's death. Then I will kill my brother, Jacob." Genesis 27:35-36, 41 (NLT)

Life Application: We must forgive those who have hurt us.

"Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. He couldn't pay, so his master ordered that he be sold—along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned—to pay the debt. "But the man fell down before his master and begged him, 'Please, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.' Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt. But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment. His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it,' he pleaded. But his creditor wouldn't wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full. When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?' Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt. That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart." Matthew 18:23-35 (NLT)

"If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins." Matthew 6:14-15 (NLT)

II. All of us need to make some important commitments if we are going to keep our past in the past.

a. We must meditate on who we are in Christ.

"Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise." Philipians 4:8 (NLT)

"...anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!"
2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLT)

"So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, 'Abba, Father.' For his Spirit joins with our spirit to

affirm that we are God's children. And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory." Romans 8:15-17 (NLT)

"The LORD is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love... He does not punish us for all our sins; he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve. For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west. The LORD is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. For he knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust." Psalm 103:8-14 (NLT)

b. We must keep short accounts.

"So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God." Matthew 5:23-24 (NLT)

"And 'don't sin by letting anger control you.' Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil." Ephesians 4:26-27 (NLT)

c. We must develop relationships with friends who can help us let go of the past.

"Let the godly strike me! It will be a kindness! If they correct me, it is soothing medicine. Don't let me refuse it." Psalm 141:5 (NLT)

"He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us." 2 Corinthians 1:4 (NLT)

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Connect Group Questions.

To prepare for this week's meeting, take some time to focus on the following questions and write out a few brief answers. Be prepared to share them with your group.

1. Looking back at your notes from this week's teaching on "A Fresh Start with My Past" was there anything that particularly caught your attention, challenged or confused you?
2. What do the following passages teach us about forgiveness?
 - Matthew 6:14-15
 - Matthew 18:21-35
 - Mark 11:25
 - Colossians 3:13

Why is it sometimes harder for us to forgive ourselves than others?

3. Discuss the following "Serenity Prayer" written by Reinhardt Niebuhr:

"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time; Enjoying one moment at a time; Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; Taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; Trusting that You will make all things right if I surrender to Your will; so that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with You Forever in the next. Amen."

What portions of this prayer are the most difficult for you to pray? Which parts are easiest? Why?

4. What can we learn from the following passages about God's view of us and our past?
 - 2 Corinthians 5:17
 - Romans 8:15-17
 - Psalm 103:8-14
 - Isaiah 43:25

5. Make two lists under the headings provided below:

People who have hurt me

People I have hurt

a.

a.

b.

b.

c.

c.

Which list was easier for you to complete? Why?

Now read Romans 12:17-21 & Matthew 5:23. How should we deal with the people on each of our lists? Which of these lists will be easier for you to deal with? Why?

6. Discuss the following quotations:

“Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.” Stephen R. Covey

“Holding a grudge is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die.” Unknown

“It’s harder to make amends with an offended friend than to capture a fortified city.” Proverbs 18:19 (NLT)