

PRESSING ON...

"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:14



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Going Back to Breakthrough: Why we must examine our past.

■ by Anne Lockwood, MSW, LCSW



Have you left your past behind and yet find yourself repeating the same dynamics that surrounded you in your childhood or adolescence?

Do you deal with issues in relationships that seem to reoccur without explanation?

Do you perpetually seek human approval and try to please everyone to no avail?

Do you strive to stop your anger from erupting but rarely succeed?

Are you experiencing anxiety without plausible cause?

In order to move forward we must **look back**. God is continually writing His story of freedom, restoration, and renewal as seen in the gospel narrative found throughout the Bible. It is evident in these stories of renewal that in order to walk in freedom, we must examine our past and leave room for release of experiences that bind us, but unfortunately so many of us choose not to step into this process. Often it is fear that holds us back; fear of the possibility that our childhood, our past experiences, and our families of origin have impacted us, led us into darkness, and trapped us in destructive patterns. In his book, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, Peter Scazzero writes, "Our fear of bringing secrets and sin into the light, however, drives many people to

prefer the illusion that if they don't think about it, it somehow goes away. It doesn't. Unhealed wounds open us up to habitual sin against God and others." Other times, we avoid looking at our past due to the misconception that when we are made new in Christ we leave the past behind, never to look at it again.

Brothers and Sisters, when God makes us new he does not erase our past. We are still ourselves and our experiences have still happened and shaped us. Instead, he forgives us, leads us to forgive others, and sets us free to love and trust God and others. We must become vulnerable to allow Him to lead us to examine the impact of our

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God's Design & Plan for Marriage

| Marriage Tips Series

■ by Doug VanTil, MSW, LCSW



I must admit that I write this article with fear and trepidation. As a Christian counselor/therapist who works with couples, I will say it can be exhilarating, challenging, rewarding, frustrating and humbling - oftentimes all at once. The good and bad news, and for sure the humbling part, is being married myself for 35 years. We therapists encounter many instances which cause us to ask ourselves, "Who am I to offer couples wisdom about marriage?"

The other day I was talking to a friend about the prospect of writing this "Marriage Tips" article. As I was commiserating about my lack of qualification, he suggested (while understanding the basis for my misgivings) that wisdom is wisdom, and I should feel alright about repeating wisdom from many experts that have come before. With those words of encouragement, here are some "there's nothing new under the sun" tips on marriage from a Christian marriage counselor.

◆ **The first tip** is for me: Try to practice what I preach.

- ◆ **The second tip** is to remind ourselves of God's purpose and His design for marriage. I'll borrow from author and marriage counselor Gary Thomas. In his book, *Sacred Marriage*, he proposes that God instituted marriage to move us as individuals and as a couple (becoming one) towards holiness and not necessarily happiness. Perhaps the challenges, conflicts, and the triumphs that come with marriage, are all for the purpose to refine us and make us more and more like Christ, towards the furtherance of His kingdom. Gary challenges us to spend less time on striving towards happiness and more time and effort toward purity and holiness as per God's plan for marriage and relationship.
- ◆ **The third tip** is to remember that God's design for marriage is for it to last, knowing full well that a marriage unit is comprised of two sinners who sin a lot.
- ◆ **The fourth tip** is to accept the biblical, but not so glamorous, concept that we are now stuck with each other (for better or worse, for richer or poorer, till death do us part).
- ◆ **The fifth tip** is to think about the idea that working toward a good marriage should be motivated and driven by a desire to be a good model for our children, grandchildren, friends, and other observers.
- ◆ **The sixth tip** is to remember that with our fallen human natures it is natural to have the temptation that the grass is greener somewhere else. If we acknowledge temptation we can better resist it.
- ◆ **The seventh tip** is that the process of becoming holy requires vigilance, hard work, endurance, and patience.
- ◆ **The last, but not least, tip** is to remind ourselves that in God's holy plan He designed sex as a priority for us to figure out, work on, and enjoy in the confines of marriage. As men and women each uniquely made with different perspectives and abilities it's incumbent upon us to enjoy the almost limitless possibilities.



Doug VanTil is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. He enjoys working with individuals, couples and families in our South Holland location.

New staff...



Erin Davis, MSW, LCSW
Licensed Clinical Social Worker

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Adolescent & Adult | Individual & Couple Therapy

Erin has experience working with adolescents, adults, and couples in social service and ministry settings specializing in women's issues, difficult life transitions, crisis intervention, spiritual issues, and relational challenges. She is passionate about partnering with clients in their pursuit of wholeness—body, soul, and spirit and strives to create an environment where people feel heard, valued, and safe. Erin draws on a variety of treatment modalities, recognizing that each person and situation is unique and requires to be treated as so.

Erin earned her Master in Social Work from the University of Illinois at Chicago and her BA in Social Work from Bradley University, Peoria, IL.

The “S” Word

■ by Charlene Brouwer, MA, LAMFT

It seems fitting that the topic of sexuality comes up in the very first chapter of the Bible, doesn't it?

The first question that we ask after the birth of a baby is related to sex: is it a girl or a boy? Or the recently popular Gender Reveal Parties surprise the guests and often the expectant parents themselves with this important information through things such as cake or balloons in either pink or blue. Without sex, our world as we know it would not exist. You and I would not exist. Our sexuality is an incredibly important part of the human experience.



In this increasingly complex world, the way we talk about sex continues to change. Consider the terms sexuality, sex, and gender. “Sexuality” broadly encompasses everything involved in a person's state as a sexual being. According to the World Health Organization, the biological and physiological characteristics that make us either male or female are understood as “sex” categories. “Gender” refers to masculinity or femininity, and the roles and behaviors that our society considers appropriate for men and women.

In our therapeutic work at Chicago Christian Counseling Center, many of the issues for which we see clients are related to sexuality.

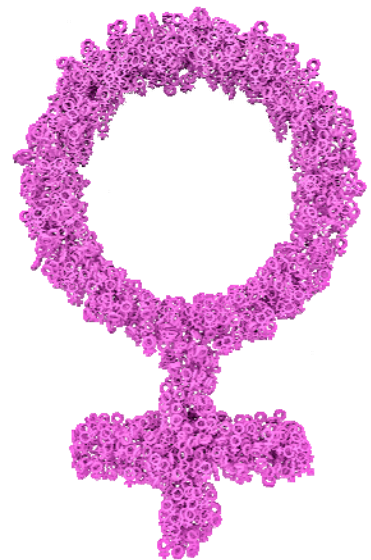
For example:

- Restoring marriage relationships following extramarital affairs
- Recovering from compulsive sexual behaviors, such as pornography use
- Healing from childhood sexual abuse or date rape
- Choosing healthy sexual boundaries and appropriate use of social media
- Moving forward in light of miscarriage or unplanned pregnancy
- Developing clarity and compassion regarding gender identity confusion
- Growing in understanding and empathy while working through sexual dysfunction

There seems to be an interesting dichotomy regarding sexuality. On the one hand, our world exudes and fixates on sexuality. This is evident in news, advertising, television, films, books, and shopping malls. It is nearly everywhere for all to see. On the other hand, our sexuality is the most private, intimate, defining part of our self. It is something many people find difficult to talk about, even within the walls of a confidential counseling office. And problems with sexual function or compulsive behaviors are often surrounded by secrecy and shame.

Another dichotomy related to sex and sexuality is its power to bring both joy and pain into our lives. Sex can draw a couple closer together in their marriage commitment, or drive them apart. It can be experienced as a healthy and joyful part of an individual's identity, or as a source of misery.

“So God created people in his own image; God patterned them after himself; male and female he created them.” ~ Genesis 1:27



Wherever you find yourself today related to this topic, be encouraged by these words of Jesus in John 10:10, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” Prayerfully consider how these words may apply to your sexuality. What is “life to the full” as it relates to your sexuality? What new work of healing, restoration and growth may God be guiding you to at this time in your life?



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Our Mission Statement

Promoting health and wholeness through professional counseling, consultation and education from a Christian perspective.

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past experiences on our current choices and ways of relating to others. As I invite people into understanding the formative nature of their past within our individual, marital, or family therapy sessions, the process is healing and life-altering. Understanding and acknowledging the unmet needs and wounds of my clients' pasts provides opportunities for God to meet them in being allowed to feel and express buried emotions, to realize why certain experiences elicit particular reactions within them, and even to usher in forgiveness and reconciliation with others. A client said to me the other day, "When you first told me we were going to look at my past starting in my

childhood, I thought you were way off. I had a great childhood, according to anyone that would look at it. Little did I know all that I was going to find as I processed my past experiences. It hasn't been easy to discover what I have, but, wow, has it been freeing and what change it has brought! I'm free to love in a new way, free to trust in a way I didn't know possible, and ready to receive my emotions as they come taking ownership of them rather than my emotions overtaking me."

There is hope. When we surrender to the Lord and open up the book of our past to watch as God writes the story of our future, we find true freedom; freedom in relationship to God, to others, and to ourselves. This process doesn't come without difficulty when we

allow God to break down the defenses we've built up to bury the pain, but where we permit and ask for God's light to shine, there can be no darkness. Will you allow God's power to heal the space that your past takes in the core of your mind, spirit, and body? If you're ready to start, I recommend you seek a professional Christian counselor to walk alongside you and guide you in your passage to the truth that will set you free.



Anne Lockwood is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. She enjoys working with individuals, couples and families in two of our Chicago locations in the Edgewater & South Loop neighborhoods.