

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 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 neighborhood.

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800.361.6880 | info@chicagochristiancounseling.org

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