

4 Truths to Overcome a Difficult Past

Christianity means change is possible. Deep, fundamental change.

It is possible to become tenderhearted when once you were callous and insensitive. It is possible to stop being dominated by bitterness and anger. It is possible to become a loving person no matter what your background has been.

The Bible assumes that *God* is the decisive factor in making us what we should be. With wonderful bluntness the Bible says, "Put away malice and be tenderhearted." It does not say, "If you can . . ." Or: "If your parents were tenderhearted to you ... " Or: "If you weren't terribly wronged or abused ... " It says, "Be tenderhearted."

This is wonderfully freeing. It frees us from the terrible fatalism that says change is impossible. It frees us from mechanistic views that make our backgrounds our destinies.

If I were in prison and Jesus walked into my cell and said, "Leave this place tonight," I might be stunned, but if I trusted his goodness and power, I would feel a rush of hope that freedom is possible. If he commands it, he can accomplish it.

If it is night and the storm is raging and the waves are breaking high over the pier, and the Lord comes to me and says, "Set sail tomorrow morning," there is a burst of hope in the dark. He is God. He knows what he is doing. His commands are not throwaway words.

His commands always come with freeing, life-changing truth to believe. For example: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other [that's the command], just as God in

Christ also has forgiven you [that's the life-changing truth]. Therefore be imitators of God [command], as beloved children [life-changing truth]; and walk in love [command], just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma [life-changing truth]" (Ephesians 4:32–5:2, NASB, author added comments).

There is life-changing power in the truths of this text. Ponder them with me as you pray for that power to change you.

1. God adopted us as His children. We have a new Father and a new family. This breaks the fatalistic forces of our "family of origin." "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven" (Matthew 23:9).

I once heard a young man quote Hebrews 12:10–11 with tears of deep conviction and great joy because they assured him that he was not doomed to think of God in terms of his abusive earthly father: "They [our earthly fathers] disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we share his holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (author comments added).

They did this . . . but He does that. This is a life-changing truth. We can know it, believe it, and be changed by it, no matter what kind of earthly fathers we have. God reveals himself in His word to revolutionize our thinking about His fatherhood. We are not cursed to think in the old categories if our upbringing was defective.

2. God loves us as His children. We are "loved children." The command to imitate the love of God does not hang in the air; it comes with power: "Be imitators of God as loved children." "Love!" is the command and "being loved" is the power.

3. God has forgiven us in Christ. Be tenderhearted and forgiving just as God in Christ forgave you. What God did for

us becomes the power to change. He forgave us. That opens a relationship of love and a future of hope. And does not tenderheartedness flow from a heart overwhelmed with being loved undeservedly and being secured eternally? The command to be tenderhearted has more to do with what God has done for you than what your mother or father did to you. You are not enslaved to your past.

4. Christ loved you and gave Himself up for you. “Walk in love just as Christ loved you.” The command to walk in love comes with life-changing truth that we are loved. At the moment when there is a chance to love, and some voice says, “You are not a loving person,” you can say, “Christ’s love for me makes me a new kind of person. His command to love is just as surely possible for me as His promise of love is true for me.”

My plea is that you resist fatalism with all your might. No, with all God’s might. Change is possible. Pursue it until you are perfected at the coming of Christ.

The article above is one of 120 daily devotions in John Piper’s devotional book, A Godward Life: Savoring the Supremacy of God in All of Life. The book is comprised of meditations to help keep your heart and mind focused on the unparalleled beauty and majesty of God. A new hardback edition is now available.

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