

Break Free From a Dark Past Into Your Destiny

One of the most difficult things for people to do is overcome the past. Mental health providers, social service persons, psychiatric practitioners and even the religious community will all attest to the fact that “issues” from the past continue to reverberate and ricochet into the present of most people’s lives, causing a whole range of consequences from toxic relationships to emotional handicaps to even physical illnesses.

The concept isn’t new. We have long recognized that “the child is father of the man” and “what is past is prologue” in our lives. Helping people find a way to cast off the baggage of the past is one of the most difficult tasks in ministry.

Pastors and Christian counselors spend inordinate amounts of time trying to help people let go of the guilt and blame they carry for mistakes of the past and encouraging them to open themselves to the healing and wholeness God has promised for all our lives. This is critical, for without this release of the past, people continue to lead lives filled with pain that is masked but never eliminated. It is much like taking medicine to eradicate the symptoms of a disease but never being healed of the disease itself.

The internal conflict related to the past is nowhere more critical than in the lives of women. More women seem to be afflicted with the burden of the unforgettable and unforgivable past because we make up the largest percentage of the church.

In addition, women are more likely to have certain burdens of the past because society has had a “double standard” of conduct and behavior for women, and women who have “missed the

mark” have had their own as well as society’s condemnation to live with.

In spite of the many changes sweeping the world because of the existence of multinational corporations and global economic success, there are still many areas in which the traditional roles of women have not changed. Even with communication and travel bringing the light of modernity to virtually every corner of the globe, we are still often shocked to find those antiquated systems that stifle the personal development of women, limit education and maintain systems that negate basic, human rights—socially, economically, legally.

The church should be a place on which the world system does not intrude. Unfortunately, judgments are too often made about our sisters in Christ that relegate them to positions of inferiority and failure based on subjective criteria. They are “disqualified” from leadership, service, ministry, even full participation in the life of the church based on their past experiences, failures, poor decisions, ethnicity and education.

Disqualified is a word women hear much too often. They are told they don’t “qualify” for the mortgage, the promotion, the job, the membership in the club. Even in church women who desire leadership roles are told they are disqualified by their gender.

And how many women have aspired to be used by God but believe that the past disqualifies them for a future in Him?

Poor choices, questionable lifestyles and a history of “failures” have made many women fail to seek, aspire to, accept or embrace their God-ordained future. They don’t understand that God sees us not as we were nor as we are but as He created us to be: fearfully and wonderfully made in His image, fully engaged, enlightened and empowered by the love of God.

The many women in the Bible prove that God does not disqualify us because of our pasts or for any of the reasons that society does today.

For example, we aren't disqualified because we are too old. Look at Sarah. We aren't disqualified because we belong to the wrong ethnic group. Look at Esther. We aren't disqualified because we are poor. Look at Mary, the mother of Jesus. In today's world, Ruth would have been an unregistered alien, but God gives her a prominent place in the history of His people.

Rahab's Story

And what about Rahab? Perhaps no other story of a woman in the Bible is as powerful a testimony of redemption and grace as the story of Rahab, the harlot of Jericho.

According to both our current standards and the standards of her times, Rahab was a "fallen" woman. She practiced a despised profession in the city of Jericho, a city that had been cursed for the inhospitable way it had treated the children of Israel as they passed on their way from the wilderness to the Promised Land. Rahab had so many strikes against her that anyone looking at her life would believe there was no hope for a positive future.

But this woman became a savior of her family and played an important part in the military conquest of the city by the Jews. In addition she became an ancestor of Jesus. Her life is a powerful illustration of the redemption Christ provides to us and how He can give power and purpose to the most negative life.

The Bible says that Rahab was a professional harlot. She was so well known and successful that her "house" was perched high on the city walls—the famous Walls of Jericho.

We can determine from the Scriptures that her house was a gathering place for all different kinds and classes of men. No

doubt men of all ages and occupations passed through her house: merchants, soldiers, students, scholars and travelers from distant lands.

As she entertained these men and the after-dinner wine began to flow, she no doubt heard stories about the invisible God of the Jews who fights against those who fight against His people. He was depicted as a warrior God who fights with fire and hail and thunder, who changes the course of rivers, brings down cities, and sweeps all before Him—even pharaohs and kings—for His peoples' sake.

The guests speak in fearful whispers, saying that this band of Jehovah-worshipers is marching 2 million strong toward her land and moving toward her very city! The information becomes crystal clear when a group of men show up at her house. By their unfamiliar clothing and strange ways Rahab concludes they must be a scouting party of the very enemy she has heard so much about.

But Rahab, believing the reports of this strange God, Jehovah, is moved to help the spies. She agrees to hide the men from the soldiers of Jericho who are pursuing them. She hides them in a basket on the roof of her house, and as soon as she has sent the soldiers away in a wrong direction, she lets the men down in a basket outside the city walls.

Rahab saves the spies, but in so doing, she makes a powerful agreement with them. She asks them to remember her, her parents, her siblings and all that pertains to them to save them when the Jews invade the city.

The Jews tell her she must hang a scarlet cloth from her window high up on the wall as a signal to the invading army. They will pass by her house if they see the red cloth, and everyone in the house will be spared. In this way Rahab became not only the salvation of her own family but also an Old Testament typology of Christ, the Savior.

There are two compelling life-lessons to learn here. One is that God can and will use us as the instruments of salvation for our loved ones. The other is that God does not count our past when He is planning our future!

The end of Rahab's life is a powerful story of faith, trust, salvation and service. God bestows a tremendous honor on a woman with a bad reputation.

Rahab, the harlot, marries into the aristocracy of the Jews. She becomes Boaz's mother and the great- great-grandmother of David, the greatest king in the history of Israel. But even more important than that, the genealogy of Jesus listed in the book of

Matthew traces Jesus' ancestors back to Rahab! She is an honored ancestor of Jesus, the Christ.

My sisters, be encouraged. We cannot imagine where our lives in God will lead us! You can draw strength, joy and self-esteem from this wonderful account of Rahab's life.

Remember that God is no respecter of persons. He places His gifts and anointing in a person, not in a pedigree. He honors character, integrity, commitment, a pure heart and honest motives—not the résumés of our lives, good or bad.

Nothing in our pasts can disqualify us for a positive, promising and powerful future in God because God's plans for our future cancel out the failures of the past.

Rahab's life was abundantly blessed with an unexpected future because she uprooted herself based on the spies' description of their God. Her life tells us that in order to cancel our pasts, it is sometimes necessary to leave familiar situations, surroundings and people to truly find our places in God.

Rahab's story also shows the power of a positive testimony. The spies talked about their God in such a way as to make

Rahab want to leave all to follow Him. We don't know when the words we speak about our relationship with God will touch others so powerfully that they, like Rahab, will want to change their lives, surrender their pasts and leave all to follow Him into a bright new future.

Her life shows us too that God will give us opportunities to make choices that will determine our destinies. When we make the right ones, we will walk away from our past into a glorious future of power, purpose and praise.

God doesn't want us to be bound by society's or the church's ideas of what women can do; nor does He want us to be held back by our own guilt and shame. It's time to let go of all the things that hold you back and step into your true destiny!

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