

Your Intense Physical Pain Might Be Rooted in This Unexpected Issue

My back pain patient Jason had a strained childhood to say the least. His father, Pete, suffered from bipolar disease—a serious mental illness that involves periods of disorganized, manic and sometimes psychotic thoughts, alternating with periods of deep depression.

In addition to having bipolar disorder, Jason's father also struggled with addiction. He tended to abuse cocaine and alcohol, mostly during his depressed periods. In contrast, when he was sky high in mania, he actually liked how he felt, so he was less inclined to consume illegal street drugs.

Because Pete didn't reliably take his prescription psych medicine (he spent the money on street drugs instead), his wife found him impossible to live with and eventually filed for divorce, demanding custody of the children. Already in the throes of depression, the next step downward for Pete was suicide.

There's more. Pete killed himself right in front of his 7-year-old little boy.

Just before he pulled the trigger, Pete tearfully apologized to Jason, "Son, I'm so sorry, but I can't go on like this anymore," as if his apology could save Jason from the ensuing years of despair.

Maybe you don't believe this story could be real. Though I admit I changed a few details for my patient's privacy, the part about the suicide is true.

Probing Deeper

Ironically, when I met Jason, I had no idea about his past. I didn't start probing into his childhood until after the MRI of his back showed only very low-level disk problems and the OMM and muscle relaxants failed to help.

By then, I was beginning to wonder about him anyway. The language he used to describe his back pain was a little too dramatic, considering the lack of physical abnormalities.

At first, Jason sincerely denied having significant childhood trauma. However, I could feel that something was wrong with him emotionally. But that's what happens sometimes after you suffer a major trauma. You just block it out to protect yourself.

Once the dam broke and Jason started talking about the tragedy, I pieced some things together by reading between the lines of what he said. It seemed that as a child he felt guilty, as though the suicide was his fault. It also seemed that he was angry with both his father and with God for letting the whole thing happen in the first place.

Lots of 'Whys'

On the next visit, Jason acknowledged that he felt somewhat better, even though I didn't actually touch him at the previous visit. He also thought about what I said—about how suicide might be connected. He said he was beginning to wonder if it was true. You can't argue with non-contact pain relief. It's very convincing.

This visit was totally different from the others. Jason wasn't defensive anymore. And he didn't even talk about his back. For the most part, he asked questions about what his faith had to do with his trauma. He apparently knew I was a Christian.

"I feel like a bad Christian for saying this, but I don't want to extend grace to my father," Jason said. "And I don't want to forgive him. I want him to be punished."

“At least you’re honest,” I said. “I used to feel that way about somebody I needed to forgive too. But Romans 12:19-20 says to leave the punishment up to God. I think it’s because it’s better for us to let God be the judge and jury. The spite just hurts us otherwise.”

About six weeks later at his follow-up appointment, Jason told me that God revealed something to him about his father. One morning while he was in that twilight stage between being asleep and being awake, Jason received three words from God: “He wasn’t able.”

Jason knew exactly what God meant. Pete lacked the ability to give Jason a sense of “normalcy” in childhood because between the dysfunctional childhood and the mental illness, he didn’t first have normalcy for himself.

The point is, you can hold onto your anger and resentment as long as you choose, but you can’t change the fact that people can’t give you what they don’t possess.

I’m not in any way justifying the wrong behavior of those who hurt you in the past. I’m simply pointing out that everyone, including you and me, fall short in the eyes of God. If you want compassion and mercy, try to see others through the lens of compassion and mercy. Separate the sin from the sinner. I believe this eventually helped Jason forgive his father and get rid of even more low back pain.

Love and Forgiveness

Just as love gives us free will, love requires you to forgive. John 3:16 tells us that God so loved the world that He sent His only son to die for our sins. By sending Jesus to the cross, God created a bridge to connect Himself with mankind so He could forgive us and be reconciled with us. If God hadn’t loved us so much, He wouldn’t have made this kind of sacrifice. That’s how important forgiveness is to God.

With regard to how many times it's right to forgive, "Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven'" (Matt. 18:22, MEV).

This isn't to say that you must forgive those who hurt you in order for God to love you. Just don't blame Him when you suffer the consequences of unforgiveness, such as stress, stress eating, obesity, physical pain and illness. {eoa}

This article is an excerpt from Radical Well-Being: A Biblical Guide to Overcoming Pain, Illness, & Addictions by Rita Hancock, M.D. Copyright 2013, Personalized Fitness Products, LLC.

Rita Hancock, M.D., is a board-certified physical medicine specialist with a specialty board certification in pain management, and she has been in full-time practice in Norman, Oklahoma. She serves as the Oklahoma delegate for the Christian Medical and Dental Association, as well as their official spokesperson on matters of diet and nutrition. Dr. Hancock is married and has two children.