



CAN YOU BE HAPPY EVEN IF YOU HAD A BAD PAST?

-- Accepting the unchangeable past

Everybody has a past. We all have things we regret: mistakes, sins, unloving attitudes, wrong priorities, etc. Many people are dying slowly in a secret tomb of guilt, crippled by the shame of some secret addictions or sexual sins, or simply haunted by wrong decisions and attitudes.

After going through such a painful experience, some believe the lie that their pain and failure is who they are — not just something they've done. And these feelings can trap them into thinking that they can never recover — that, in fact, they don't even deserve to. When our past pain becomes our present identity, the shame and guilt cycle has claimed yet another victim. Like a child who repeatedly picks at a scab, many hurt people live a life of unhealed pain.

Please know that there is a way out of the cycle. One of Jesus' disciples, Peter, broke out of his prison of shame. "I'll stand faithfully by You until the end," he insisted a few hours before betraying Jesus, showing he was not as faithful and strong as he thought. Later, broken and repentant, he cried out to God for forgiveness. After His resurrection, Jesus' forgiveness and restoration gave Peter a renewed passion. Through his repentance and God's forgiveness, he went from failure to triumph, and became one of the early leaders of the Christian church.

You too can break free from the cycle of shame and guilt. Like Peter, you can become convinced of the truth: namely, that you are not your sins. Rather, you are who God says you are: His child. You are forgivable. You are changeable. You are capable. You are moldable. And you are surrounded by the boundless love of God.

You need to move on from one season of your life to the next. You can't get stuck in either the mountains or the valleys. Do not allow either the worst times or the best days of our life to define who you are. You are more than one season or one moment of your life. Move forward! Your life is not over. You made mistakes, you hurt others, but if you repented, God has already forgiven what you can't seem to forget. Don't allow yourself to be stuck in a past season, don't allow any season of your life to define you and don't let others define you by the seasons of your life.

The first step to overcoming shame and guilt is to accept that which cannot be changed. In the Old Testament, King David committed adultery and then murder, to cover his adultery. When confronted by the prophet with the truth, he didn't try to pretend he was innocent and, after he repented, he did not allow the guilt trap to close down on him. He knew he couldn't change the past but he was secure in God's love and forgiveness.

Psalm 51 records the beautiful repentance of the fallen king: *Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin... Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from Your presence or take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*

— Psalm 51:1-2, Psalm 51:10-12

He allowed his sin to drive him toward the God of healing and hope, rather than farther away from Him.

While you may always remember what happened, you need to believe that you are not what happened. If you are living with a secret shame, in a place of private darkness, God can do a similar miracle for you. God can take the shame and guilt of past failures and amazingly redirect their outcomes toward your future success. And when He does, you can be even better than new! Your one-time weakness can be replaced with an equal and opposite strength.

You see, God has provided a reset button and that reset button is called repentance. At any time, we can push that button and start all over again.

Leave the past behind and move into your future. Jeremiah 29:11 tells us: *For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."* God is a God of hope, He is so loving and always willing to give us new chances.

We are on a journey and we learn with each season. We need to accept that the past has passed and leave it there, where it belongs, in order to make peace with the present and walk into the future with hope. Let's not get trapped, our past doesn't have to be our future! Yes, you can have a happy life in spite of what you have done in the past. Just receive the forgiveness God is offering you and choose to believe in His tender love for you personally:

1 John 1.9: *If we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.*