

Are you held hostage by the past?

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BIG SANDY, Texas—Whenever we are unable to get over previous hurts and failures, we are held hostage by the past. The baggage we carry around makes it very difficult for us to move forward. We allow some negative experiences to color the way we live our lives today.

By making those statements, I am not making light of what may have happened to people in the past. People have suffered genuine tragedies in this imperfect world.

People lose children, spouses, parents and friends—sometimes under horrible circumstances. People contract cancer, multiple sclerosis, AIDS and other debilitating diseases.

But tragedies do not have to stop a person from possessing a positive outlook and being productive.

It has been said that the problems of our past impact us in one of two ways. We experience either a breakdown or a breakthrough.

Here are a few signs that may reveal if people haven't gotten over past difficulties.

1. Comparison

If you hear people continually talk about how much harder they've had it than anyone else, chances are they are allowing themselves to be held hostage by their past.

2. Rationalization

Rationalization (believing that there are good reasons not to get over past difficulties) creates a fog that hinders people from finding solutions to their problems. Excuses, no matter how strong, do not lead to achievement.

3. Isolation

Some people withdraw due to their past hurts. For many, it's like a natural reflex that kicks in for self-protection. When naturally outgoing people isolate themselves because of the past, they become especially miserable.

4. Regret

Some people become preoccupied with regrets. In the following analogy, notice the type of friends who can monopolize our time.

Do you reminisce with the Done family: Woulda, Coulda and Shoulda?

Do you consort with both of the Opportunity family: Missed and Lost?

Do you commiserate with all the Yesterdays? There are too many to count, but all would have sad stories to share.

It is one thing to learn from the past. It is very much another matter to be overcome with regrets.

5. Bitterness

People who don't get beyond the problems or the pain of the past eventually become bitter. It is the inevitable consequence of not processing old injuries and tragedies.

No matter what you have experienced, there are people who've had it better than you and done worse. And there are people who've had it worse than you and done better.

The circumstances really have nothing to do with getting over your personal history. Past hurts can make you bitter or better. The choice is yours.

In conclusion, I would like to mention the following steps to help you avoid being held hostage by the past actions of other people toward you.

1. Acknowledge the pain.
2. Grieve the loss.
3. Forgive the person.
4. Forgive yourself.
5. Determine to release the event and move on.

If you are having a hard time because you're holding grudges, talk to God about the issue and ask Him to help you through the process. No matter how difficult this becomes, persevere through it.

You will not be able to be your best today until you say good-bye to yesterday.