

IN THE MARGINS: It's never too late to have a happy childhood

By Tony Martin
Editor

Have you ever felt like your past is holding you back? Maybe you had a tough time growing up – whether it was being left out, bullied, or struggling with family dynamics. For some, the childhood scars are deeper, involving significant trauma that casts a long shadow over their lives. But here's the good news: it's never too late to have a happy childhood.

Now, you might be wondering, "How is that even possible?" The answer lies in the powerful truth that, as Christians, we are not defined by our past. In Christ, we have the freedom to start anew, to reboot, and to reclaim joy and peace in our lives. The past is just that – the past. We can't change it, but we can choose how it affects our present and future.

Understanding the past and embracing the present

The first step in this journey is acknowledging that the past is unchangeable. What happened, happened. No amount of dwelling or rehashing can alter those events. However, we are not prisoners of our past. The Bible reminds us in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" This verse isn't just a comforting thought; it's a transformative reality. When we accept Christ, we are reborn into a new life, leaving the old behind.

Freedom in Christ

One of the most powerful aspects of our faith is the concept

of freedom in Christ. Galatians 5:1 says, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." This freedom isn't just from sin but from the burdens and bondage of our past experiences. Christ's sacrifice wasn't just about securing our place in heaven; it was about liberating us here and now.

Steps to move forward

1. **Forgive and let go:** This is perhaps the hardest but most crucial step. Holding onto grudges and resentment keeps us chained to the past. Jesus teaches us the importance of forgiveness in Matthew 6:14-15, reminding us that forgiving others is essential for our own spiritual freedom.
2. **Seek healing:** Sometimes, moving on requires seeking help. This could be through prayer, counseling, or support groups. James 5:16 encourages us to "confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." Sharing our burdens with trusted friends or professionals can be incredibly healing.
3. **Live in the present:** Philippians 3:13-14 advises us to forget what is behind and strain toward what is ahead. Focus on today. Engage in activities that bring you joy and surround yourself with positive influences. Develop new hobbies or reconnect with things you loved as a child but might have abandoned.
4. **Embrace gratitude:** Developing a habit of gratitude can transform your outlook on life. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 instructs us to "give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Even on tough days, finding something to be thankful for can shift your perspective and bring joy.
5. **Trust in God's plan:** Jeremiah 29:11 reassures 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.” Trust that God’s plan for you is good and that He can bring beauty from ashes.

Living free and thriving today

Remember, the idea that your past dictates your future isn’t a biblical truth. In Christ, we are free to live fully and joyfully, regardless of what happened before. Your past may have shaped you, but it doesn’t define you. You have the power, through Christ, to create a new narrative, one filled with hope, joy, and freedom.

A new beginning: Sarah’s story

Let me tell you about Sarah. Sarah grew up in a chaotic home. Her parents fought constantly, and she often felt invisible, lost in the turmoil. School wasn’t much better; she was the target of relentless bullying and felt like she never quite fit in. By the time she reached adulthood, Sarah carried a heavy burden of pain and insecurity.

It wasn’t until she reached her forties that Sarah began to confront her past. A friend invited her to a church retreat, and it was there she encountered Christ in a way that changed everything. She realized that her past didn’t have to dictate her future. With the support of her new church community, Sarah started a journey toward healing.

She began by forgiving those who had hurt her, a process that took time and a lot of prayer. She sought counseling to help unpack the trauma of her childhood. She started engaging in activities she enjoyed as a child but had long abandoned – painting, hiking, and playing the piano. Each step was a part of reclaiming her joy.

Sarah also developed a habit of gratitude. Every morning, she would write down three things she was thankful for. This simple practice helped shift her focus from what she had lost

to what she had gained. She began to see God's hand in her life, guiding her toward a future filled with hope and possibilities.

Today, Sarah is thriving. She radiates joy and peace, a testament to the transformative power of Christ. She often says, "It's never too late to have a happy childhood," and she lives that truth every day. Her story is a beautiful reminder that no matter our past, we can choose to embrace the present and look forward to a bright future.

So today, choose freedom. Choose joy. Choose to embrace the life that God has designed for you – a life where you can thrive and flourish, unshackled from the past and looking forward to the promises of tomorrow. Just like Sarah, it's never too late to have a happy childhood.