

“UNPACKING EMPTY BAGGAGE . . . IT’S MORE THAN THE HEALING OF MEMORIES”

A catchy phrase commonly used when there is a need to examine an issue in greater detail is to “unpack it.” We also hear the word “baggage” used in reference to our past wounds and their effects on our relationships today (i.e. marriage). So, if I decide to “unpack my baggage,” it can speak of a desire to examine in greater detail those issues from the past that continue to work against me—and to ultimately find healing for such issues. When most people think about dealing with their “baggage,” they generally think about events or memories from their earlier years that have been hurtful and have left an imprint upon them. These, for example, could include times when a child has been subjected to emotional, physical or sexually abusive types of shaming behavior from a parent or someone else.

EMPTY BAGGAGE . . . WHEN NO OVERT DAMAGING MEMORIES EXIST

But what do you do when you don’t have any significant memories of being wounded as a child, yet you know that you aren’t living from a place of emotional wholeness? This, in our experience, has been one of the most important yet frequently overlooked questions in the lives of many of the people we have counseled over the past 15 years. So many times we see people come to us who are struggling with symptoms of anger/rage, depression, anxiety, loss of purpose and calling, relational conflict, and/or addictions of various types, and are having difficulty in connecting with God on an intimate level. Yet, when they reflect on their early developmental years—the period when our identity is shaped—they cannot identify any specific negative memories that could have caused early wounding and the subsequent struggles they are now experiencing. In fact, some individuals have very few memories at all from the first six or seven years of life. In other words, when they enter into a process of “unpacking their baggage” from childhood, their “bags” appear to be empty.

IS THE BAGGAGE REALLY EMPTY?

No, the “baggage” from the past is NOT empty, yet it does not hold specific traumatic memories. Without minimizing the impact of the effects of shame-inducing traumatic childhood events (and related memories) on the health of a child (and the future adult), we want to focus here on the impact of a different type of wounding—that which occurs due to “acts of omission” (versus commission). When the needs of a child are not met—needs that we believe that God designed to be met by the primary caregivers—there will be significant consequences in later years. In our experience, the impact of this type of wounding can be just as damaging as some of the more overt wounding, although it is more difficult for the person to identify. In addition, more “event-oriented” healing practices (i.e. inner healing sessions for traumatic memories) do not work as well for this type of wounding. Maybe you’ve been in a church service when you’ve gone forward for healing prayer for emotional struggles and you have not found much help from those experiences. Yet, you are aware of someone else who went forward for prayer and the individual received significant healing for a memory that surfaced during that time. This can result in a great deal of shame and self-condemnation for the one who has received prayer ministry but still does not experience significant change as a result. The question that often arises within is “What’s wrong with me? Why can’t I receive and be healed?” Sometimes

the issue is simply that there are no specific memories that need to be healed and thus the healing needs to come in a different way.

THE PROBLEM OF NOT HAVING NEEDS MET AS A CHILD . . . AND ITS EFFECTS TODAY

When working with people, we ask them to reflect on different needs that we believe God says are important in our early developmental years (i.e. birth to 6 or 7 y/o) and to ask themselves and the Holy Spirit, "To what degree did I receive these needs from my father and mother?" Three of these fundamental needs are 1) to be loved; 2) to receive affection; and 3) to have a sense of belonging. But what do these really look like? To *feel loved* would mean that I felt special, precious, valued, important and significant . . . that I was deserving of the very best. To *receive affection* would mean that I was touched and held . . . that I was cared for and affirmed through touch . . . that I was given the message that closeness feels good and that touch is a sign of warmth and positive regard. To have a *sense of belonging* would mean that I have a special place in the family . . . that I make a special contribution . . . that I occupy a position of importance. In many cases, an individual who looks back at his or her early years is unable to identify that these important needs (and others) were addressed, and thus their "file" for these is pretty empty. And when these needs were not adequately met, we either find ways to get these needs met in our adulthood in unhealthy ways or we learn to shut down our needs altogether. In either case, it is not what God desires for us.

FINDING HEALING . . . SOME OF MY PERSONAL STORY

So what do we do when we find that these needs were not adequately met in childhood and we are still having symptoms of this today? It is our belief that these "empty bags/places" in our soul and spirit can now only be filled/restored by our Heavenly Father. The first thing we must do, however, is to ask Him to reveal to us what He sees regarding our past, and to invite Him to connect our hearts with how He feels about this. I (Jerry) went through a process many years ago whereby I became aware of the fact that there were places within my heart that did not receive all that was needed when I was young, and it contributed to some very difficult years in my adulthood. Although I also had some wounding that was more overt in nature, I soon realized that some of my deeper wounding came from areas of lack. As I opened up my heart to God and invited Him in to these places, I began to grieve from the "cost" of not receiving all that was needed, and I also began to "feel the Father's heart of grief" as well. The healing for this type of wounding in me took time, and although I did have times of direct prayer from others—which was important—I needed to embrace this healing journey and receive, over time, the healing that the Father provided. I also needed the help of a Christian counselor to guide me for a time in this healing process as well as a small community of people who could love and care for me during that healing process. A very important aspect of this type of healing was to begin to truly love what the Father loves—ME.

PRAYER

Please pray with us . . . Father, I am aware that I am not living with the fullness of life that Your Son died to give me. I also struggle with areas in my life where I desire and need more freedom. Please open my heart to see places in me that did not receive what was needed, and where I am still being affected today. I am willing to feel what You feel about these empty places in me, so that I ultimately can be healed

by You. I want to walk in all that You have for me and I also want to deeply release and forgive—from my heart—those who missed the mark in providing those needs that YOU said were vital. I now want to have these places filled and restored by Your love. I pray this in the name of Your Son, Jesus. Amen.

From the Father's Heart,

Jerry and Denise Basel