

Making Peace
with
Your Past

H. NORMAN WRIGHT



a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

© 1985 by H. Norman Wright

Published by Revell
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.revellbooks.com

New paperback edition published 2013

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

“The Assertion Questionnaire” from the book *Control Your Depression* by Peter M. Lewinsohn, Ricardo F. Munoz, Mary Ann Youngren, and Antoinette M. Zeiss © 1978 by Peter Lewinsohn. Published by Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible.

Old Testament Scripture quotations identified AMP are from the Amplified Bible, Old Testament. Copyright © 1962, 1964 by The Zondervan Corporation. Used by permission.

New Testament Scripture quotations identified AMP are from the Amplified® Bible, Copyright © 1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations identified NASB are from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

The internet addresses, email addresses, and phone numbers in this book are accurate at the time of publication. They are provided only as a resource; Baker Publishing Group does not endorse them or vouch for their content or permanence.

13 14 15 16 17 18 19 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In keeping with biblical principles of creation stewardship, Baker Publishing Group advocates the responsible use of our natural resources. As a member of the Green Press Initiative, our company uses recycled paper when possible. The text paper of this book is composed in part of post-consumer waste.



Contents

Acknowledgments 7

Introduction: The Most Important Journey You May
Ever Take 9

1. Excess Baggage—Where Can You Put It? 13
2. How Did You Collect All That Baggage? 23
3. “Me, Change? Impossible”—Or Is It? 37
4. Relinquishing Your Resentments 53
5. Coping with Rejection 77
6. Breaking Away from Perfectionism 99
7. Resisting Overcoercion 119
8. Overcoming Overindulgence 135
9. Healing Emotional Paralysis 155
10. Treating Your Wounds 177

Notes 199

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all those who have challenged and stimulated my own thinking and growth through the creation of this work.

I thank my wife, Joyce, for her gracious encouragement and for her acceptance of the clutter, stacks of books, piles of papers, and the preoccupation of my thoughts during the time I was involved in writing this.

I want to express my appreciation and thanks to a friend who has supported, encouraged, and helped me so much during the writing of not only this book but many others. This friend is Marilyn McGinnis, a former student, who in her own right is a highly gifted author. She edits my books, polishing my rough ideas and giving them the flow that is so necessary. Her assistance frees me to create without worrying about the nitty-gritty.

Introduction

The Most Important Journey You May Ever Take

I invite you to come with me on a journey—a journey through life. As we travel we will look at where we have come from, where we are today, and where we will be going. Together we will consider the importance of the past and recognize the role it plays in our present.

I am particularly concerned with helping you look back upon your past because of what it may be able to tell you about yourself. In your passage through life, you want to be fully in charge of the route, the events, and the destination; in order to do so, you need a clear view of where you have been. The amount of control you have depends on whether you live your life as your own person or allow another person within you to direct your energies and thoughts. This “other person” who may be trying to control you is what counselors and psychologists call your “inner child of the past.” This inner child is the part of your psyche that retains the burdens and problems of your early days.

As you get better acquainted with your inner child, you will understand yourself in a new and different way. You will have better insight into questions like:

How did I get to be who I am today?

Who is responsible for what I am?

How can I change the parts of me I don't like?

The ideas that follow are the result of twenty years of searching Scripture, counseling hundreds of individuals and couples, and spending hours in research in order to teach graduate students. Other concepts have come from my own thinking, from theologians and pastors and from the prompting and guiding of the Holy Spirit, who has helped me sift through and draw these thoughts together. Indeed, I am convinced that if you know the presence of Jesus Christ in your life, the Holy Spirit is your most powerful resource in making peace with your past. Scripture tells the Christian that he is now an adopted member of God's family. Galatians 4:4–5 (NASB) tells us that God sent his Son to redeem us from sin, “. . . that we might receive the adoption as sons.”

First John 3:1 makes it even more personal: “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God. . . .”

The family into which we have been adopted is quite different from families here on earth, which often have unstable or inconsistent parents. In our Father, God, we have absolute stability and security. We have a parent who is consistently wise and good, and our position as his children is assured.

A. W. Tozer so beautifully described the type of love God has for us when he said, “It is a strange and beautiful eccentricity of the free God that He has allowed His heart to be

emotionally identified with men. Self-sufficient as He is, He wants our love and will not be satisfied till He gets it. Free as He is, He has let His heart be bound to us forever.”¹

As you know, when you invited Jesus Christ into your life, the Holy Spirit became a part of your life as well. The Holy Spirit is our teacher and guide, who gives us a greater understanding of how we are related to God. Paul said in Romans 8:15, “. . . But ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry *Abba, Father.*” What part does the Holy Spirit play in our adoption? The Spirit makes and keeps us conscious of the fact that we are God’s children. The words *Abba, Father*, literally mean that we may call him “Daddy.” The Holy Spirit moves us to look to God as our Father and trust him as a secure child trusts a dependable parent. This means leaving former childhood patterns that are interfering with the way in which we are currently experiencing life.

With the presence of Jesus Christ in your life today, you can use the ideas that follow to disconnect negative responses that are based in your past. You can become a free person, one who is enjoying life, without heavy anchors from your childhood weighing you down. In spite of events or influences that may have adversely affected you as you grew up, you can still gain control over the inner child who wants to take over. You can still make peace with your past by being reparented by your heavenly Father!

Ask the Holy Spirit to allow the thoughts of these pages to stay in your mind and help you change undesirable beliefs, attitudes, and responses. Begin to practice the things you learn here. Pray for reminders of what you have discovered. Reread again and again the pages that apply to you. Copy significant statements to carry with you. Memorize, meditate on, and visualize the words of God as a guiding

force in your life. Thank God that we, as his children, *can* be different.

One more point: as this book takes you on what could be the most important journey you will ever make, you may uncover memories, thoughts, and feelings that have been buried for years. You may sense a strong need to talk to someone especially equipped to help you deal with what you are discovering. Do not hesitate to contact your pastor or a professional Christian counselor in whom you have confidence.

Wherever our journey through life takes us, we can rejoice in the assurance we are not crippled, powerless people. We are new creations who have been adopted into God's family. I do not believe I can overemphasize the importance of the good news that we were "foreordained . . . to be adopted . . . as His own children through Jesus Christ . . ." (Eph. 1:5 AMP). As you fully grasp this concept and integrate its truths into your life, God will give you the insight, strength, and stability you need not only to live in this world, but also to experience life to the fullest, in spite of the stresses and negative influences around you. Too many Christians live as though they were orphans. Thank God each day that you are his and ask him how he wants you to live—today.



1

Excess Baggage— Where Can You Put It?

Some time ago my wife and I had an opportunity to take a cruise on a large ocean liner. Since our itinerary and calendar had been selected for us in advance, our biggest task concerned selecting what we would take with us. As we looked at the pile of goods and clothes strewn on the living-room floor, it was hard to believe that this voyage was to last for only eight days. It looked more like a scene from *Around the World in 80 Days*! We knew that if we were not careful in selecting what we should take with us, we would end up with an incredible amount of excess baggage.

So we began to sort through the pile and ask, *Do we really need this item? Will I ever wear this outfit? What's the purpose of this gadget? Will this item make our journey more*

enjoyable, or will it get in the way? If I don't have this with me, will I perhaps actually have a better time? We had to be discriminating. If we took all of that paraphernalia with us on the cruise, we would experience a number of difficulties. For one thing we knew we would have to pay more at the airport for the excess baggage. So my wife and I eliminated much of what we had gathered.

However, even with careful selecting we still took too much. Once we arrived at the ship and the porters brought our luggage to our stateroom, we still had too many suitcases and boxes full of clothes and equipment. We unpacked and hung as much as we could in the closet—but we had brought too many clothes, and they wouldn't fit even if we crammed them in. We went through a selecting process again and put some of our belongings back in the suitcases and boxes.

Then we had a further problem—hiding the luggage. We stashed some of it under the bed, out of the way. That worked fine during the day, but when we wanted to rest or sleep, the bulge in the bed kept us from being as comfortable as we could have been.

Now what to do with the bags that would not fit under the bed? We could leave them in plain sight, which wasn't convenient. We could try to hide them in every nook and cranny of the stateroom. But if you have ever been on a cruise in a postage-stamp size cabin, you know there is *no* spare room!

Aha! What about tossing the items overboard? Then they would be out of sight and gone forever! No more problems and no more irritations! But what a price to pay! We could feel the effects of that action for months and years to come. The baggage would be out of sight, but not out of mind.

There wasn't much we could do about our unwise planning on this cruise, but we both decided that if we ever had it to

do again we would make wiser decisions. Because we carried too much baggage we were hindered during our voyage.

Just as my wife and I carried excess baggage on our trip, we may drag along excess luggage on our trip through life. We all start out at birth and sail ahead into childhood, adolescence, and on to adulthood, collecting baggage. And this baggage—the influences and pressures from our parents and other people in our childhood—has a significant bearing upon our adult life. We hang onto much of the excess baggage of our childhood. We are supposed to move out of childhood and become adult. Paul the apostle spoke of this when he said, “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; now that I have become a man, I am done with childish ways and have put them aside” (1 Cor. 13:11 AMP). However, instead of “putting aside” our “childish ways,” we try to carry them with us throughout the voyage, and oftentimes it hinders the process of becoming adult.

How does this childishness reveal itself in adult life? The way a child is treated when he is young—whether that treatment is good or bad—becomes the way he believes he *should* be treated. As he grows, he will perpetuate his elders’ actions toward him by incorporating into his actions the responses he learned when he was young. Instead of avoiding the negative inputs from his childhood, he will parent himself in the same unfavorable fashion he is used to experiencing. Unless something intervenes to change his patterns of behavior, he will retain that aspect of his childhood in his adult responses.

Have you ever thought to yourself after saying or doing a particular thing, *That was a childish thing to do*? How did you feel about your action? Did you have a positive feeling, or did you experience chagrin? Did you become critical

of yourself for having that thought or feeling? Did you ask yourself, *Where in the world did that come from?* Like the excess baggage on our cruise, these childish things are ghosts from the past. They tend to get in the way when we try to relax and enjoy our life's journey. They are excess baggage.

Excess Baggage

Some of the baggage we accumulated in childhood helps us as adults. Some hinders us and continually creates tension. But whether helpful or hindering, there is security in hanging onto those patterns we learned early on. We remember both the delight and the trauma of being children. We never completely eliminate our childhood experiences or the child within us, as Dr. W. Hugh Missildine describes:

The child you once were continues to survive inside your adult shell. "Thrive" would perhaps be a better word than "survive," for often this "inner child of the past" is a sprawling, bawling, brawling character, racing pell-mell into activities he likes, dawdling, cheating, lying to get out of things he doesn't like, upsetting and wrecking others' lives—or perhaps this child is the fearful, timid, shrinking part of your personality.

Whether we like it or not, we are simultaneously the child we once were, who lives in the emotional atmosphere of the past and often interferes in the present, and an adult who tries to forget the past and live wholly in the present. The child you once were can balk or frustrate your adult satisfactions, embarrass and harass you, make you sick—or enrich your life.¹

Our childish tendencies often emerge when we are exhausted, sick, under a great deal of pressure, have too many responsibilities, or feel threatened. If you are reading this

book you are an adult and have both the scars and the credentials to prove it: a birth certificate, driver's license, perhaps a marriage license, and even several diplomas. You have had many experiences. As you grow older, wrinkles and gray hairs—and a bit less hair—may give greater credibility to the fact that you are an adult. But just because you manifest all the physical characteristics does not mean that you have “grown up” all the way.

What is a grown-up adult supposed to do and be? You are supposed to be in charge of your own life. This includes making your own decisions, being responsible for your life and carrying out the expectations of adult behavior. Many of us carry this out quite well most of the time. Some of us carry this out some of the time. Others have rare and infrequent flashes of adult behavior, mixed with a lot of childishness. All of us at some time show un-grown-up tendencies. For example, some people are so insecure with making their own decisions that they need the approval and affirmation of others. They are confined in their own personal prison. For some, this need stems from the responses of people currently in their lives. But for a much larger group, the controlling influence is their parents. Their parents may be living or deceased. It really doesn't make that much difference. Even though our parents may be deceased, thousands of miles away, or under the same roof, parental attitudes and admonitions still live within us. We are still at the mercy of their injunctions because, as children, we believed all that they said to us. Consequently, we may find old patterns of response emerging whenever we have contact with them.

What is important is the fact that if you are trying to use other, current relationships to resolve past conflicts with your parents, you may actually be stunting your own growth.

Attachment Baggage

From our earliest days we feel a sense of attachment with our parents. They supply our wants and needs, including a sense of stability. In the same way that we rely on them, we come to rely on childhood patterns, which persist far into adulthood. We may feel very conscious of this and feel immobilized in trying to deal with it, or it could seem a phantom, illusive attachment that still maintains control over our responses. Either way, childhood patterns, whether healthy or painful, are familiar, and familiarity brings security and comfort.

For example, our attraction and attachment to particular people in adulthood can be a carryover from our past. If our parents were loving, they were bound to leave their stamp upon our lives, even if we cannot remember the specifics of that relationship. Some of us, in adulthood, are drawn to people similar to our parents. Others are drawn to those opposite their parents.

An example of this kind of attachment is Mary. As she dated she seemed to be drawn to men who were not really good for her. She realized that she was drawn to men with some type of flaw. Her own father was a very handsome but passive and ineffective man. From early childhood she greatly admired him and struggled not to see his weaknesses. But after so many years of disappointment, she felt betrayed. Nevertheless, she still chose to date men who were like her father, hoping that they would turn out to be dependable and that she might be able to help them.

John's experience reflects another variation of this tendency. He was raised by a mother who was cold, aloof, and unresponsive. She was extremely neat and was more concerned with her home being a showplace than in nurturing

the members of her family. She dressed well and did not want her son to get too close, because he might “mess up her clothes or hair.” He felt she used him, because she always told him what to do, how to do it, and what to wear, especially when she entertained. Although John was raised without warmth, love, and nurturing, who does he date again and again? Women who cannot give of themselves and who are little more than unloving mannequins. Why? He keeps trying to refashion women like his mother, in order to make them give him what he needed. He selects women with little potential to give him what he needs and becomes frustrated in his attempts to reform them.

This attachment in dating often continues into mate selection. Some people try to recreate their original family. For example, an only child who has not had much experience relating to his own peer group is more likely to select a parent figure for a spouse. Some people select for a mate a person who is some type of a transference object from their past—someone who is like a parent, sibling, or other significant person with whom they can respond and relate to as they did the person from their past. Most of us do this to some degree. But if there are unresolved emotional issues still existing between us and that significant person from the past, there can be problems. For example, you might choose a partner who is similar to someone you could not get along with in your past. You cannot get along with this type of person in your present situation either. But you are not always aware that you are repeating your old pattern.

All people do not try to recreate their original families when they marry. Many want just the opposite and look for a spouse who is very different. They are trying to escape from their original family and to build some type of new

one. They believe they will be more comfortable with this new type of person. But often in their blindness they may overlook buried similarities that emerge later on. When they do discover these in their mates, they may be thrown into a panic, for it appears their history is about to repeat itself. The greater the amount of unresolved issues from their past family situation, the greater the upset.

Why, you may ask, do people turn so much of their lives over to the influence of significant individuals from their past? Would you believe that we really have no choice in the matter? Why not? Because you began your interaction with your parents in a helpless state. You were dependent upon them for your very existence; you learned this very soon. You also learned that there were certain ways you had to respond to maintain a state of well-being with them. If mother and father were happy then you received more positive attention. Over the years children develop quite a repertoire of responses to maintain a good relationship.

As you grew, your physical survival depended less and less upon your parents. But your dependence on your parents for good feelings decreases much more slowly. And for some the decrease is negligible. Dr. Howard Halpern put it so well: "The emotional umbilical cord not only remains uncut but often twists into a Gordian knot that ties us to our parents' reactions to us."²

The Powerful Inner Child

Some parents believe that their task is to help their children develop into autonomous, self-sufficient individuals, and they endeavor to bring that about. Others, however, allow their own needs and difficulties to interfere. But both groups are

influenced by their own inner child, which gets in their way and prevents them from being fully functioning adults. The videotapes of their own childhood begin to interfere with their proper parental transmission to their own children. Their own inner child could be threatened by their children's desire to grow and become independent and self-reliant. And what happens? The child's developing inner child interacts with the parent's inner child, and growth is hindered.

Does this mean that I am saying, "Let's lay the blame for all our adult problems and difficulties at the feet of our parents"? Certainly not! Who were your parents? Imperfect humans like you and me. They had their own problems with life and were faced with their own childhood memories. The social and cultural forces of their time affected them, and their own marriage relationship had its effect as well. Because of their own difficulties and filtered perceptions of life, their view of you was perhaps inaccurate, and they did not always respond to you in the best way. We do not always respond to our own children in the best manner, either. You were hurt as a child, in most cases, not because your parents really intended to hurt you, but because they did not know better.

If we give too much importance to the attitudes of our "inner child" that result from the imperfections of our upbringing, then our perception of the present becomes distorted. We find ourselves overreacting, underreacting, or overanalyzing our responses and actions. W. Hugh Missildine says:

We don't like these feelings and reactions; we don't understand why we have them; we are ashamed of them; we may berate ourselves for having them. Because we have them, we regard ourselves as somehow different, perhaps neurotic. Or,

shaken by them, we may try to project the blame for them onto family, friends, fate, even the weather. As they keep recurring, we become increasingly disturbed and may feel ourselves alone, separated from others.³

Blaming parents or others for our problems is an excellent way to rid ourselves of responsibility. However, it will not rid us of the problems. But it is a fact that you can break childhood bondage. As adults we can choose to remain the way we are or seek to grow. Our task is not to build a case against our parents, siblings, or others who had an influence on our lives. Rather, it is to understand who we are and, with the help of Jesus Christ, become free of any damaging results from our past. As we look at the past and open closed doors, we will discover ghosts flitting here and there that disturb and unsettle us. But ghosts cannot hurt us. They are not our enemies. In the next chapter we will begin to lay those ghosts aside as we realize that, as Pogo says, “We have met the enemy, and he is us.”



2

How Did You Collect All That Baggage?

When Jim came to my counseling office, he was seeking to stand on his own two feet. His marriage was failing because his wife had gotten tired of making all the decisions for the family. She told Jim that she felt as if she were raising a child rather than enjoying his partnership in their marriage. Jim told me he didn't trust his own decision-making abilities, because, as a child and youth, his parents and older brother and sister had always run interference for him and planned every step of his life.

Jim is a victim of what Dr. W. Hugh Missildine calls "over-coercion." This is just one of several parental attitudes we may have experienced in our childhood, which keep us from becoming grown-up adults. See if you can identify with one

or more of the following patterns.¹ If you can, it may help you understand why you experience difficulty in some areas of your adult life and help you to begin to gain freedom from your past.

Negative Parental Attitudes

Overcoercion is one of the most common parental attitudes. This involves giving a child constant direction, supervision, redirection, instructions, and reminders. In an effort to make things “easy” for their child or to avoid the time and effort it takes to teach a child independence, parents deny him the opportunity to seek and develop his own interests.

In this environment a child has the choice to resist the influence (either overtly or covertly) or to submit and learn to rely upon others for direction. A child who resists overcoercion may manifest his resistance by forgetting, procrastinating, escaping into daydreams, or dawdling. If he learns to submit to overcoercion as a child he can easily follow this pattern of needing outside direction when he becomes an adult, or he may become hard on himself and order and admonish himself as his parents did.

The overcoerced adult has learned to resist his own directives. He becomes a child to his own parental commands. The push-resist cycle of childhood is still functioning.

Oversubmission is the opposite of overcoercion. The over-submissive parent submits to the child’s demands, temper outbursts, and impulsiveness and allows the child to rule and control and become the “boss.” He or she may do this out of “love” for the child, but it is not loving, and ultimately harms the child. For the child’s response is to become even more demanding, and soon he has no regard for the rights of others. The word *no* is a foreign language to him. He does

not learn limits as a child, thus as an adult he still does not comprehend the meaning of the word.

As an adult such a child's goals are often sabotaged by his own impulsive behavior. He can move to excess in eating, smoking, or drinking and is often thoughtless, easily angered, and does not consider the rights of others.

Perfectionism is commonly found in a person who is successful but who is dissatisfied with his level of attainment. Things are never enough or good enough. Where did the perfectionist learn this? Usually in a home in which he experienced conditional acceptance. His own parents expected him to perform above and beyond all standards; then acceptance was given. And he cooperated with this dictum by excessive striving and by developing an overserious preoccupation with achievement. He lives with a constant feeling of unworthiness because he does not feel he can meet his parents' standards.

The pattern of belittling oneself follows from childhood right into adulthood. Perfectionists are disappointed in their accomplishments and have little joy in life. Even though other people may be quite satisfied with the perfectionist's accomplishments, their attitude really does not matter.

Overindulgence occurs in an environment where gifts, privileges, and services are lavished upon the child—not because the child needs or wants this attention; his wishes are never taken into consideration. After years of being spoiled, the child becomes bored, loses initiative and spontaneity, and is apathetic. Since he never learned how to work for rewards, his ability to stick with anything and be persistent is nil.

That child now has become an indulged adult. If he is no longer catered to by others, he will either blame life itself or those people who become involved in his life. He will continue to seek people who will cater to his wishes and desires. But

when he finds such persons, how does he respond? With boredom, apathy, and so on. The childhood pattern is repeated.

Punitiveness is a parental response that may be manifested in many ways, including out-and-out hostility and aggression toward the child. It is often combined with overcoercion and perfectionism. The parents feel justified in punitive action, but they usually react out of anger, frustration, or impatience rather than any action or attitude of the child. After being the subject of much punitive action, the child may learn to behave in a way that reinforces, justifies, or invites the punishment.

If his parents were negligent as well as punitive, the childish adult may learn to retaliate. Since he has never really experienced enjoyable relationships with others, he may often be overwhelmed with feelings of revenge. On the other hand, if his parents showed affection but were still overly punitive, the childish adult could learn to create situations where he could experience punishment by punishing himself through self-criticism and guilt.

Neglect occurs when parents are either never around or are too preoccupied to become involved with the child at each stage of his or her development. Neglect is found at every level of society. A child who experiences neglect early in life has several possible difficulties to contend with: He may lack the ability to develop close, meaningful relationships with others; he may have difficulty setting limits for himself, because, as a child, no one was ever interested in setting limits for him; he may have difficulty developing a self-identity that assists him in relating to others.

Rejection, believe it or not, is not as common as you would think, at least in the purest sense of the word. It is usually mixed in with another parental response, or the child interprets another response as rejection. A child who is continually

rejected develops a poor self-concept. As he grows up he becomes bitter, anxious, and feels isolated, helpless, and of little value.

One way that parents show rejection of a child is to give him too much responsibility. They lay adult responsibilities on him before he is ready for them. As a result, he never has an opportunity to experience being a child, and he longs for what he is missing—acceptance, affection, and praise.

As an adult he may tend to take on too many responsibilities and never learns to relax, play, and enjoy life. Not only does he restrict his own life, but he may tend to place restrictions on the lives of those around him as well.

These are a few of some very common parental attitudes and home environments. Where are you in all this? What influence in your past contributes to who and what you are today?

At the end of this chapter we will ask some questions that will help you determine how much of this excess baggage of your past you are still carrying around with you and how you can begin to dump some of it in a positive, constructive way.

But, first, consider further the environment you grew up in and whether or not you are perpetuating or creating a situation in your home now that is potentially destructive.

Depressogenic Environment

Some children have been brought up in an environment that fosters depression and keeps self-esteem at a low level. This type of home atmosphere, which is contrary to what Christians are called upon to have, is called a “depressogenic environment.” Yet many Christians, unfortunately, have created this in their homes by too much emphasis on “thou shalt not,” rather than on giving praise and encouragement for

the positive things family members do. A depressogenic environment does not provide these important positive needs. It does not provide either a child or an adult with adequate support for his or her self-esteem.

In most cases this environment undermines self-esteem or elicits emotions and conflicts that the person cannot handle. Depression usually results. If we live in an atmosphere of constant attack from someone we love and respect, we are left with feelings of hurt, guilt, and helplessness. And as we become more vulnerable, the verbal and nonverbal exchanges can affect us more and more. Following are some typical attitudes that make up a depressogenic environment.

1. Other people attempt to control us so we cannot gain any type of independence. This control may be subtle or overt, but our lives are directed for us. And in time we begin to believe that we cannot exist without the other person's direction.
2. Others try to convince us that we need them and cannot survive without their emotional support.
3. We are given ambivalent messages that undermine our self-esteem, such as, "In spite of how sloppy you are, we still love you," or, "I guess this is just the burden we will have to bear, having a problem child like you. But remember, in spite of that, we do care for you."
4. Others attempt to provoke guilt in us by making us feel responsible for situations or conditions. They attempt to make us feel miserable. They can do this without saying a word. A parent can come into the room, look around to see how clean it is, look disgusted, sneer, shake his or her head, and leave. What kind of feelings could that arouse in a person?

5. Our intentions and motives can be misinterpreted by significant others. We can begin to doubt our own perceptions. Constant questions such as the following can accomplish this: “Are you sure you said that or did that?” or, “I’m not sure anyone else heard you say that . . . ,” or, “You don’t really mean that, of course.” Hearing these statements enough can create doubts.
6. If the communication process was blocked in our homes, both rejection and indifference occurred. A relationship where deep and significant feelings cannot be expressed will hinder growth.
7. Competitiveness in a family relationship can cause depression and/or lowered self-esteem. Anything that is done to build envy or jealousy can have a detrimental effect upon the family. If we were compared with other children or another child was given more attention, we were affected.
8. If the home is void of joy and humor and maintains a constant monotony, we may wonder about ourselves: *Am I the cause of this dull life? Why are my efforts to add variety and new activities not accepted?* If we receive few or no positive responses, we learn that it isn’t safe to share.
9. If we were not allowed to display any anger as we were growing up, we probably learned to block this and other emotional expression as well. We may also have channeled our anger into depression.²

What Do We Do with the Excess Baggage?

Depression attitudes like those just described can leave us with an inner child who is carrying a great deal of excess

baggage that we constantly have to walk around or trip over at the most unlikely times. If we are aware of those childhood tendencies and attempt to hide them under the bed, we still experience their presence when we need to rest and relax. So the powerful inner child causes aches and pains during our waking hours as well as during the hours of rest.

Some of us acknowledge this excess baggage but attempt to hide it in the closet. But one day we have to open the closet. There we are—face-to-face one more time. We may try to rearrange the issues, but this doesn't resolve their continuing influence upon our daily lives.

Can you throw the excess baggage of the inner child overboard and eliminate its influence? Can you really eliminate all of the influence and experiences of your childhood? Is it possible to rid yourself and start anew? Of course not. We cannot vanquish the powerful inner child, but we can identify him and begin to correct our negative attitudes about him. We need to treat ourselves with the same regard God has toward us. We can give up any resentments and bitterness we hold toward significant people from our past and realize that we can become grown-up adults. Our memories will always be with us, but their effect can be diminished. Christians have this capability. We can become positive parents to ourselves.

Reconstruct Your Past

Use your memories as the key to understanding your past and the influence your inner child has had on your emotions and reactions as an adult. To gain a greater awareness and understanding of your childhood development, first ask yourself questions such as: *What was I really like as a child?*

What were my parents' reactions toward me? What were my reactions to my parents' responses to me?

To help you recall some of these memories get a pencil and paper and find a comfortable chair to sit in. Begin to reconstruct your childhood from the earliest age that you can remember. Some have found it helpful to look through childhood picture albums, which can activate forgotten memories. Keep paper and pen with you at all times. Other memories will emerge during the day, when you least expect them. The more you recall, the more helpful it can become. We can all remember isolated times when we were lonely, afraid, angry, rejected, and so on. What you are looking for, however, are prevailing, continual patterns. Try to discover the consistent day-to-day attitudes you perceived others had toward you.

As you go through this reconstructed journey in your attempt to touch your memories, be aware of the feelings that each memory raises. Because of some intense pain from these experiences, some memories may have barriers and blockades surrounding them. But if the pain remains, these memories are still alive and affecting you. Allow the feelings to surface. Avoid getting stuck on one memory, however. You may, because of the pain, find yourself returning to dwell upon it time and time again, once it has surfaced. You may overanalyze it and try to understand what happened. You may spend an inordinate amount of time attempting to prove to yourself that you were not to blame for whatever happened.

If the pain is coming from one or just a few isolated incidents, it may keep you from clearly seeing the overall broad picture of your childhood. You are looking for themes or patterns that were fairly constant in your life, and you also

want to know what your consistent response was to your environment.

Your goal is to discover how your past and present relate. Your reactions to people in work situations, to your marriage partner, or to your friends may be founded in attitudes and methods of response you learned in childhood. Either use your present patterns to determine your past influences or work forward from your childhood to gain greater understanding about these habits.

The following questions and directions will help you in your reconstruction:

1. What were your moods as a child?
2. Were you happy, and if so, when?
3. Think of times when you were demanding, when you felt sorry for yourself or felt lonely.
4. Recall times when you purposely tried to elicit approval from your parents and how you tried to do this. What were the times when they gave you their approval, and how did you feel?
5. What were your fears, and who knew about those fears?
6. How did others respond when you told them you were afraid?
7. How did your brother or sister respond to you on a consistent basis?
8. What was your father's day-by-day and week-by-week attitude toward you?
9. What was your mother's continuous response and reaction?
10. Were they strict, indulgent, moralistic, demanding?
11. Did they demand perfection from you?
12. Were you catered to in any way?

13. It is also important to remember how you reacted to these responses of others. Did you “buy” everything that was said to you?
14. Did you attempt to conform to every request?
15. Did you comply with others’ expectations and requests?
16. What was your attitude like?
17. Were you disrespectful?
18. Did you become angry or sullen?
19. How did other people respond to your anger or sullenness?
20. Did you learn to use or work your parents to get your way?
21. What was your home atmosphere like? Happy, loving, tense, bickering, silent, depressogenic?
22. As you continue your search for memories of your past, ask yourself these questions about both of your parents. Did he/she have time for me?
23. Was he/she home much of the time?
24. Could I approach him/her with my problems or difficulties?
25. How did he/she react?
26. And how did I handle the reaction?
27. What were/are the positive qualities of each parent?
28. What were/are the negative qualities of each parent?
29. Describe how you felt/feel about each parent.
30. What emotions did/does each parent express?
31. Describe how each parent communicated/communicates with you.
32. Describe your most pleasant and unpleasant experience with each parent.
33. What messages did each parent give to you in your early childhood and during your adolescence?

34. What are the messages today?
35. How did you react to those messages?
36. Describe how each parent punished you.
37. How did each parent share criticisms with you?
38. How did you feel when this occurred?
39. In what ways are you similar to your father?
40. In what ways are you different from your father?
41. In what ways are you similar to your mother?
42. In what ways are you different from your mother?
43. Was your relationship with your mother close or distant during childhood?
44. What has it been like during the past ten years?
45. Was your relationship with your father close or distant during childhood?
46. What has it been like during the past ten years?
47. Did you have brothers or sisters?
48. If so, what was your relationship with them then, and what is it like now?

These relationships are important, but not as much as those with your parents. But if your siblings' attitudes affected your parents' attitudes toward you, they may be very important. If you were the scapegoat or culprit whenever there were squabbles, then you developed certain attitudes.

49. Consider your life today and then relate it to your past.
In what situations do you feel the most uncomfortable?
50. Do these have any similarities to your past experiences?
51. In what situations is your anger excessive or inappropriate?
52. Are these times reminders of situations in your past?
53. Is this the way in which you responded as a child?

54. When do you experience fear or anxiety?
55. Who is present when fear or anxiety occurs?
56. How do these times remind you of experiences of your past?
57. Do you ever feel embarrassed and, if so, under what conditions?
58. When were you embarrassed as a child?
59. Who embarrassed you the most?
60. In what situations do you feel most self-conscious? Why?
61. When did this same situation occur in the past?
62. When do you feel alone?
63. Is this a new feeling or one from the past that continues to haunt you?
64. Who are the people today you have the greatest difficulty in relating to?
65. Are they in any way similar or dissimilar to significant people in your past?
66. Are you reacting in your adult life as an adult, or has your child response continued to emerge and live your life for you?
67. Are you borrowing responses from your past, or have you developed your own healthy responses so that you are a free person?

Two final questions for your reconstruction: In what way is the presence of Jesus Christ in your life disconnecting your responses from your past to the present? Are you becoming a free person and one who is living your present life without heavy anchors from the past slowing you down?

Perhaps you have not yet applied Jesus Christ to your life in this area of your past. You can ask him to free the

blockage from your mind, so you have greater understanding and awareness of your past experiences. You can ask him for clarity of thought in accurately recalling those memories. Ask him to help you identify how you continue to treat yourself as others treated you in early years.

Jesus Christ came to set us free—free from the consequences of sin and death, but also free from the crippling patterns and experiences of the past.

Now that you have reconstructed your past, in the next chapter you will learn how you can change the way you have been responding and move toward being a grown-up adult.