

## Let Yourself Be Seen

Have you ever noticed how occasionally something will happen in your life that puts you right back in a moment you experienced years ago? It is a common phenomenon to have our past impact our present. This is a good thing when we can draw from past experience that has been largely stable and secure.

However, Scripture tells us that there will be trouble here on planet Earth. We are living in a fallen world; bad things certainly do happen to good people. We often don't have logical reasons for why they happen, but some common ones occur when parents or caregivers fail to create a stable environment for children. Abuse, physical illness, addictions, mental illness, serious financial difficulties or living in unsafe environments such as where chronic bullying occurs affect many. So, when we don't have a secure past to fall back on, what happens when our wounds tether us to our past and what can we do about it?

Children are wired to believe that they are the cause of whatever good or bad happens around them. They simply are not cognitively capable of understanding that caregivers own the burden of responsibility for the child's stable environment. In fact, it is unbearable for children to determine that the adults in their life are unable to protect them from the dangers of the world.

Regardless of the reasons, children in these environments can easily believe they are incompetent, unacceptable or worse yet, unlovable. Strong feelings of anxiety, coupled with the emotional distress of their home over time are translated into the core belief that something is wrong with them. Even if the child excels at school or sports, these messages can still become ingrained in one's self image to impact future relationships and decisions.

Those parts of themselves that are especially vulnerable or fragile, therefore, can go into hiding. The painful emotions which can be triggered by even positive situations can be overwhelming. To avoid the pain can mean giving up on hoping for things to ever change for the better, or for dreams to ever be realized.

Even enjoying a good or happy time out of fear that it will end badly or, worse yet, that something bad will randomly occur to blind side, can become something believed to be best avoided. In other words, there is little place for joy or attention on the present, as the future is to be guarded against. This is not done consciously or intentionally. It is learned as a coping mechanism to reduce the stress of the unstable environment and gives the child a greater sense of being able to control stress and anxiety levels where little or no control over anything exists.

As we enter into the adult world and continue in this type of thinking, it is a life of bondage to a lie about our dignity, power and value as a human person. This lie keeps us from embracing our true worth and the unshakable value placed within us by our Creator, as our value is not determined by this world. This, however, is in radical opposition to what our society teaches us and it can prevent us from understanding the choices we really do have as adults.

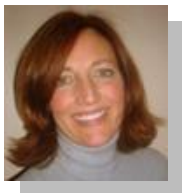
The good news is that we CAN change all of this! We can begin to identify any lies we have learned to tell ourselves by examining our inner dialogue. Is it harsh, critical, condemning or accusatory? If so, what it takes to transform it is the will to change, a bit of practice and trust.

First, we expose and identify it by bringing some understanding and healing to the site of the injury within ourselves. Some attention is needed, not in which to dwell, but to bring relief. The coping skills we learned in unhealthy relationships need to be changed in a different relationship – a therapeutic one.

Next we must replace those lies with truths. It helps immensely to be able to recognize and accept the gentle and loving voice of God – the one who came to us to heal us. If we are doing wrong, He convicts us, as He tells us He didn't come to condemn, but to bring us all to His Father in heaven. (John 3:17) The distortions and lies are certainly not from Him.

Replacing the lies with the truth is a huge step toward healing. Those hidden parts of ourselves need to be coaxed out of hiding, returned to our awareness and embraced. Remember, Jesus tells us He is the way, truth and life. Working through our wounds in this way is truly a personal healing experience with our Savior which enables us to grow in a way that fits our nature as image bearers of God – in touch with our true worth, yet open to His rebuilding the integrity within us through the abundance of His grace.

Choosing to work through past hurts enables one's inner self to be expressed by connecting those hidden parts and living more fully in Christ. It is a partnership worth pursuing and one to which all are invited. Building a foundation for a healed past to impact and lead the way to a better and untethered future is a choice worth pursuing. You'll know when you've done it because you'll be able to let your true self be seen.



JoAnne V. Crough joined Meier Clinics in 2001 and is a Licensed Professional Counselor and Director of the clinic in Pittsburgh, PA. She counsels individuals struggling with anxiety, depression, grief/loss, mood disorders, panic attacks, stress and women's issues and also provides marital counseling. JoAnne has been happily married since 1984 and has three children. For more information about JoAnne or other staff/services provided at Meier Clinics, please give us a call or visit our website.