

Restoring Your Innocence

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Science tells us that our brains remember literally everything—every experience, emotion, sensation and thought that has ever occurred to us, like a never-ending movie. As we grow, the vast majority of these experiences recede from immediate memory and are relegated to our subconscious. Confirmation of this is found in people who have had near-death experiences who report seeing their whole lives play back before them. Perhaps you yourself have had a vivid dream that brought back remarkably detailed memories of scenes, colors, emotions, even tastes or smells you experienced a long time ago.

Experiences held in deep memory can affect our attitudes and behaviors for better or for worse, often without our being aware of it. Our innocence is lost when bad memories overwhelm the good. We begin to feel bad or depressed. Anxiety, hopelessness, guilt and loneliness steal our joy. We may begin to feel helpless or worthless, even that life is not worth living. Worse, we may find ourselves doing things we don't really want to do, such as saying things that hurt those closest to us. Paul wrote: "For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will *not* to do, that I practice (*Romans 7:19*).

Negative emotions locked in deep memory can cause a root of bitterness to spring up within us that can defile many (*Hebrews 12:15*). Wounded people wound others. Jesus said it this way: "The things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man" (*Mark 7:15*).

When this happens, how can our innocence be restored?

Jesus said: "He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed..." (*Luke 4:18*). The Apostle John wrote: "all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God" (*John 1:12*)—that is, to become innocent before God like little children. Paul summarized it succinctly: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a *new creation*" (*2 Cor. 5:17*). This is the promise of being "born again."

For this promise to be truly fulfilled, our memories have to be reset. The deeper we receive the Words of Jesus, the deeper the Holy Spirit works within us, bringing to light long forgotten memories. As our darkest memories come into the light of Christ, their power to influence us is diminished or lost altogether. Jesus described the impact this way: "The Spirit gives life. The flesh [our "bio-memory"] profits nothing" (*John 6:63*).

Forgiveness is the key to the working of God's Spirit within us to release the negative consequences of deep memories. *1 John 1:9* tells us: "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The same Apostle assured us elsewhere that "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (*John 3:17*). This word "saved" means to be "made well" or "cured." Through the power of forgiveness, God literally cures our hearts that are oppressed or broken by bad memories from past experiences.

Jesus taught that we need to forgive others just as God forgives us. In fact, Jesus said that if we do not forgive others, neither will God forgive us (*Matthew 6:15*). This is really important to the restoring of our own innocence! Forgiving someone does not mean we have to decide that what they did to us is OK. If someone has harmed or abused us, God does not ask us to accept their wrongdoing. He merely asks us to release that person to God's judgment so that we, ourselves, can be set free from the negative consequences of memories of the abuse. In cases of severe abuse, only the power of the Holy Spirit is enough to help us through this process. But the end result is worth it. Jesus came to set us free so that we can experience the abundance of life God intended for us. Whom the Son sets free is free indeed!

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any memories hidden within you that may be preventing you from living freely and receiving the abundant life Jesus promised to all who walk with Him.