

Overcoming Childhood Imps



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What is the only thing you can take to Heaven? People. People matter to God. That is why he made man. He wants relationships with people who know Him and love Him for who He is. Every verse, every passage, and every story in Scripture teaches us how to relate to one another and God. God made us in such a way that we must learn to understand others if we are going to achieve any of our goals or fill his plan for our lives, ministry, church, family, and community.

Over eighty percent of our success in life involves relationships with people. Talent, education, and looks will only take one so far. Eventually, we must depend on the goodwill and favor of other people.

God gives us a family where we interact and learn such relationship skills as patience, trust, and conflict resolution. We learn about God from our parents. We learn to relate to neighbors from our siblings. Our identity forms when we interact in the nurturing environment of a loving family.

Unfortunately, most families fall short when it comes to nurturing. Mine had plenty of love; the problem was that nobody knew how to show it. I had only one intimate conversation with my mother and none with my father in my entire childhood. They provided everything I needed, and they loved me very much. They just didn't know how important it was to express that love.

If we fail to learn these important lessons, we will have trouble in our marriages, families, jobs, churches, and neighborhoods. We will continue to relate to people the way we did in our childhood.

Our pastor suddenly reminds us of our obnoxious brother, who drove us crazy. Our wonderful husband eventually turns into a carbon copy of our distant, uncaring father. The snooty priss with who shares our office is just like our little sister, who tattled about everything and only seemed to be on this planet only to make us miserable.

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A simple glance at church history teaches us that man has never understood relationships and their effects. Cain's murder of Abel is an excellent example of brothers who didn't understand them. Abraham put Sarah in danger to save his own life. Many of the heroes we use as standards in our teaching made foolish relationship choices.

God is preparing men and women to understand relationship principles and then teach these principles to others. He is concerned about our relationships. Above all, he wants us to know and understand him and appreciate how he thinks and feels to work more effectively in service to others.

I learned a lot about myself several years ago, during a three-month doctor ordered sabbatical, and it was not pretty. I had lots of troublesome residues leftover from my childhood. Although my marriage was excellent and my teenage kids were not threatening to sell their stories to Oprah or surprise me with an all-expense-paid trip to meet Jerry Springer, I still had a lot of junk in my belief system.

After a happy twenty-year marriage, I had much of the family stuff down. The problems we faced and dealt with were from outside our home, finances, and professions. That's where food addiction found its way into my life. I turned to food for acceptance and comfort. And believe me, a huge plate of mashed potatoes smothered in gravy can be very accepting.

So what do we do? We take it until we have had enough, then we call them the names we have always wanted to call our father, our brother, or sister, but never had the courage. We quit our jobs, walk out on our families, leave our churches or move into better neighborhoods and start the cycle over with new people.

My response to pressure was to pull back from the pain and retreated into food. The more pressure stirred my emotions, the more control food gained over me.



One day after losing 80 pounds, I found myself standing in front of the refrigerator with the door open. My head was inside, my eyes scanning every shelf as if my life depended on what I would discover there.

During those years, I would diet and lose twenty pounds. A month later, discouragement caused me to give up, and within a few weeks, I would have gained thirty. Throughout eleven-years, I ballooned up to nearly 300 pounds.

I suddenly “came to” and stopped what I was doing. I stood up straight, shook my head, and closed the refrigerator door. I walked back into the living room where I had been standing before my eyes glazed over, and I went into neutral.

I wasn’t even hungry. Why was I foraging in the refrigerator? What did I think before my mind went into neutral?

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My mother. I had been thinking about my mother and the fact that I needed to call her. A fleeting thought about her and the old behavior patterns associated with our relationship returned before I was even aware of their existence. I felt stress, and I reacted.

It didn't matter that it had been over five months since I had experienced this type of behavior. I didn't even realize how much influence relationships had over me.

Much of what we accept as truth about who we are will dictate our behavior. When we spend time in prayer, God shows us many erroneous beliefs we carry about ourselves hidden in our unconscious minds. Most of these are things someone told us or misperceptions accepted as obvious truth only because they come from authority figures.

These veiled imps or "triggers" rarely reach the surface. They hide deep in the part of our minds where we file memories we don't want to face. The moment our guard is down, they pounce. Before we're aware of it, that old, destructive behavior rushes forward, set to act. They stand in position, ready to accuse us in a moment of weakness. Once we become aware of them and recognize where they came from, they lose their power over us.

It takes a determined effort, but we can uproot many of them. By keeping a constant vigil and questioning every belief that reaches the surface in your thinking, you do this. Where are you from? What are you doing here? What are your motives? Where have you been hiding? What comment, raised an eyebrow, rude remark, shocked expression, or ear-piercing scream, did you piggyback into my subconscious mind? You can never find them all. Of course, that would be impossible. Your mind, however, can be your best friend or your most deceitful enemy. It is up to you.

I can choose to live free and take control or let these childhood imps push me, cringing into a corner. I choose freedom. Not only does freedom feel better, but it also looks better in a bathing suit.