

Four
--Looking Backward--
Traumatized Emotions

A few years back, a documentary exploring the historical validity of Israel's Egyptian enslavement uncovered interesting archaeological evidence. One piece was found deep in a mine that had likely been worked by a Hebrew slave. While lying on his back, he had etched on the ceiling, "Lord hear our cries."

The slave figured no Egyptian would find it. God did. Out of a burning bush he responded, "I've heard the *cries* of my people." God gave us emotions. He cares about our feelings, even if we struggle to explain or express them.

Emotions are like the temperature gauge in a car, letting us know how we're responding to life. They're neither good nor bad, just indicators. But, sometimes normal emotions that have been traumatized tend to red-line on the gauge. It is best to pull over and investigate instead of ignoring them and driving on.

One can imagine, faced with the rigors of Egyptian slavery, every day concerns red-lined into panic and chronic worry. Disappointment sunk to despair. Loss slipped into crippling grief. Frustration overheated to anger. And all of this became a generational cycle of trauma begetting trauma begetting trauma ...

This is where we are right now. Feelings we've managed to subdue over the years are oozing out the sides of our sandwich with each bite. Words we would never say start popping out. Arbitrary tears. Fits of anxiety or anger. This plague is triggering us in ways we wouldn't have dreamed of a year ago.

Ever pick blackberries? Yummy fruit, but they come with stickers. You know that going in and simply remove the ones that break off on your person. You rarely get them all. Little bits remain just below the surface. A week later an innocent tap on the shoulder brings you to your knees. A hidden sticker was triggered.

This is life. Our formative years frequent the blackberry patch. People hurt us. They may not mean to, but they deceive, manipulate, enable, dominate, use, abuse, and sometimes seduce us. There are no perfect parents. There is no perfect upbringing. Sadly, neither time nor determination heal these wounds.

This pandemic triggers emotions that have festered below the surface for years. We've managed them with an array of coping strategies that no longer work. When the pressure of right-now feels like the trauma of back-then, I need to ask: "Among my friends, why does this particular issue trigger only me? What does

this remind me of from my past? What is it about me that won't let this go?"

This plague has become like an involuntary stress test, revealing preexisting damaged emotions. It would do us well to explore the test results.

Things to consider:

1. Explore your feelings toward the most influential person in your childhood.

2. Talk about your prevailing emotions during your early years.

(Homework)

Think - Write - Share

1. Take time to mentally review and ponder your current emotional flair ups. (don't rush)
2. In private, write about times you felt like this during childhood. (details)
3. Find a trusted friend (not a family member) and share your story. (be brave & honest)