

Paradise Lost - How the Past Can Affect Our Present

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Overview

- Paradise lost and Paradise regained
 - The gospel message : the past can affect the present
 - Convergence of neuroscience/psychology and Christian message
- Dealing with the past and future: some simple ideas
 - For yourself
 - For your family and friends

The Christian Narrative: The Past Can Affect the Present

- The Greatest Commandment is about RELATIONSHIPS: love God and love others (Matt 22:34-40)
- Paradise lost: Sin came into the world with a breakdown in relationship between God and man, and between man and others (Gen 3: 8-12)
 - The tree of knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel....
- Effects of sin can be passed from generation to generation:
 - Idol worship and effect on next generations (Exodus 20:4-6)
- Healing comes from RECONCILIATION: rebuilding relationship with God through the cross (2 Cor 5:18-20)

A Similar Message in Human Relationships

The past can affect the present: relationships and reconciliation

Neuroscience: We are Created for Relationship

- Prefrontal cortex allows us to read and communicate with another person
 - Mirror neurons
- Sight: read others' body language
- Middle ear to filter out background noise to hear speech better
- Larynx for speech: can express range of emotions
- Facial muscles: mirror another person, express emotion
- Gut for “gut feeling” for sensing something is wrong before the brain and analyze and put into language

Breakdown in Relationship Results in Anxiety and Dysfunction

- Hierarchy of response to strangers, unfamiliar situations or conflicts
 - First level: Communication and building relationship
 - Mostly human activity, using prefrontal cortex
 - If this works, do not have to be afraid
 - Second level: Fight or flight if relationship breaks down
 - Typical animal behavior
 - FEAR! Amygdala, brain's danger detector on full blast
 - Third level: Freeze or faint when life is threatened and escape is impossible
 - Mouse in the mouth of a cat
 - System shut down

Earliest Recorded Fight or Flight (Gen 3:8-12)

- ⁸ then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD god as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD god among the trees of the garden. ⁹ but the LORD god called to the man, “where are you?”
- ¹⁰ he answered, “i heard you in the garden, and i was afraid because i was naked; so i hid.”
- ¹¹ and he said, “who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”
- ¹² the man said, “the woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and i ate it.”

Brain Activation in Fight or Flight

- When communication does not work, and fear takes over: fight or flight
 - Amygdala: brain's "smoke detector" for danger to initiate fight or flight
 - Other parts of the brain provides the gateway to past experiences, needed to look for solutions
 - Another part of brain provides balance between the rational and emotional parts of brain
- Growing up in conflicted/stressful environments, the amygdala and the fear circuit would be activated often
 - Amygdala would get more sensitive with over-use: vigilance as survival skill
 - Other parts of the brain may get "burned-out" with over-use: slower access to past experiences and harder to balance the rational with the emotional
- For many, family of origin was stressful/conflicted, relationship wounds were not repaired

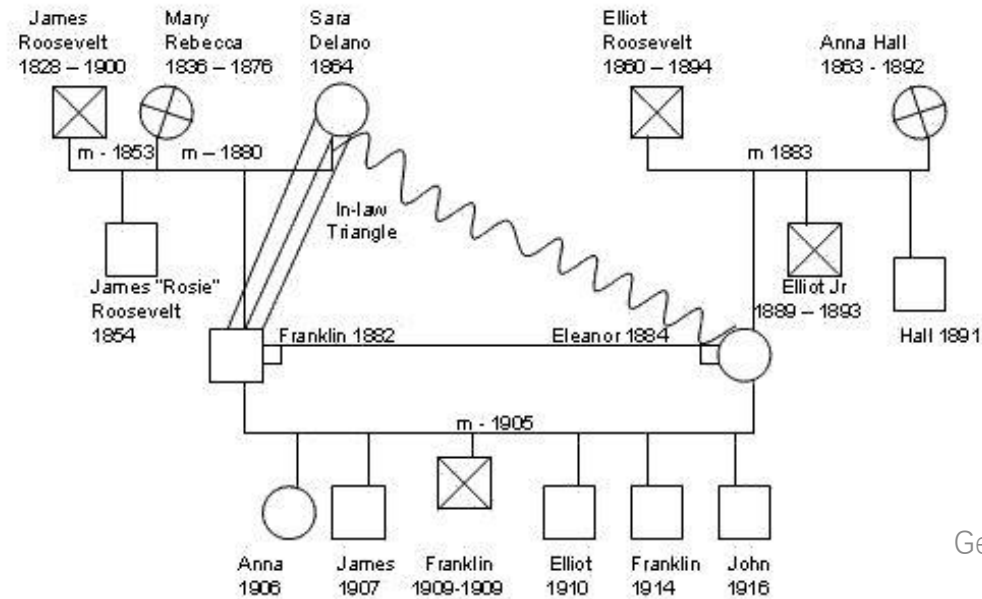
Growing up in Conflicted Environment Can Affect Our Present

- A overly sensitive amygdala means a person would easily get triggered
 - Living in fear and anxiety
- Affected structures in brain means a person would be less able to utilize past experiences to solve problems and less able to balance the rational and emotional parts of brain
 - Impact to emotion: over-reactive
 - Impact to cognition: prone to all or nothing thinking and cognitive distortions
 - Impact to behavior: fewer behavioral strategies to deal with stress
 - Impact to interpersonal relationship: hard to build relationship when one is over-reacting
 - Blaming, pleasing, controlling, super-rational, avoiding including anger, boundary issues
 - Impact to self-concept: living to avoid anxiety, often for others, but who am I?

Dysfunction/Anxiety from One Generation Can be Passed to the Next Generation

- Growing up in a conflicted environment, the resulting attachment wounds can affect one's amygdala and other brain structures:
 - Reducing ability to handle stress
 - Also a tendency to recreate the conflicted environment in one's own life, which would then affect the next generation
- Prolonged anxiety/conflict between parents or parents' own issues can impact a child's brain development resulting in anxiety in the next generation
 - Attachment studies have seen transmission of maternal attachment styles in the range of 70%-80%

Problems Passed from Generation to Generation



Genogram from internet sources

- Alcohol problem from Eleanor's father to her brother
- Marital problems from FDR/Eleanor passed to their children

Problems Passed from One Generation to the Next

- Parents' preference for one children led to sibling discord
 - Rebecca liked Jacob more so than Esau
 - Jacob loved Joseph more than the other children
- Eleanor Roosevelt smuggled in alcohol to his dying brother in the hospital whose was dying out of complications of his alcoholism
 - Eleanor's daughter Anna arranged to meetings between FDR and his mistress Lucy Mercer towards the end of his life

The Past Can Affect the Present

- From the Bible: created for relationships with God and man
- Breakdown in relationships, between God and man and between man and man, resulted in sin and dysfunction
- Result of breakdown in relationship between God and man, i.e. result of sin, can be passed from one generation to the next
- Reconciliation with God needed to restore relationships and peace
- Physiology and psychology: created for relationships
- Breakdown in relationships results in stress and dysfunction: hierarchy of response to threat
- Anxiety and dysfunction can be passed from one generation to the next
- Counseling as way of reconciling past disruptions in relationship

Recap

- Created for relationships and hierarchy of response to threat
- When relationships fail, brain interprets that as FEAR and body goes into fight or flight mode
- Growing up in a conflicted environment, FEAR is internalized and we tend to over-react, affecting our emotion, cognition, behavior, interpersonal relationships and self-identity
- Finding our way back: dealing with our FEAR and building better relationships

Fear driving the Flight or Fight Response

Afraid, hid, the woman you put here with me...

A Few Strategies to Deal with Present Issues

- Fear: how are you dealing with your own fears and how are you calming someone else's fears?
- How can you maintain better relationships to provide a safe environment for your family and friends?

Calming Your Anxiety through Meditation

- Psalm 23: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want....
- Walking with Jesus along the shores of the Sea of Galilee...

Calming Anxiety by Learning to Communicate Better

- BE A REPORTER: interview someone sitting next to you on a blessing or happy memory from the past few weeks
- Send a non-verbal message to your partner that you are a safe person
 - Smile, be gentle, be interested
- As your partner speaks, watch for facial expressions and follow up on the non-verbal language
- Summarize and give your partner opportunity to correct your understanding of the incident
 - Your partner knows that you know

Reduce Anxiety by Being on the Same Channel

- At least two channels of communication: rational and emotional
- Your child asks you to help with his/her math problem
 - Which channel?

Attuning by Being on the Same Channel

- Your spouse came home grumpy after fighting an hour of rush hour traffic
 - “I told you so many times before, don’t take 880 and you never listen to me!”
 - “Next time, check on-line first to see which freeway is less clogged. That can be very helpful.”
 - “Let’s just have some ice-cream.”
 - “I got stuck on 880 last week and it was so bad....”
- What channel was your spouse on?
- What channel were you on?
- What would be a better response?

***Your 13-year old son looks irritable
after being reprimanded by his
soccer coach***

How would you open a dialog with him?

More Strategies to Calm Your Anxiety

- Communication: talking things out to reconcile
 - After an argument, parents talk things over with their children to calm the children's anxiety
- Walking, jogging and other bi-lateral stimulation
- Journaling your thoughts: whatever is bothering you
- Keeping a blessings journal: 3 good things that happen to you everyday

Thank You!