

No Trespassing IX: The Power of the Past

1. Opening Joke:
 - a. A mother with eight children needed to do a brief errand, so she instructed her children to stand in a circle, hold hands, and not move. She would be right back.
 - b. Five minutes later the mother returned. She was horrified to see that a family of skunks had come into the room and settled down inside the circle of kids. But the poor kids didn't move, as instructed. Mom panicked and shouted, "Children. Skunks, Run." Immediately each kid picked up a skunk and ran.
 - c. In a similar sense, people pick up the skunks of their past. And they carry them around and say, "Life stinks, doesn't it?"
 - d. Well it's no wonder their lives stink. Look at what they're holding on to. They're holding on to the past.
 - e. Guess what we will be learning about today. The Power of the Past.

2. If you had the power to change your past, what would you change?
 - a. Most people would like to alter their past in some way.
 - b. Some would eliminate a tragedy or a hardship.
 - c. Some would add taking advantage of an opportunity.
 - d. Others would change a decision or a choice they regretted.
 - e. Some would remove a disease, or suffering, or eliminate a death.
 - f. Some would make basic changes in his or her family, or how they raise their kids or who they married or didn't marry.
 - g. What about you? What would you alter? *(Good question for Small Groups)*
 - i. Fortunately, we cannot change the past.
 1. Does it surprise you that I say, "fortunately?"
 2. I am thankful that I cannot change my past.
 3. Why? Because I believe in the sovereignty of God. I believe that He is in control.
 4. I believe that through even my own tragic sins and failures, God is able to accomplish His purposes in me.
 5. God alone knows my future and He alone has the power to change ME through the circumstances of life...if I am willing to cooperate.
 6. Romans 8:28 says, "*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*"
 7. God alone has the power to redeem our past.
 8. God alone can make something of my past, so that I can become all He created me to be.
 - ii. I believe that God has a wonderful destiny for me.
 1. I believe that He has a wonderful destiny for you.
 - a. A great and marvelous purpose.
 - b. Something that will leave its mark upon eternity.
 2. But something stands in the way of our achieving or experiencing that destiny.
 3. It is our past.
 4. And the devil uses our past against us..
 5. He throws it in our faces through accusations and intimidation.
 6. He tries to use our past to thwart our future.
 7. And I hate to say it, but he is often very successful at it.

3. What is the relationship between the past and the future?
 - a. **We are all products of our past.**
 - i. You are what you are because of all that you have been through.
 - ii. This explains why twins will still become very different people, despite their genetic similarity.
 1. They each experience different things and make different choices in those things.
 2. Their lives are shaped by all that they go through.
 3. Their likes and dislikes, their biases, their attitudes...all are the direct result of what they have experienced in life.
 - iii. But even though we might have experienced a horrible past; maybe abuse, maybe tragedy, maybe poverty, our past **does not have to control** how we live and face our future.
 - iv. **Although we are products of our past we don't have to be prisoners of it.**
 - b. This is because God's purpose is not limited or neutralized by our past.
 - i. God made a promise to a group of Jews that had to feel very hard for them to believe. *"For I know the plans I have for you ... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."* (Jeremiah 29:11).
 1. It was a promise that so many of us hold onto and cling to.
 2. But this was a promise made to a nation in captivity.
 3. It was made to a nation that had sinned, rebelled, and experienced the judgment of God.
 4. They had nothing going for them. Their past was ruling their present.
 5. But God makes it clear...their past doesn't rule their future. **He DOES!**
 6. **YOUR PAST DOESN'T RULE YOUR FUTURE. GOD DOES!**
 7. **Your sin, your failed marriage, your wayward children, your bankruptcy, your joblessness, your circumstances and your past does not fix your future. GOD DOES!**
 8. **Can I have an Amen?**
4. There are some common ways of dealing with our past
 - a. **Denial** – Denial is where we refuse to acknowledge that we have been hurt, or we refuse to take the responsibility for our pain.
 - i. Through denial, we live as if nothing had ever happened.
 - ii. The problem with denial is that the events that hurt us are never resolved, the core issues are never dealt with, and the pain from our past continues to squeeze the life out of our future.
 - iii. Denial can come in a number of flavors –
 1. from vanilla – where we live like actors around the sources of our pain;
 2. dark chocolate – where we deny our own sins and hide from our past, hoping no one ever discovers it.
 - iv. Denial leaves us in pain. It blocks us from God's plan and God's future for us.
 - b. **Living in the past:**
 - i. Memorabilia is a hot item for people later in life; 50's songs, 60's cars, and 70's clothes. Why is that? Because we associate "good times" with our past.
 - ii. Nostalgia – is that pining for the past, when things were easier and simpler.
 - iii. Oh really? Were they really easier?
 1. My grandmother had crippling arthritis from kneading dough by hand
 2. My mother knew dozens of other children who either died or were stricken by diphtheria, scarlet fever or polio.

- iv. When we live in the past we are actually living in a set of selective memories.
 - v. We tend to forget the painful ones and we relive the good ones.
 - vi. We tend to relive our memories in order to drown out our present pain or difficulty.
 - vii. The past exerts power in the present through the gift or the curse of memory.
 - 1. Memories have great power.
 - 2. Our memories and our interpretations of our past have a tremendous power to influence how we see the present and how we see our world.
 - 3. This is one of the reasons why this is a subject that must be discussed in the context of spiritual warfare.
 - viii. If you are living in the past, in a set of selective memories, you will never get to experience the liberating power and joy of God's future for you.
 - ix. The next time you are recollecting the past; ask yourself WHY you are doing so. You might be surprised at the answer.
- c. **Sorrow** – Sorrow is something that happens when grief has locked the door to your future.
- i. We all grieve over the loss of a loved one, but some of us grieve more than others.
 - ii. Sometimes we experience a loss that leaves such a huge hole in our heart that we feel like we can never move on and face the future without that person.
 - iii. Grief is natural and important part of the process of life.
 - 1. It is okay to pause there to heal from a loss.
 - iv. Grief's purpose is to help us to remember, preserve and affirm the past, all of those people who are in our past, and to preserve their meaning to us, while slowly letting it become past.
 - v. But God does not want us to live in grief or sorrow.
 - 1. It is not our destiny.
 - 2. It is not His plan for us.
 - vi. Jesus said, "*I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live*" (John 11:25)
 - vii. God had a plan for your loved one who may have gone before you – and they have completed that plan.
 - viii. God still has a plan for you...don't allow Satan to steal that plan through prolonged sorrow.
 - ix. Let God unlock the door to your future.
- d. **Regret** – is the sensation of sorrow or sadness that comes from the feeling that we wished we had or hadn't done something some way.
- i. Almost every parent I know has regrets. "If only I had (or hadn't...)."
 - ii. Parental regrets are easy to come by, hard to banish
 - iii. No wonder, writes Peggy O'Mara in Mothering magazine, that we are sometimes tempted to have another child so "this time we'll get it right."
 - 1. The illusion here, of course, is that with enough opportunities, we could become the perfect parent and produce the perfect child.
 - 2. Regret is always about "what could have been or might have been."
 - iv. Regrets do have something to tell us.
 - 1. They're worth listening to (at least for a while), because they show us our human frailty, our mistakes, our sins, and how these can affect those most precious to us.
 - 2. Sometimes we did the best we could, and sometimes we didn't.
 - v. The downside to persistent regret is that it can lead to an attitude of defeat.
 - vi. The antidote to regret is grace.
 - 1. Grace that says, "you are forgiven."
 - 2. Grace that says, "I have plans and a future for you"

3. Grace that says, “your past is not stronger than My future for you.”
 - e. **Blame** – is where we become a victim and declare that everyone else is at fault.
 - i. We blame God, our parents, our children, our schools, the class bully, the boss, etc.
 - ii. The net result to the victim mentality is that they refuse to take responsibility for life. Everything is someone else’s fault.
 1. I can’t get a job because the employers are all scum; they have it in for me.
 2. Or my last boss has it in for me...he gives bad references to everyone that calls him.
 3. Or my last 5 marriages failed because those guys were all drunks. (did you ever wonder what attracted you to them in the first place?).
 - iii. We learned last week that we may have been VICTIMIZED but it is our CHOICE to remain a victim.
 1. We are not responsible for what others do to us, but we are responsible for how we respond to it.
 2. It is vital to understand that God is sovereign.
 - a. He is in charge.
 - b. He has always been in charge.
 - c. He saw you when you were hurt.
 - d. He has not left you. He will never leave you or forsake you.
 - e. He has a plan for your future if you are willing to let go of your past.
5. Where does the past gains power:
- a. **Guilt and Discouragement**–
 - i. Paul had every reason not to forget his past. *“As for zeal, persecuting the church”* (Philippians 3:6).
 1. He had hunted down Christians, he had supervised their arrest. He had prosecuted them and even approved their execution.
 2. Guilt-driven people are defeated by their memories so that their past controls their future
 - ii. There is a fable that the devil was having a yard sale and offered to sell the tools to his trade to anyone who could afford them. They were spread out across the table with labels on each – hatred, malice, envy, despair, sickness, sensuality...all the weapons people recognized because of their obvious ugliness. But off to one side, apart from the rest lay a harmless looking wedge shaped instrument marked “discouragement.” It was old and worn and priced far higher than all of the other tools.
 1. When asked why, the devil explained, “Because I can use this one so much more easily than the others. I use to open doors that are tightly bolted, by wedging it in until the door swings open. Once inside I can use the other tools whenever I want.
 2. Discouragement adds up our failures and tempts us to stare at the negative balance in the checkbook of life. Its point is to lead us to conclude that there is no point in trying. “Give up...its easier”
 - b. **Fear of the future** (I want to go back to Egypt).
 - i. Lv. 11:4-6 *“the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! 5 We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost-also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. 6 But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!"*
 - ii. At the root of the complaints, of the looking back, of the regrets was a rejection of God. It was the victory of a selective memory over the experience and hardship of deliverance.

1. This same group of people cried out to God in Egypt over their heavy burden of slavery.
 2. Yet now, when the going gets tough, they want to get going back to slavery where at least they knew where their next meal was coming from.
 3. No faith was needed in slavery. Only dependence upon the slave master.
 4. Slavery seems better than faith.
- iii. Egypt may have seemed safe and secure to the Israelites. Yes, it had trials, but they were known trials. They feared the unknown circumstances ahead of them.
- c. **Resentment** – binds you to the past and makes you its prisoner.
- i. Anger and resentment always hurts you more than the one you are angry with.
 1. *“While the one in the wrong has probably forgotten what it was that offended you, you will continue to stew in it, chained to the past.”* Rick Warren says, *“Listen: Those who have hurt you in the past cannot continue to hurt you now unless you hold on to the pain through resentment. Your past is past! Nothing will change it. You are only hurting yourself with your bitterness.”*
 - ii. There is an antidote to this power of the past. It is called forgiveness.
 1. Un-forgiveness means you are still trying to collect a debt owed to you by another.
 - a. The problem is that you can never collect.
 - b. And fortunately, your debt that you owed God was a debt you could not pay...and Jesus paid that debt for you.
 2. In Philip Yancey’s book “What’s so amazing about grace?” he writes *“Not to forgive imprisons me in the past and it locks out all of the potential for change.”*
 3. To forgive is also to forget.
 - a. To “forget” in the Bible means *“no longer to be influenced by”*.
 - b. In Hebrews 10:17 the Lord promises *“Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.”*
 - c. That doesn't mean God has a bad memory!
 - d. It means He forgives our past and treats it as if its forgotten.
 - e. God chooses to never to call our sins to mind once they are forgiven.
- d. **The Spirit of Religion** (Old wineskins) (C. Peter Wagner)
- i. The church is called to be an organism (something that is alive) and not an organization.
 1. Unfortunately, many churches become just organizations because they live in the past.
 2. Revelation says, *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”* (Revelation 2:7).
 3. The Greek word for “says” is in the **present** tense, not the **past** tense.
 4. But the religious spirit tries to keep us from hearing the present tense by having us focus on the past tense.
 - ii. Old Wine’s Power
 1. Luke 5: 36-39 *He told them this parable: “No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. 37 And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. 38 No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. 39 And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, ‘The old is better.’”*

2. There is a key word is at the end: “no one after drinking old wine wants the new for he says, “the old is better.”
3. Once we are content with what we have known, we don’t want to try anything new. It is human nature to prefer constancy, unchanging methods and a comfortable environment.
4. Accepting the unknown future requires laying down the known past.
- iii. Listen to this strange twist:
 1. **Yesterday’s new wineskin is today’s old wineskin.**
 2. That is why the spirit of religion has a relatively easy task.
 3. It wants us to stay where we were and not move into God's new season . . . hey... we heard God at this place.
 4. The power of the religious spirit comes from its attempt to convince us that God has nothing better for us in the future.
 5. The past might have been good, but your destiny is the future, not the past.
- e. This has implications for our church.
 - i. If you are recalling the “good old days” – then you are missing what God is doing in the here and now.
 - ii. God is doing incredible things.
 - iii. Stop wanting yesterday’s wine; drink up today’s new wine – enjoy what God is doing today.

6. How do we disarm the Power of the Past

- a. (Philippians 3:13-14) *“Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward(LIKE A RUNNER) to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*
- b. **We disarm the past by “forgetting” in a biblical sense.**
 - i. (epilanthanomai from epí = in + lantháno = lie hidden) The Greek word used for forgetting doesn’t just mean “to forget,” but to be "completely forgetting."
 - ii. Paul uses an illustration of a Greek runner completely forgetting his opponents whom he is leading in the race.
 1. What happens to a runner who is leading that looks back? **They lose stride.**
 2. Paul presses home the lesson that when a child of God dwells on his past failures, the things he should have done and failed to do, the things he did which he should not have done -- all of these have the potential to impede or hinder our forward progress in the Christian life.
 - iii. When a Christian has confessed and repented and made things "right" with God and his fellow-man, the next step is to completely forget them.
 1. The word for “Forgetting" is in the present tense indicating that he was continually forgetting.
 - a. It isn’t a one time act.
 - b. It is the action that is done every time the memories haunt him.
 - c. It is a continuous CHOICE and ACT of the will.
- c. **We disarm the past by choosing to not to look back.**
 - i. There is always that temptation to look over your shoulder, to look back at the city that is being destroyed, or to go back into the burning house to get something you left behind.
 1. Paul is saying in essence that to keep one's focus "Don't look back."
 - ii. What things is Paul saying not to look back on?
 1. Everything, "good" things, achievements (eg those "religious" achievements Paul described earlier in this chapter), virtuous deeds, great accomplishments, etc.
 2. The bad things too: the sins, the failures, the disasters.

3. We are told to forget all of it because it has nothing to do with the future.
 - a. You cannot live on past victories.
 - b. You should not be defeated by past sins.
 - c. And yet most people are so distracted by the past that they are impeded in running for the future.
- iii. Paul is saying that the saint who would run to win must forget it all. One can't successfully run forward if he or she is looking backward.
- iv. Our Daily Bread illustrates the importance of not looking back but instead continually looking forward (Winning the Race)
 1. On May 6, 1954, Roger Bannister became the first man in history to run a mile in less than 4 minutes. Within 2 months, John Landy eclipsed the record by 1.4 seconds. On August 7, 1954, the two met together for a historic race. As they moved into the last lap, Landy held the lead. It looked as if he would win, but as he neared the finish he was haunted by the question, "Where is Bannister?" As he turned to look, Bannister took the lead. Landy later told a Time magazine reporter, "If I hadn't looked back, I would have won!"
- v. Paul was able to "forget" his past and anticipate his future. Listen again:
 1. *Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward(LIKE A RUNNER) to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*
 2. This doesn't mean that his memory was erased, but it does mean that because God had forgiven him, Paul had a clean conscience and was free of the control of the guilt or pride he may have felt from his past.
- vi. Don't go back, don't even look back.
 1. Luke 17: 31-33 *On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. 32 Remember Lot's wife! 33 Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.*
 2. Genesis 19:26 **"But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt."**
 - a. She left behind relatives, she left behind a way of life. She wasn't just looking back to see what was happening to the city. She was looking back because she really didn't want to leave.
 3. Some of us have accepted Christ because we didn't want to go to hell. And so we are looking back...sometimes even toying with sin - - as much as we can get away with - - because we really didn't want to leave our old life. We never came to hate it and never came to love Jesus for rescuing us from it. We only wish we could have it both ways.
 4. Perhaps you haven't found your satisfaction in Jesus because you never let go of your past.
 5. You still think that your past will meet your appetite. Manna doesn't taste so good – leeks and onions tasted better.
 - a. Have you ever eaten a leek and an onion? It would make you sick to eat them. It's a poor man's meal. It is like the Prodigal son who had to eat corn cobs.
- vii. But God holds the future.
- d. Jesus even tells us to not look back.
 - i. He warns us not to look We cannot go back. We must leave it behind.

- ii. Luke 9:61 *Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-by to my family." 62 Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."*
 - 1. **Looking back makes you worthless for service in the Kingdom of God.**
7. **We disarm the past by pressing on TOWARDS the future** (toward God)
- a. Better said, **“LOOK AT THE PRIZE AND NOT AT THE PAST!”**
 - b. I PRESS ON: dioko
 - c. TOWARD THE GOAL: kata skopon dioko
 - i. "Goal" (skopos) is first in the Greek construction for emphasis and "skopos" refers that on which the eye is fixed, the distant mark looked at, the goal or end that one has in view. Skopos was used to refer to a target for shooting.
 - d. OF THE UPWARD CALL OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS: tes ano kleseos tou theou en Christo Iesou:
 - i. The upward call of God in Christ – is looking at the goal, it is seeing Jesus as the reason for living, not getting another car, house, vacation or retirement. God’s plan for you found in Christ...the upward call of God in Christ. That is your goal. That is your target.
 - ii. **“LOOK AT THE PRIZE AND NOT AT THE PAST!”**
 - e. If you have no purpose for your life, you have no life.
 - i. Dr. Bernie Siegel found he could predict which of his cancer patients would go into remission by asking, “Do you want to live to be one hundred?”
 - 1. Those with a deep sense of life purpose answered yes and were the ones most likely to survive. Hope comes from having a purpose.”.
 - 2. , service, etc. mean that we lose.
 - f. Here’s Hope:
 - i. *“For I know the plans I have for you ... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”* (Jeremiah 29:11).
 - ii. The Bible says, “I will restore to you the years the locust has eaten.”
 - 1. Your past may have been horrible. You may have failed in a marriage. You may have children that didn’t turn out the way you wanted. You may have lost a job, you may have done poorly in business. You may have committed some horrible sin that even though you know its forgiven, you cannot imagine ever being used by God again.
 - 2. God is in the business of restoring lost fortunes, of bringing life where death once ruled.
 - 3. He will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten.
 - 4. **Look at the Prize and not at the past!**
8. Or Daily Bread there is a powerful illustration entitled Seeing Or Remembering:
- a. *There's a story about a man who was slowly losing his memory. After an examination, the doctor said that an operation on his brain might reverse his condition and restore his memory. However, the surgery would be so delicate that a nerve might be severed, causing total blindness.*
 - b. *"What would you rather have," asked the surgeon, "your sight or your memory?"*
 - c. *The man pondered the question for a few moments and then replied, "My sight, because I would rather see where I am going than remember where I have been."*
9. What will you choose today, given a choice of whether to see or to remember?
- a. 2 Cor. 5:17 *17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

Let’s pray.

10. Scripture –

- i. He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, Thou wilt cast all their sins Into the depths of the sea." ([Micah 7:18-19](#))
- ii. "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." ([Psalm 103:12](#))
- iii. Lo, for my own welfare I had great bitterness. It is Thou Who hast kept my soul from the pit of nothingness, for Thou hast cast all (how many?) my sins behind Thy back." ([Isaiah 38:17](#))
- b. "I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins." ([Isaiah 43:25](#))
 - a. .
- c. Return to your vomit:
 - i.
- d. *Isaiah 43:15-19 I am the LORD, your Holy One, Israel's Creator, your King." 16 This is what the LORD says - he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, 17 who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick: 18 "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. 19 See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.*
- e. *Jeremiah 29:11-13 "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. 12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."*
- f. *Isaiah 65:16 Whoever invokes a blessing in the land will do so by the God of truth; he who takes an oath in the land will swear by the God of truth. For the past troubles will be forgotten and hidden from my eyes.*
- g.

Sunday evening passage: Psalm 31: 9 Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; My eye is wasted away from grief, my soul and my body also. 10 For my life is spent with sorrow And my years with sighing; My strength has failed because of my iniquity, And my body has wasted away. 11 Because of all my adversaries, I have become a reproach, Especially to my neighbors, And an object of dread to my acquaintances; Those who see me in the street flee from me. 12 I am forgotten as a dead man, out of mind; I am like a broken vessel. 13 For I have heard the slander of many, Terror is on every side; While they took counsel together against me, They schemed to take away my life. 14 But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD, I say, "You are my God." 15 My times are in Your hand; Deliver me from the hand of my enemies and from those who persecute me.