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Presentation Transcript
Healing Losses
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The title of this presentation is *Healing Past Losses*. It's part of a series on *Overcoming Losses* – the fourth and final one.

By way of review, the first presentation in the series was titled, *Where Overcoming Begins*. And, if you'll recall, we saw in that that our troubles in life and also the fruits of the flesh – what the Bible calls them – begin with the losses that we've suffered in our lives, especially in childhood. And we saw that how we deal with losses makes all the difference. As God said to Cain, "If you do well, will you not be accepted?" That statement was delivered to him after what he considered a loss. So it's all about how we handle the things that have happened to us.

The second one was called, *The Work of Overcoming*, where, once we laid the foundation to understand what the work needs to be, we met the selfish lady. Remember her? The lady that said that she'd tried everything. She prayed, she studied, she fasted, she donated to the poor and she was still just as selfish as ever. She tried to overcome her selfishness by doing things. But when she looked inside and she healed her past losses, then she stopped being selfish without even having to try. So we saw that her selfishness was a way of protecting herself from loss.

I don't think I've actually said this yet, but you know that expression, "once bitten, twice shy?" We develop sensitivities when we get hurt. If I punched you in the arm about that hard, it wouldn't hurt. But if I did it a thousand times, after awhile, you'd start to wince, because it would get very sore there. Or, if I hit you once really hard right between the eyes, you'd be watching my right hand after that all the time, because it's what happens to us that makes us shy away from being hurt again. And the defenses that we develop to protect ourselves from future losses are the things that cause the problems. When we're small children, we develop the defenses because we can't do anything else, but, as we get older, those defenses become self-destructive and inhibit the very things that we're trying to accomplish in our lives.

The third one was *Identifying Past Losses* and we learned that we all defend ourselves from past losses – mostly by not allowing ourselves to think about them. That's the

primary way that we do it. So we learned how to identify those losses by understanding human memory and how it works. I won't go into detail about that again.

Today we're going to learn – once we've identified what the losses are – how to heal them – how to take care of them. I'm trying to make a very complicated topic simple, so there are certain caveats that I probably could deliver here. But, for most people and most issues, the things I'm going to talk about today are very applicable.

The place I want to start today – to understand how to heal past losses – is to talk about what's called *attachment theory*. Attachment theory developed in the early 50s. It started about 1950 with a man name John Bolby and was added a great deal to by another lady, named Mary Ainsworth, who was a gifted observer. She got a grant and started observing mothers with babies. They'd go into the home on a weekly basis and watch – I think there were hundreds of mothers that they were watching with their infant children. Then, when the children were a year old, they conducted what they called the *strange situation interview*. It's really kind of a weird name, isn't it? But this was an ingenious device to try to understand how people work.

What they did was, they had the mother, with the infant – the year-old baby – come into a room that had two chairs and some toys on the floor. And she'd sit down, put the baby down on the floor and try to get the baby engaged in playing with the toys. Then a stranger would come in and sit in the other chair. And she would attempt to get the baby to engage with the stranger. And after a few minutes, she would get up and leave. And they watched what happened when she left. A few minutes later, she came back. And they watched what happened when she came back. They did this with hundreds of children and mothers. And they discovered that there were essentially four categories of response. It wasn't like across the board different. It wasn't a rainbow or a continuum. It was four distinct relational styles that babies have developed. And they postulated that those styles developed out of the way they were treated. They were a way to respond to their environment – to the way their mothers treated them.

The first category of child was upset when mom left, was easily engaged and soothed by the stranger, and when mom came back, there was a joyous reunion. They decided that this kid was a kid who felt secure – felt good about himself, felt like mom was going to come back and wasn't that worried, and when she did there was a big happy reunion. This child was obviously very connected to mom.

The second one didn't seem to notice too much when mom left, or, if they did notice, they didn't make a big deal out of it. And when she came back, it was, pretty much, the same way. They thought those kids were secure, too, until they put heart rate and blood pressure sensors on them and discovered that they were very upset internally, but you couldn't see it. And they postulated that that was a way of dealing with something that was going on between mother and child. We'll talk a little bit more about what they correlated to. That correlated to the children that knew that they weren't going to get taken care of by their mother emotionally. She might be changing their diapers and feeding them, but she didn't know how to attune herself to them, or she was too

preoccupied to do that, or too worried about some other stressor. Sometimes that happens when mothers are addicted or, maybe, there's fourteen other kids to take care of. There are a lot of reasons why that can happen. But this child learned that it wasn't going to get what it needed and its way of dealing with that was to pull back and act like it didn't matter. People that have that style of operation – the way they live their life – they call them avoidant when they're babies and as they get older, they call them dismissing, because they try to reach out for relationship, but when they're disappointed by the other person, they pull back. So there's this approach-avoidance thing, where they feel like, "Oh, see, I knew you were going to let me down," because that's what happened a long time ago.

Then the third category of child screamed and yelled when mom left, went to the door, was hard to soothe by the stranger. When she came back, the child couldn't decide whether it was happy to see her or angry with her for leaving. They called that child the ambivalent child. That child was the child that correlated to babies that did not know whether they were going to be taken care of or not. It was kind of like pulling the handle on a one-armed bandit – you know, sometimes something came out and sometimes it didn't. It was just "who knew what was going to happen next?" – a lot of anxiety around that kind of upbringing – people that are really dramatic and everything is always up in the air and don't know what is going to happen next – confusing and chaotic and all that.

Then the final category that they discovered was where the child froze when mom came back – didn't know what to do – deer caught in the headlights. They correlated that with children who were either frightened by or hurt by their mother. That puts a child in a no-win situation, because it's hardwired to love and be loved by mother. And then, when mother hurts or scares you, there's nothing you can do. It throws you into a state of disorganization. It's really hard to think about that, isn't it? Terrible thing.

Those are the four styles they discovered. The good news about those three insecure styles of attachment – avoidant, ambivalent and disorganized – is that some of those people, over the lifespan, migrate out of those insecure attachments to become secure. They become just like the child that was secure in the beginning. How does that happen? If we could figure that out, we'd be in pretty good shape, wouldn't we? Well, they actually *have* figured it out. And there are people that are able to overcome that kind of attachment. We have sayings like, "As the twig is bent, so grows the tree." But people are not like trees. They can change. Anything that happens to us, in our lives, no matter how early, if we work hard enough on it, there is a lot we can do to make it better – maybe not perfect, but we can make it better than it was. So they call that category earned-secure, because people had to *do* something in order to move away from the insecurity that they had, to something else.

Do you know what the greatest predictor of that change is? It's really interesting. It's a rich story about what happened to you – how you came to be you with your insecurities and your securities and all of that. If you'd like to learn more about that, you can read a book called, *Becoming Attached*, by Robert Karen. It's a big book – thick – but not hard to read and you don't have to read the whole thing. He talks a lot about the effects on

society and all that and you might not be interested in that part of it. But, if you want to learn about the attachment process that, obviously, God designed into us – right? – then you can read that and you’ll learn more about it. So a rich story of the past... This is a very important thing to understand that they’ve discovered – how people overcome those kind of losses in early life. When your mother is not taking care of you like you’re hard-wired to desire, that is a loss. That’s a loss. So how do you overcome that?

Well, what is a rich story? Well, it includes all the other characters in your life, especially your parents and siblings, relatives that were influential and teachers. What is their perspective in the story? What do they think about what’s going on?

I was talking to a lady awhile back whose father died when she was eight years old. Two years after that, her mother remarried. So she had a step-father. She wasn’t taken to the funeral. She felt like everybody else just went on. They never talked about it. She didn’t know how anybody else felt about his loss. She felt like it might have been her fault. Kids do that sometimes. She was eight years old when he died. After a lot of talking, she finally decided it might be a good idea to sit down with her mother and talk about what happened – after all these years – she’s in her forties. So she did. Her mother pulled out the picture albums and they went through them. A lot of her ideas about how her mother felt about it were literally exploded, because they just never talked about it. So now, see, she’s deepening the story about what happened – why she’s like she is.

So these other people – their feelings, their thoughts, their motives, their actions, their plans, their strategies, the different states they were in while their life was going on, how strongly they felt, what they were thinking about, how they felt about her – about what was going on – the more things that we can add to that story, and just fill it out and enrich it. Also, how they affected you – how those folks affected you, how being around them – what were your feelings, thoughts, motives, actions, plans, strategies and states related to them – and how you affected them – how you thought, felt and acted – the lives and experience of everybody that touched your life. That’s one of the things that you can do to enrich the story.

That would take a lot of work, wouldn’t it? It would. Is it worth it? I think it is. It’s a lifetime endeavor, actually.

I have a young girl that comes to see me and she has a terrible, terrible anger problem. She’s got the whole package. She’s really bright. She’s good-looking. She gets good grades. She’s very polite. She’s empathic toward people, but she just has an explosive temper. One day she said, “I just need to learn how to hear the word *no* and not go off.” I said, “Okay, so what I want you to do is start keeping a journal of every time that happens – who said it, how you felt, what the issue was, what they were thinking about how they felt about you after you went off – the whole thing. And just keep doing that. And bring it in here every week and we’ll talk about it. And we’ll enrich it even more.” When she hears her own words coming out of her mouth, and I reflect that back to her, and then she comes out with more of it, if we just keep noodling that around, that’s all

going to get built into her by understanding how she's affecting others and why she reacts the way she reacts. All of that is just going to kind of get put in place.

So why does that help, from a brain point of view? Well – and this is really important for you to understand... In the Bible times, and maybe even in 1950, they didn't understand some of the things they understand now, so I guess it's not essential, but it surely makes a whole lot of sense to me. And because I know these things, I know how to help people in a way I never could before. And as I teach those things to people, they're able to help themselves in a way they never could before. So why does the story help?

Well, what we're learning is that the key to mental health is the integration of the brain. What does that mean? Well, you know, you have a bottom part of your brain and the top part of your brain. Right? You've got a brain stem, and a cortex. You've got a limbic system in the middle – a mid-brain. You've got a front and a back, where you think up over your eyes, and you've got all memory storage in the back and sides. You've got in the middle – down below that – is where the emotions are created. So, when all of that works *together* – communicates with each other – that's when we feel and we're doing our best.

Have you ever gone off on somebody – just completely lost it? When that happens, the part that you think with shuts off. All the blood drains out of that and it goes down into the part where all you can do is feel. And that's when we say and do things we regret later, because all our good judgment has been turned off. That's not optimal mental functioning, is it? And then you know people that can only think and never feel anything. And that's no kind of life either. So, when the whole brain works together, that's when it's the best.

Losses inhibit brain integration. Got that? Losses inhibit brain integration. We talk about the defenses that we use to hide from ourselves what's happened to us. When we're hiding from ourselves what's happened to us, we have *disintegrated* our brain. There are parts of the brain that are not talking to each other. The memory part is not allowed to interact with the logic and the emotions. So healing past losses is all about restoring full integration of the brain. That's what is really going on inside.

You say, "What about the spirit and what about the mind and all that?" Well, I think that all those things interplay with the brain. I think, maybe, there are simultaneous operations going on. I'm not quite sure how that works. I don't think anybody is. But they can watch these things happening in a person's head. They can put people in a scanner and talk to them about a traumatic event and see it firing down in the right side in the emotional center. And they can take them out and do therapy with them, then put them back in and talk to them about it, and they can see it now out on the left side cortex. I know, when we do EMDR, I can hear it move over quite often. People will be talking about what happened to them and they'll sound like the age they were when it happened, and then, when they stop, it shifts over and it starts sounding like an adult. I think I mentioned the guy, whose grandfathers got in a fist-fight on Christmas morning – rolling around on the floor, cussing, bloody nose, kicked over the tree, screaming and yelling. And he was five. And he was saying, "They wrecked my Christmas! They scared me and my siblings! We

were terrified. We didn't know what was going to happen. I thought maybe it was my fault." It sounds just like a five-year-old. A few minutes later, he was saying things like, "Well, they were friends just a few years later. And my parents did put the tree back up, and we went and had breakfast, and they sent them home. We had our Christmas and it was all good." That was the adult. I mean, you could hear it. It's amazing. So now, his brain is integrated. He can now think about something for the first time in his life as an adult, because both sides are connected now.

So it's all about restoring integration. And not only that, but your brain actually goes through your whole body – those nerves that come out of your brain stem, they run all the way down to your toes – everywhere. So there's a connection between your entire body and your brain. There's a huge expanse inside the human trunk where we can *feel* emotions – not just there, but in our head. I see people telling me about how angry they're getting. I see their fists start balling up and their knuckles turn white. I say, "Look at your hands." They don't realize that the sensation in their body is related to what is going on in their head. That's been disconnected. So, when we start getting that back, and we get the left side and the right side connected, and the front and the middle, and all of that, that's what enriching the story does. It starts pulling everything together and making those connections.

In EMDR, we have this thing that we do when we set up to it. And I say, "So what image, in your mind, do you have of this bad event?" "Well, I can see my grandfathers down on the floor. And one of them had a bloody nose." Where's that coming from? Well, it's probably coming from back here, right? Okay. "And when you think about that, how did that make you *feel* about yourself?" So now I'm asking him to get an emotion – right? – a negative emotion. Where is that coming from? Way down deep, in the middle of his brain. "And, on a scale from one to seven, how strong is that?" So now I'm asking him to go to his left brain and put a number on it. Right? "And what emotion came up for you?" Back to the middle again. So we're going left, right, left, right, front, back, left, right. What we're doing is opening up those channels, just by asking those questions. A lot of my people tell me that they feel a lot better before we ever get to turn on the lights, because we've already been doing bilateral stimulation of the hemispheres of the brain just by talking. And when you create a rich story, that's what you are doing. You have to fill in details, and then you have to talk about feelings, and you have to think what year it was, and how old I was. . . . So we're getting all this cross-talk, in your brain, going on when you do that. And then I ask people, "Well, on a scale from zero to ten, how strong is that emotion?" So they go right back to the number, right? They have to start thinking with their left brain again. That's what helps. You don't have to know that. All you have to know is that you need a rich story with all kinds of information in it – emotional information, logical information, chronological information, feelings, body sensations – all of that. So it's all about restoring integration of the brain.

I have a fellow that was coming to see me. He didn't have a father. He recalled an incident where he was playing out beside the house, and he was feeling left out, because the other boys were talking about their dads – or, I guess, they went to do something with their fathers and he didn't have one. I said, "So when you think about that, what feeling

do you get?” He said, “Really a lot of sadness.” And I said, “Where do you feel that in your body?” He said, “You always ask me that question, don’t you?” He has trouble connecting with the feeling in his body. He’s learning how to do that. So, as he noodles that around, and he keeps hearing me ask that question, it’s starting to become conscious with him. He’s starting to *get* awareness. So that’s enhancing his integration, isn’t it?

Emotions are *always* about a person – always about a person. You don’t just have emotions about nothing. They’re always about a person. So, when you’re angry, who are you angry with? Okay? And there’s *always* a place you feel it in your body. Where do you feel it? And there’s *always* an impulse that goes with it. “Well, nobody would like to smack their father in the face.” So, didn’t you just tell me what the impulse is? I mean, there’s *always* an impulse. And anytime that you can’t feel any one of those three things, that’s because a defense is in operation to keep you from feeling it – because it’s not fun to think about smacking your dad, or your teacher, or your husband, or whatever.

So, that’s the essential process of getting past losses. And I use attachment theory because the earliest losses we suffer usually have to do with our parents, because we’re so hard to satisfy when we’re babies. That’s where we suffer a lot of our losses – earliest ones – and it’s hard to remember those things.

We talked about memory and how you don’t *have* to remember them to fix them. So, I hope you’ll go back and listen to the third one on this series. If you didn’t catch it, you can learn about that there.

So, ways to heal past losses – now that we have the basic building blocks in place. Let’s talk about this in two phases. One is the *do-it-yourself phase*. We talked about a rich story about yourself. That’s very important. And, if there’s just one thing that’s bothering you, a rich story about that.... I had a lady come in that had been in a really bad auto accident. So her work had to do with telling the story of the accident and building the whole fact.

Another thing that people can do is a process called *mindfulness*. You should Google that if you don’t know what that is. It’s, essentially, just becoming more aware of your own internal workings. Building the rich story can help with that. The questions we ask in EMDR cause that to happen, but mindfulness is kind of all that on steroids.

Did you know, for example, that you can liken your mind to the sea? On the surface of the sea there are waves. There is noise. There is foam. There is kelp floating. There are ships running around. There’s wind. There are tsunamis. But, if you go far enough down, there is calm – very calm. And, if you can be down there and look up, you can see all that going on. But you don’t have to go there. You can be calm. How do you get there? Well, one of the ways to do that is to learn how to focus your mind away from the distractions of the surface. And one really good way to do that is by just staying with your breathing – just noticing your breath. If you notice your breath for a long enough period of time, you get calm. Do you know why? Because you’re just in the present moment. You’re not thinking about all the depressing things that you’ve lost in the past, nor are you thinking about all the losses you’re anticipating in the future. You’re just in the middle – living –

down in that deep, calm place. And the more time that we can spend our time there, the better we're able to deal with the things that happen to us.

I started doing yoga a number of years ago. It's pretty funny to watch it, but I got this yoga tape, called *Back Care Yoga for Beginners*. And the guy that did the yoga tape, his name is Rodney Yee. And he used to be a ballet dancer, but now he's a yoga master. After he'd been doing yoga for a number of years – and he told this on another one of his tapes that I bought – I don't remember which one it was – but he was talking about going back to visit his father, whom he'd never gotten along with. He said, "I went home. I sat down where I always sat, and he started in on me, like he always did." And he said, "It just washed over me. It was like it didn't even affect me. My blood pressure didn't go up. My heart rate didn't go up. I didn't get upset. Just whhhooo..." He said, "The only thing I can thank was the yoga – the learning to meditate on the present moment and stay present." It give you control without even knowing it. He didn't even know that was going to happen. He was worried about going home.

Another thing that I've learned is what is called a *float-back*. When you're trying to find out about losses of the past, those losses trigger unpleasant things in the present that cause us problems. I was lying in my recliner chair – which is where I do all of my main work. I was thinking about the Feast of Tabernacles we were going to have in Park City the second time. I think it was February, March? And I was making a list, in my mind, about what needed to happen. And all of a sudden, I felt extremely anxious – way more anxious than I felt the first time we did it. And I thought, "What's going on here? I already did this once and it worked out okay. Everything is doable. Why am I so upset?" I didn't know why, but I was supposed to bring with me, to my first EMDR training, an example of something that upset me in the present. So I took that in. And the question was, "Well, try to think back to a time when you felt just like that in your past." Well, I thought back to mistakes I'd make in high school, middle school, elementary school. And then it hit me. I remembered walking into kindergarten the first time, holding my mother's hand, and I looked at all these kids in this room, and I freaked. They put me into kindergarten a year early, because I walked and talked early. They erroneously thought I was ready for it. And just seeing all this frenetic activity, and my parent older and calm – it was quiet at our house – and it was kind of a zoo I was looking at, I think – and I just, "Blaaaaah!" I remember that was not a good year for me. In fact, I flunked kindergarten. I had to do it again when we moved to Denver. But I was ready that time, though. And it was a much better experience. But that float-back is where you find out where it starts.

You can float back for body sensations, too – not just emotions. When did you *feel* like that before in your body? A lot of people that are really angry...they remember this or other things, like their shoulders tensing up or something. What we're trying to do is coax the feelings out of the unconscious, where they've been and not been willing to see them or feel them.

Another thing that is helpful to some people is the *tapping* – you know, like this (demonstration) – bilateral stimulation of the hemispheres. (For those who are just listening, I'm tapping on my arms.) Sometimes that's very helpful to people. People calm

themselves down a lot with that, I've noticed. There's a book by a lady, named Laurel Parnel, called *Tapping In*. You could read that. And Francine Shapiro – the lady who came up with the whole EMDR thing – wrote a book recently about *Getting Past Your Past*, which is the exact title of one my sermons awhile back.

Another way that we can do this is called *body work exercises*, which is really good. It's amazing what comes to the mind while one is running. Yoga is good. Massage.

Another thing that is really good is what is called *projectives* – projective activities – art. What is it about art? Well, how does it make you feel? So there is a request of the unconscious to divulge information. Music. Journaling. “I just need to hear the word *no* without getting upset.” So write about that. And here's what you should write about. You should write about how you feel about the situation, about where you feel it in your body, about how it makes you feel about yourself, about how upsetting it is – zero to ten. Put some numbers in there.

Dream work is another way. How do you do that? How do you make sense of these crazy dreams we have? Well, one way that you can help yourself with this is that you can realize that every time you see somebody in a dream, it's *not* usually them. It's some aspect of *you* that you either do or don't like, or they represent something that is happening to you presently. Every time a client says, “I had a dream about you last night,” my ears always perk up. It's never been me yet – out of their own mouths. So, how do you do that? Well, you take a stack of paper, and, in chronological order, you write down everything that you *see* in the dream – not everything that happens – just everything that you *see*. “I saw a man riding down the street on a red bicycle.” Okay, man, bicycle. That's what you write down. And you put a number at the top of each sheet, so that you remember the order they're in. And then you put a circle around that – on each one of those. You use a sheet of paper for each thing that you see in your dream. Then, you go back, and you look at each sheet of paper, and you write down the first two or three things that come to your mind about that *thing* that you saw in your dream. And you put circles around those and connect them back to the main thing. When you get that done, then you start all over again with the first sheet, you take a colored marker and you circle the *one* thing that jumps out at you of those three things – which seems to have the most import? And that is a way to find out what your symbols are in that dream. You know, there are dream books you can buy that have symbols all laid out. That never works, really. There might be a few symbols that are kind of universal – you know, like falling – out of control; or black and white, or water – all, generally, kind of mean the same thing to people. But most of us, when it gets past that, we have our own symbols, and if we spread them all out on a table, and look at those things that we've circled with a marker, and we just start thinking about how we feel when we see those things, it's pretty amazing what we can come up with. I notice, most of the time, that only happens once when somebody does therapy with me. And it's usually within the first three weeks. And that dream usually tells *me* what the therapy needs to be about. The unconscious – once it knows it can get help – starts sending up messages – communicating. It wants to be free of the need to defend against feeling. But it has not done so, because it's afraid it will overwhelm the person – the self.

So those are some things you can do. It's a lifetime process and everybody has to find the things that work for them, but the focus ought to be on the story – on building the story.

Professional help. That's the second category of things we can talk about. I use *EMDR*. I believe that to be the most helpful thing that I've found for people – certainly the quickest. *Mindfulness therapy.* There are lots of books about that on the market. There's a type of therapy that fits right in with what we're talking about. It's called *Narrative Therapy*, by Bernard Guerney. You can look it up on the Web. *Analytical or psycho-dynamic therapy* has always been about the unconscious and removing defenses – very much slower than any of these others, probably, but it may be more thorough. I'm not there to judge that. And then, another one that I've discovered recently is called *intensive short-term dynamic psycho-therapy* – big scary name – *ISTDP* - intensive short-term dynamic psycho-therapy. For people that don't want to mess around, that's a good way to go, because the therapist is trained to help you penetrate your defenses quickly and get right down to it.

Let's just do some common sense thinking about this issue. The losses we've suffered create emotional wounds. When you sprain your ankle, what do you do? You favor it, don't you? You try to keep the weight off it. Why? Because it hurts to walk on it. So what does that look like? Well, it looks like limping, doesn't it? And, if an injury lasts long enough, we don't even know we're limping after awhile. It just becomes what we do. When we suffer emotional wounds, we try to keep the weight off of it. We try to keep from feeling the pain by not thinking about it. Sometimes we deliberately suppress thinking about it, and other times, we unconsciously just don't go there, because every time we do, it's like getting an electric shock. So we wind up still carrying around the pain, limping along, not even aware of it.

I think I've told you the story about the girl who was abused, who was raging all the time at people. She just wasn't connected to where that anger was coming from. But it was rage about her past loss of safety and the fact that she wasn't loved and respected. And when she dealt with that loss and all the feelings she had about it, her rage – which is listed as one of the fruits of the flesh, is it not? – just melted away. No need for anger management. She just wasn't angry anymore.

So, does anger explode out of you? When people try to talk sense to you about certain topics, does it feel like you're being attacked? Are you depressed or anxious? Well, those are defenses at work to keep you from feeling the losses. Going to church, paying tithes, serving other people won't help you with that stuff. You'll just be limping to church. As God said, to deal with this issue, we have “to rend our hearts, not our garments.”

So that's a bit about dealing with past losses and healing them. We have a lot more material on our Website about this, so you can look at the *Series* page and the *Topics* page on www.liferesource.org and find more help with those issues.