

# TURNING PAST FAILURES INTO PRESENT SUCCESSES

*“Replication or Repudiation plus Responsibility”*

By Brent Hunter

## Introduction

- A. Jonathan Edwards\Max Duke comparison: *“In the early 1700s, two men developed distinct reputations for themselves—one was Jonathan Edwards, a man of integrity, refinement and Christian character, and the other was Max Duke, a well-known criminal. During the last two hundred years, their descendants have been traced. In Jonathan Edward’s line of descendants are 13 college presidents, 200 preachers, 60 prominent leaders, 90 physicians, 32 authors, 6 professionals and 300 farmers. On the other hand, Max Duke’s descendants include 90 prostitutes, 100 criminals, 145 confirmed drunkards, 300 delinquents, and 285 who contracted various evil social diseases.”*
1. It is **amazing** -- the effect of one person’s influence!
  2. The Ten Commandments establish this principle. (Ex 20:4-5)
- B. It is easiest to simply blend in, BUT we are **free moral agents!**
1. We can **replicate** (repeat)
  2. We can **repudiate** (consciously choose NOT to repeat)
  3. We can be **responsible** (make the right choices)
- C. THESIS: I. Replication -- powerful!  
II. Repudiation -- pit falls!  
III. Responsibility -- key!

## I. REPLICATION

- A. Background and overview
1. Each of us has 2 families:
    - a. A family of *orientation*
    - b. A family of *outcome*
  2. How we respond to ‘a’ determines ‘b’:
    - a. We either *replicate* -- repeat
    - b. Or we *repudiate* -- change
- B. We see the overwhelming strength of replication...
1. In **MARRIAGES AND FAMILIES!**
  2. It is *easier* to replicate\repeat what you are used to than to change.

- C. It's so influential that we **often repeat even things we hated while growing up!**
  - 1. Paul's struggle: *"For the good which I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I practice."* Rom 7:19
    - a. Ex. Divorce tends to be contagious
    - b. Ex. Child abuse is often carried out by those abused
  - 2. Abraham *lied* (half truth), Isaac & Rebecca, Jacob & Esau
  - 3. There is amazing comfort in **familiarity** -- even if it's painful.
- D. The children of Israel came out of Egypt.
  - 1. They left bitter bondage. (Ex 1:11, 13-14)
  - 2. They wanted to return -- but why? (Num 11:5)
  - 3. Their fixation on the **past** destroyed the possibility of a **better future**.
- E. **We tend to raise our children EXACTLY THE WAY WE WERE RAISED.**
  - 1. Small wonder Ecc 6:11 says, *"Wisdom is good for an inheritance..."*
  - 2. And the psalmist says, *"...more to be desired than fine gold."*

## II. REPUDIATION

- A. *"We are all affected by our past, but we are **not prisoners of it.**"*
  - 1. *"Repent and turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance."* Acts 26:20
  - 2. Overcoming sinful habits is not easy! **BUT IT IS A MATTER OF CHOICE!!**
- B. **Major pitfall: the tendency to over-react (extremes)!**
  - 1. Illustration: Corinth first refused to withdraw from someone that they should have; and then to correct it, they refused to accept him back into fellowship as they should have! This is a typical example of repudiation.
  - 2. Illustration: the children of Israel
    - a. 1st generation -- **zealous!**
    - b. 2nd generation -- **apathetic!**
    - c. 3rd generation -- **rebellious!**

(They *"forsook Jehovah"*! They decided to be independent of their parents by repudiating too much. -- Judges 2:12)

## III. RESPONSIBILITY

- A. Learn from the past -- **make choices, NOT EXCUSES!**
  - 1. Adam and Eve -- With their first sin, both tried to blame the other.
  - 2. Today no one seems responsible for his own actions.
- B. **Don't blame your parents!**
  - 1. Ezekiel said, *"The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge."* That generation used this excuse. But God replied, *"This saying will be heard NO MORE!"* Ezek 18:2-4

2. See attached handout ("Don't Blame Your Parents")
- C. What makes a man or woman great? Those who have the courage and character to repudiate bad parenting and make the right choices!
  1. Hezekiah's father was a very wicked king.
  2. Abraham's father was an idolator.
  3. Gideon's father was an idolator.
  4. Jephthah's mother was a harlot, yet he became a mighty man. (Judges 11)

**CONCLUSION:**

- A. Replicate the good...Repudiate the bad! (II Cor 5:10)
- B. We must all STOP MAKING EXCUSES & BE RESPONSIBLE!
- C. Repent! With GOD's help, be a Hezekiah, a Gideon, or a Jephthah.
- D. Do the 3-part assignment attached. It is never too late to increase your insight and turn things around.
- E. *"Too many of us lose our peace of mind and security by allowing us to be nailed on a cross between two thieves. On the one side is the thief of regrets over the past, and on the other, fear of the future."* Turn to GOD, receive forgiveness, put regrets behind you, and with His power take your past failures and transform them into present successes!

# ASSIGNMENT TO APPLY PRINCIPLES

## THREE PARTS:

Spend some time thinking seriously about these 3 items. Then on a separate sheet of paper write out your answers. Be as specific and thorough as possible.

I. Think about what things you *liked* about your upbringing and would like to **replicate or repeat**.

II. Think about and list the things you would like to *repudiate* and **take responsibility to change**.

III. Discuss how you will avoid the tendency to **over-react and simply go from one extreme to the other**.

This assignment is especially effective when done at a **young age**. I have felt very good about the results achieved when given to 18-19 year olds who have **only been out of their family of orientation** for a **short while**. They are able to **think clearly about what they would like** in their **new families of outcome** before they begin to **repeat or replicate bad habits**.

However, it is **never too late** to increase one's awareness in this area and with God's help become a **"transition person."** **Negative traits stop by choice** with this type of person and successive generations are spared the **negative consequences** of the bad traits being passed down to their descendants.

**Wouldn't it be wonderful if each generation analyzed its past and decided to improve its family so that every generation got better and better instead of just repeated over and over the mistakes of the past?**

You can be a part of making this happen!

# DON'T BLAME YOUR PARENTS

*by Jacob H. Conn, M.D., Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, Johns Hopkins University Medical School.*

The unsuccessful, the unhappy at various periods in history have blamed their plight on numerous things -- fate, the gods, demons, innate cussedness, or heredity. Today it is the fashion to hold one's parents accountable for every flaw, from plain laziness to mental illness: "I can't save money because my parents never taught me economy." "I'm a hypochondriac because my mother fussed so much about my health when I was little." "In childhood I wasn't permitted to think for myself."

A woman I know actually blamed her parents for her unattractive appearance. Asked why she didn't wave her hair, powder her nose, or occasionally get a new hat, she answered plaintively, "When I was a child Mother always told me I wasn't good looking." It did not occur to her that as an adult it was up to her, and nobody else, to make the most of her looks.

The current notion is that little children are emotionally fragile, that you can wreck a child's whole future by loving him too little or too much, by teaching him the facts of life too late or too soon, by being too strict or too indulgent. Such half-baked misinterpretations of the importance of the formative years ignore the fact that most human beings are blessed with an inner strength. Actually, the average child is as tough psychologically as he is physically. Just as the body repels germs and viruses, so the mind has similar immunities and resistances to the unwise or unkind doing of parents.

History is full of examples of men and women who had unhappy childhoods and yet made a success of their lives. John Stuart Mill became a great philosopher and led a harmonious married life despite a father who never praised him, never allowed him to associate with other children, and relentlessly forced him to study night after night. Beethoven's ne'er-do-well father drove and exploited him shamelessly. Florence Nightingale's parents hemmed her in by all the restrictions that went with Victorian gentility and bitterly opposed her going into nursing.

Ordinary mortals likewise have the capacity to build worthwhile lives despite a past full of psychological handicaps. I do not deny that "parental rejection" or "over-domination" may genuinely handicap some individuals. But a human being is not a machine that once set rolling in the wrong direction is unable to change its course. The essence of maturity or "adjustment" is to make the most of yourself with whatever you have, which includes your physique, your mental endowments, your social opportunities, and your parents.

Almost daily in my practice I see patients who blame their failure to meet life on their parents instead of on themselves. A fearful, immature spinster wept that she "couldn't leave Mother." Yet her mother told me: "Doctor, I wish to goodness you'd help her, so that she'd go and get married." Nothing tied this woman to her mother's apron strings but knots of her own making.

"No wonder I'm the way I am," a seriously depressed man said to me. "Look!" He pulled from his pocket a yellowed newspaper clipping that told of his parents' double suicide twenty years before. He admitted that he had carried the clipping all those years. The heart of his problem was not the shocking memory but his compulsion to dwell on it.

Contrary to popular notion, mental illness or neuroticism is not caused by an event but by the way a person reacts to it. A disturbing incident is only the match which sets off the firecracker; it's the gunpowder within the cracker which actually causes the explosion. It is good old-fashioned character -- a compound of inherited tendencies and our ability to tolerate disappointments -- that determines whether we withstand childhood tragedies or whether they down us all our lives.

If it were true that what happens during childhood fixes us once and for all, everybody would be neurotic. Certain events in childhood are genuinely upsetting, among them weaning and a new baby in the family. But the normal individual outgrows his baby shoes.

The great majority of normal, healthy-minded youngsters manage, without special help, to cope matter-of-factly with their parents' antics. Just try to spoil a child who has such innate common sense that he doesn't need or want to be spoiled! Or try to dominate the average three-year-old. Children who do not have the neurotic need to be dependent will not be dominated. Maybe they react with tantrums. Maybe they argue. Maybe they are sullenly silent. But whatever the technique for maintaining their integrity, "Mom-ism" won't and can't wreck them.

The psychiatrist's job does not consist -- as many of my patients think -- of breaking apart a person's past so that he can lay his failings, weaknesses, and peculiarities right at his parents' door. All that a psychiatrist can do is to lead the patient to face the truth about his own wish to be dominated or sheltered or what not, and help him take a stand by himself. Once that point is reached, his past life matters very little. As Dr. Franz Alexander, a distinguished Chicago psychoanalyst put it, "The patient is suffering not so much from memories as from the incapacity to deal with the actual problems of the moment."

A single experience in adult life can so change human beings that it is sheer nonsense to maintain that their natures were immutably determined years before by what their parents said or did to them. A short illness turned St. Francis of Assisi from a frivolous, extravagant young man into a devout ascetic. Gay young blades marry and become serious and responsible husbands; gadabout young wives turn into settled stay-at-homes after the birth of a baby. The human organism is a going, changing concern, with the motives of the present its propelling force.

Too many of us with shortcomings are interested in asking, "How did it start?" Too few ask themselves, "Why do I keep it up"? A person must first make the frank self-admission, "I am worrisome -- or thriftless, or hypochondriac, or irresponsible -- because it suits some purpose of my own to be that way."

The cliché, "There are no problem children, only problem parents", is as extreme and fallacious a swing of the pendulum as the idea that all children were imps of Satan. Even a little child can be responsible for his own bad upbringing, for it takes two to make an emotional bargain. When a father is too authoritarian it may well be that he is so because the child craves being bossed. When a mother prolongs treating Junior like a baby it may be because she responds to his own need for protection. Children are not mere lumps of clay which adults mold. In the parent-child relationship, as in marriage, one personality modifies and plays upon another.

Parents can set the stage for the drama of their children's lives. They can supply inspiring or uninspiring examples of conduct, which will influence basic mental, physical, and spiritual growth. But acceptance or rejection of the background they give is a matter of the child's individual character.