

Do you see the hope this offers Christians? Your bad memories of your past sins—even the worst ones—can be opportunities for life-changing growth. You do not need to avoid, run from, cover over, or get rid of your past. You can reinterpret it God’s way. God’s goal is neither memory erasure nor memory denial, but memory redemption.

A Biblical Perspective on Memories

How can God redeem your recurring memories of past failures? By giving you his perspective on them. A gospel-centered perspective of faith and hope will help you to realize three things.

1. God was in your past. He was not asleep or on vacation when you did or said the evil things that now trouble you. Whether you committed those sins before or after you became a Christian, the sovereign God was on site. He now intends to turn your past into something good. This is the perspective Joseph models in Genesis 50:20, when he reflected on his brothers’ treacherous sins: “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.” (See also Gen. 45:5–7; Acts 17:25–31; Rom. 8:28–29; Eph. 1:4, 11; and Jer. 29:11.)

2. Your past does not control your future.

Your past might *influence* your present beliefs or actions, but you are not a hostage to what you did or what happened to you. You are not doomed. Instead, you are a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), forgiven and set free. In that context you are a responsible human being, and an active interpreter and responder to your situation. You are fully accountable for your present choices no matter what memories linger (see Gen. 37–50; Prov. 4:23; Mark 7:14–23; and James 1:13–15). The question is, will you trust God’s forgiveness and his ability to use evil for good? Will you reflect this in the choices and responses you make?

3. **Your memories result from your *interpretation* of your past** (see Gen. 50:20; Rom. 8:28–29; Num. 11; Ps. 78:11, 106:13; and Ezek. 16). What you actually remember are not the past events *per se*, but the past-events-as-you-interpret-them. They are not “bare” facts, but interpreted facts. This means that they are capable of *re*interpretation. That is where your hope lies. The hope of the gospel can help you put the right interpretation on your past and make it into a good thing for you. This is what will help you get past your past!

Soon after moving to West Virginia, I lost

my eyeglasses. Being lazy, cheap, and too proud to admit visual decline, I went several years without replacing them. Eventually, after an eye exam and some loving pressure from my wife, I broke down and bought a new pair. I instantly entered a new world. Billboards suddenly became legible. Little items enlarged. Colors brightened. Contrasts cleared. The glasses had corrected my vision and allowed me to see things the way they really are.

The same is true of your memories. As you put on the Bible's glasses to gain a Christ-centered perspective, you see your past differently. Like Joseph, you can draw positive conclusions about God's all-powerful, all-wise, and all-loving purposes for *all* of your life.

Three Marks of a Redeemed Memory

The question is: How should we interpret our past sins so that God's redemptive purposes can be realized in our lives? The apostle Paul's real-life example can direct us. Near the end of his ministry, Paul writes to Timothy to fortify his fearful young friend with God's strength. In 1 Timothy 1:12–17, Paul recalls his own call to ministry, which came to him while he actively persecuted the church of Jesus. Listen to his testimony:

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Paul doesn't hide his sinful past; instead, he presents a gospel interpretation of it. He doesn't flee, avoid, or forget his past; he looks at it through God's lens. This is why the passage ends on a positive note. Jesus saves and trans-