

AVOID REPEATING YOUR PAST

The young man in his mid-twenties was seething with anger at his father. "I hate him with all the hate I can find in my heart," he said.

His dad was an alcoholic who became very violent under the influence of alcohol and did not hesitate to whip him when he was a child. He was a gambler who lost much of family finances at the casino. An incurable womanizer, he hardly bothered to hide his women. A very controlling man, he beat up his wife and was a complete dictator in the house.

The young man feared him almost as much as he hated him. I could see the anger and the bitterness written all over his face. When, however, he told me about his past, it was apparent that his life had become very much like that of his hated father.

He drank too much and admitted that he was fast becoming an alcoholic. He gambled extensively and usually lost heavily at the same casino frequented by his dad. He was an admitted womanizer and did not deny that of the hundreds of women he had slept with, he never loved even one. What's more, like his father, he was violent to women.

I looked him in the eye and said softly, "You have become very much like the man you hate so intensely." He was shocked to realize that indeed he was becoming a carbon copy of his father.

Another man who consulted me harbored a deep hatred for his mother. She was cold, harsh and indifferent. She rarely showed him any kind of affection, yet she was deeply involved in church functions and social work. She showed unfair favoritism toward his sister. When he married, what kind of woman did he end up with? You're right if you guessed that she was very much like his mother. And he repeated the same mistake that his mother made and that tormented him so when he was a kid. He favored a daughter so blatantly that his other children turned against him. It was only when he was in therapy that he understood how he had repeated the past.

So many of us end up imitating the ways of our elders that we have learned to detest. The youngster who was beaten by his father marries and does violence to his own children. The girl who resented her mother's aloofness becomes distant to her own brood. The truth is that unless we educate ourselves about our past and study the effects it had on our present thought and behavior patterns, we can find ourselves doing to others what was done to us.

The fact is that we as children learn from our elders and tend to copy their behavior and way of thinking. Only when we study our history and try to understand it can we sort things out and make the necessary changes and adjustments that will help us avoid repeating the hateful patterns that caused us so much pain. As I said to the man above who hated his father. "You have met the enemy, your father, and he is you."