Can We Overcome Our Past?

It is a question that Jane realizes most of us ask from time to time. All of us have a personal background that surely affects how we live our daily lives. The question Jane is asking is whether individuals can overcome sizeable issues from their pasts when considering accepting Christ as their savior. She is facing this issue in her relationship with longtime friends Steve and Karen Elliot. Early in their friendship, Jane never felt it was her business to inject herself into the lives of this married couple. Now, she feels that she cannot continue to stand on the sidelines.

The Elliots are obviously struggling in their search for a religious core in their lives. Recently, they have become attracted to the local Islamic congregation, primarily because it accommodates their respective backgrounds, which have included negative experiences within the Christian church in their youth.

Steve and Karen come from what have to be considered dysfunctional family backgrounds, in which both of their families were plagued by alcoholism. Both of their personal histories have profoundly affected their views on life and, in particular, religion today. Steve’s family situation can be traced all the way back to his paternal grandparents. His grandfather, the pastor of a local church, was a ‘closet’ alcoholic. Because of drinking bouts, his relationship with Steve’s mother could have been considered abusive in all forms of the word. When she left home in her late teens, she married her first husband. Whether they were alcoholics is a matter of semantics; drinking was the common thread between them. They had two children before he left the family and neither returned nor maintained any form of contact. Somewhat out of desperation to have a father in the house, Steve’s mother remarried. Her second marriage was more a matter of necessity in her mother eyes. Although the two were openly cordial with each other around the children and in public, love took a second seat to pragmatics. Steve was born two years later and would be their only child.

Karen came from an ostensibly Christian home. However, alcoholism again was present. The resultant fighting of her parents while drunk ultimately led to the breakup of their marriage. This forced Karen into taking sides, an act that continues to hurt her emotionally. The situation was complicated when her mother moved to another city shortly after the divorce and continued her alcoholism related behavior.

Steve and Karen married seven years ago. They have two children. Steve works in the marketing division of a large firm and has achieved great success. For all outward appearances, they appear to be a well-adjusted, family-oriented couple. Both are very loyal to their friends. Other than an occasional drink, the Elliots appear to be free of their families’ histories with alcohol.
Jane and her husband, Warren, have known the Elliots for the past five years. Both families have grown close over time. Jane is constantly amazed at how intelligent the Elliots are. They appear to be constantly searching. Neither of them is even overtly committed to a church, although they have often attended Jane’s Bible study, which meets weekly. Their most recent announcement – that Islam is appealing to them – has shocked Jane.

She has reached out to you, a close friend at the church you both attend, and shares her concerns with you. “What should I do? Both my husband and I are very private people and don’t feel comfortable violating others’ privacy. But we feel we need to act before they drift too far from the Christian faith to be able to return. Warren and I agree that the Elliots’ early backgrounds are their primary hindrance. It is hard for someone else to fully understand the complexity of their situation, particularly with the role alcoholism has played in both their pasts constantly lurking.”

You agree to talk with Jane and Warren at your next mid-week Bible study meeting. Knowing that Jane’s witnessing to the Elliots would involve a long-term effort, the focus of your thinking is on what scriptural guidance you can provide to her that would provide the needed building blocks for such a challenge.

ASSIGNMENT

Using your Biblical understanding, come alongside the Elliots, a couple facing significant obstacles in their faith search.
My Scriptural Research:

Group Scriptural Research:

Decisions / Recommendations:

Primary Scriptural References: