

Supplemental Reading “Generational Influences”

This week, we are asking you to do a little extra reading as part of your homework. We want to briefly look at a key concept from the Bible that may be new to you – something we are calling “generational influences.” We believe that understanding this concept can result in dramatic transformation in your life, especially as we head towards the Freedom retreat.

The term “generational influences” describes the effect that our parents and ancestors have on our life today. Whether we know it or not, the decisions that our family made to obey or disobey God’s commands can have a direct impact on our own personal walk with God. This concept is described in Exodus 20:4-6:

You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, **visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me**, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

This verse is not found in an obscure passage – in fact, it is found right in the middle of the Ten Commandments! The same concept shows up elsewhere in Scripture, including Exodus 34:6-7, Numbers 14:18, and Deuteronomy 5:9.

Practically speaking, what does this mean? Most importantly, it means that we are all products of our upbringing, whether we like it or not. This is obvious when we look at things like our physical appearance, manner of speaking, and personal preferences. However, we may have never thought that our spirituality can also be directly shaped by our family background.

We are all sinful, but each of us has certain areas where we are weaker than others. For example, you may not be particularly tempted with anger, but struggle to steward your finances in a godly way. Meanwhile, your friend may be financially responsible, but constantly grapples with his anger issues. Often times, upon closer examination, we will find that our weaknesses are closely linked with our family background.

When these areas of sin become deeply ingrained in us, they can be difficult to overcome under our own efforts. Even if we have the best intentions to stop sinning in a certain way, as hard as we try, we can find ourselves slipping back into the same sin over and over again. Identifying areas of generational influence is critical to gaining a deeper level of victory in our lives.

When generational influences are at work in someone's life, general patterns will emerge. Often times, you will see every member of a family struggling with the same sort of sin. For example, it is not uncommon to see the children of divorced parents struggle with broken relationships, sexual sin, and divorce. Because the safe, nurturing environment of their family was shattered when their parents divorced, the children grow up without a good example of healthy relationships. As adults, they lack the ability to engage in healthy relationships with others.

Sometimes, a generational influence will cause you to repeat the sin you saw modeled in your family. Other times, your sin will be something committed *in response* to the sin in your family. For example, two children who grew up with angry, abusive parents may respond differently. One sibling may inherit the same anger issues. Meanwhile, the other sibling may instead struggle with depression and low self-esteem as they take their anger and direct it inwards towards themselves.

Generational influences can take many forms – besides sexual sin and anger, addiction and financial mismanagement are also common. Another area where generational influences can take root is mysticism. Mysticism is defined as any attempt to access the supernatural outside of God. This can range from the seemingly harmless (palm readings, Ouija boards), to dabbling in other religions (transcendental meditation, New Age activities), to even darker pursuits (Satanism, Wicca). Unfortunately, our culture often laughs off these sorts of activities as fun or harmless, but Scripture shows that any attempt to access the supernatural outside of God is wrong and can open the door for the enemy to access our life. If you or anyone in your family has engaged in these sorts of activities, there may be a generational influence in your life that needs to be broken.

The concept of generational influences can be hard for us to accept. A lot of our natural resistance stems from our culture's emphasis on individuality. We like to believe that we are our own person, and that as adults we can leave the negative aspects of our past behind us. However, Scripture shows us that God looks at us differently. While God values each and every one of us as individually unique, He created the family as His primary mechanism to shape and mold our personality and experiences. When we come from a godly lineage, this can be a real blessing. But when our family did not live in accordance with God's will, this can create obstacles we must overcome.

Before we go further, let's clarify a couple of things that generational influences are *not*. First, it does not mean that you are influenced by every single sin your family committed. Patterns of generational influence are typically found in the major areas where your family struggled. Second, this concept does not mean that you are somehow held accountable for the sins of your family members. We are all individuals with our own free will and must only answer before God for our own actions.

What then is the way out of this? How do we stop the cycle that has run through our family for generations? The answer lies in Jesus Christ and in the sacrifice He made on the cross. 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us:

For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Jesus, having lived a perfect life without sin, was the only acceptable sacrifice for our sins. When He suffered and died on the cross, He bore the penalty for all of our sins – including any generational influences at work in our lives. As we are learning in Freedom, the key to victory is not hard work or trying to follow a bunch of rules. Because generational influences are so ingrained, they are very hard to overcome under our own efforts. But if we repent and acknowledge what Christ did for us on the cross, we can walk free from the sin that has entangled us for years. Not only can we walk free, but our children and future generations can walk free as well!

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

This is a promise in God's Word that we can stand on to see generational influences defeated in our lives.

As you head towards the Freedom Retreat, ask God to show you areas in your life where generational influences may be keeping you from walking more closely with Him. To do this, you will need to take some time to think about your past. Consider what kinds of behavior and attitudes your family modeled for you. Not only sin, but any blessings you have received from your family as well. The point is not to place blame on your family or cast them in a bad light. Instead, the focus is on you – taking responsibility for your sins, while acknowledging influences from the past and how they affect you today.

Jesus Christ paid for your generational influences on the Cross. They don't have to remain in your life any longer! When God shows you an area of generational influence in your life, the best response is to repent from the sin and renounce the hold it has on your life. Here is a prayer that you can use to do this:

Heavenly Father, I come before you now to confess the sin of _____ . I ask for Your forgiveness for me for this sin and its effects on my life. I renounce the effect that the sin of _____ has had on my life, and release myself from its effects, because Jesus Christ paid for my sin on the cross. I also shut the door on the enemy, and any access he gained into my life because of this generational influence. I pray a blessing on all of my family members. I forgive my parents, grandparents, siblings, uncles, aunts, etc. for the harmful effect their sin had on my life. I thank you that the sin stops with me, and that my children and children's children will be able to live without the harmful effects of the sin of _____ in their lives. In Jesus name, amen.