

Daily Prayer: Family (Mis)Fortunes – Overcoming Generational Family Sin

Exodus 20:1-21 p.61

And God spoke all these words, saying,

2 “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

3 “You shall have no other gods before me.

4 “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or 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. 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for **I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.**

7 “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

8 “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. 11 For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

12 “Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

13 “You shall not murder.

14 “You shall not commit adultery.

15 “You shall not steal.

16 “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

17 “You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbour's.”

18 Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off 19 and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.” 20 Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.” 21 The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

1 John 2:28–3:10 p.1022

And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. 29 If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. 3 And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

4 Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. 5 You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. 6 No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. 7 Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. 8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. **The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.** 9 No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. 10 By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

We're looking at our Daily Prayer series...

Philip North is the Bishop of Burnley, and today, I discover, has just said this:

LORD GLASMAN, a pioneer of the community-organising movement and an architect of the Living Wage, argues, from a strong evidence base, that to understand the self-identity and concerns of most working people in this country, we need to focus on three things: family, place, and work. The Established Church has historically had a great deal to say about these areas of life, but has now fallen strangely silent.

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2016/2-december/comment/opinion/heeding-the-voices-of-the-popular-revolution>

Today we're looking at family, and considering how to overcome the problems that can afflict us.

Family Fortunes

God gives us life through our parents, our families:

Looks, traits, talents, abilities come down the generations to us.

Loving, stable parents and family is the best we can get

Spend a moment giving thanks for every good thing that God has supplied you through family...

... and Family Misfortunes

Sin is part of human existence – living the wrong ways, rebelling against God, choosing to own ways, doing the wrong things.

Imagine if everyone obeyed the Ten Commandments. The newspapers would be empty.

Imagine if everyone knew, and shared, the love of God described in I John, on a profound and deep level. The newspapers would be filled with good news stories.

Parents and families should give us life, but so often, in our broken, hurting world, it all goes wrong

Genetic inheritance can go wrong – we’re fairly familiar with that, and know about distressing conditions passed on genetically – but *Emotional* and *Spiritual* inheritance can go wrong too.

This makes sense: what we experience right from the moment of conception affects us, for good and for ill. Conception, growth, birth, infancy, childhood – it all has a profound affect on us.

[*Why Love Matters: How affection shapes a baby's brain*, Sue Gerhardt]

We know this now more strongly than ever, yet we often fail to understand and sometimes we never get to know just what’s really going on in our broken families.

“Normal” is whatever we grow up with – and it will stay “normal” unless and until anyone tells us any different.

Take addiction. If there is active addiction in the family, it causes pain and chaos for *everyone* involved.

Patterns of families where there has been or is addiction are now well-observed and understood.

The observations serve for many families, addiction-impacted or not.

Rigidity, Silence, Denial, Isolation

[*Adult Children of Alcoholics*, Wayne Kritsberg]

1. Rigidity

An addict’s behaviour becomes unpredictable, erratic, dangerous – and to try and cope with it, the family becomes *rigid* – making lots of rules, controlling as much as possible, trying to bring order to the chaos.

It results in *rigidity* – a system too expected behaviour that’s inflexible.

It’s hard to change, and it doesn’t easily tolerate family members changing.

It ends up that children in it can’t grow emotionally, can’t experiment with life, can’t have real playfulness and fun. They often get lots of family responsibility long before they should.

They remain hurt and unfulfilled, growing up as adults outwardly, but hurt children inwardly, and reacting to others with childish hurt: “Adult Children”

It’s why, even decades later, going ‘home’ to parents can make us feel so drained and empty as scents and reminder of the old rigid system take hold again.

2. Silence

Don’t talk about it. (“The first rule of Fight Club – don’t talk about Fight Club”)

Don’t talk about it. Not to anyone in the family, not to anyone outside the family.

“It” can be the alcoholic/addictive behaviour, emotions, feelings, attitudes, events. The message is **It’s “not okay” to talk about certain things.**

When we can’t talk about what we see hear or experience, it’s jarring, and leaves us incapable of talking healthily later in life. We’re left without any “**reality check**”. “Normal” just becomes what we’re used to until someone tells us otherwise.

Anger, hurt, resentment grow, and fester; instead of being talked through and resolved, issues are ignored and unresolved, and the pressure grows and grows, over years, even decades.

Sometimes it’s never expressed; sometimes it explodes into verbal outbursts or violence, usually over something other than the real root cause.

3. Denial

Cornerstone of the ‘system’. Denial is pretending, believing everything is alright when it isn’t.

We see one thing happening in the family, but don’t talk about it or deal with it.

We present a happy image to the outside world looking good even though inside the family and inside us, things are really bad.

(Facebook is now a major way to do this.)

Smiles on the outside, rage and hurt on the inside.

To the world outside the family we say “We are happy and doing well” – while on the inside of the family there is arguing, insults,

anger, violence, and abuse – and it’s unacknowledged, ignored, hidden, denied.

Denial extends to feelings. It’s usually not safe to express anger – it could lead to verbal abuse or physical violence. So we deny we’re angry – ‘it’s not nice, is it?’ – and it becomes a way of life. We even come to believe we’re not angry when we’re actually simmering and seething with rage.

4. Isolation

The alcoholic or dysfunctional family system is a closed system.

Members cling to each other, can even be enmeshed, but don’t become truly and healthily intimate/involved.

Them-and-us:

“No one else understands us” (though we don’t either).

“We sort things out ourselves” (even though we never do)

“We’ll be there and support you” (actually we really have no idea know how to)

We end up isolated *as* families, and isolated *within* families:

Lonely though surrounded by others

Lonely because we don't know how to really relate to others.

Rigidity, Silence, Denial, Isolation. This dysfunction is fuelled by shame, fear, hurt – and sometimes some colossal pride.

Instead of turning to God for forgiveness and healing and new direction, we keep running in the other direction, end up repeating all the same behaviours that first damaged us, from conception onwards, *whether we mean to or not.*

Whether we mean to or not: who's vowed I'll never be like my dad/ my mum /whoever, and then ended up being and behaving so very like them? Me, for one...

It happens because **unhealed, unforgiven, and unforgiving, we remain in hurt and sin, and nothing really changes.** It takes real intervention and determination for something different to happen.

Rigidity, Silence, Denial, Isolation It's not really a mystery why abuse goes on and on, unchallenged, unreported – it's all to do with Rigidity, Silence, Denial, Isolation, learned not just in our families and social groups, but in our churches and football clubs too.

Though psychology and social 'science' have given us new ways of expressing and understanding these things, it's nothing new.

It's there in the Bible. I think God has know about this for a long time. Even though we're in denial, He most certainly isn't:

Exodus 20:1-21

4 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or 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. 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for **I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,** 6 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

The terrible thing about our sin is that left untreated, it makes thing endlessly worse. We're infected by it, generation after generation, handing it on without even realising it.

"...visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation" Does it sound like God is being mean? Actually this is what happens when we stop worshipping God and worship anything and everything else – in other words, when we rebel and go on rebelling so much it gets to the point we don't even realise what we've lost, or stand to gain, it any more.

"visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of *those who hate me*": **that is**, those who rebel against, deliberately reject, go away from, God.

The rest of the Ten Commandments give us the clues as to what we end up doing when we use our focus on God. They set out what we shouldn't do in order to stand a chance at the good life God intends for us.

Don't make idols, don't worship anything other than God Himself
drugs, possessions, bad religion, anything in creation

Don't stop working and resting as God designed us to

Don't do or indulge things like these:

- Rebellion against parents/family;
- murder anger violence abuse
- Adultery – sex, pornography, sexual brokenness, sexual abuse
- Theft
- Lying in any way – including gossiping, hating others
- Envy and perpetual dissatisfaction

Moses and the Israelites in their day couldn't hear these commandments without fear:

18 Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off 19 and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; **but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.**" 20 Moses said to the people, "Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin." 21 **The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.**

Fear! God speaks the truth – but we can't handle it. We isolate. We deny. We hide.

Over and over, in the OT, the call is to repent – turn from broken or wicked ways, and turn back to God.

Not "I" but "We" – both Catholic and Evangelical traditions emphasise personal sin, but actually a lot of it is corporate, joint enterprise: *WE* and *US*, not just *I* and *ME*

God's real intention is not to sulk and hate for three or four generations, and then like some sulky adult child grudgingly let us off some hook in the end. Rather if we'll let Him, He'll bring **real, solid love and blessing for *thousands of generations*.**

God calls his people to repentance over and over, and promises to help, over and over. It's there in the OT – for example:

Isaiah 1:18-20

18 "Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord:
though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.
19 If you are willing and obedient,
you shall eat the good of the land;

20 but if you refuse and rebel,
you shall be eaten by the sword;
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

And over and over in the OT, they try and try, but (like us) fail and fail.

So finally God sends a Saviour to sort it once and for all: **Jesus.**

He comes and gets right to the heart of it, the root of it.

God's solution: He comes himself, as one of us, just like us.

How does God make our scarlet sins as white as snow?

He himself comes as one who is white as snow, and *becomes* our scarlet and sin on the cross. He becomes all our scarlet; we become all his white.

Jesus takes away the sin of the world – *becomes* it – so we are no longer cursed from generation to generation. Jesus is our Saviour.

That means we no longer have to cower away in sin shame and fear. The generational trap is smashed to bits; the dysfunctional system need no longer snare us. That means our lives and families, our churches, and even our football clubs can be different

It's Advent – we're remembering he's coming again to round off finally what he's already established – and if we trust him, live with him moment by moment, start do believe and do what he says, we don't have to be afraid like Moses' Israelites were:

1 John 2:28–3:10 p.1022

And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. 29 If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

God's solution is *radical*. He doesn't just adjust our family dynamics a little; he kills off our old nature, gives us a new nature – and then he gives us a whole new family – his family.

We might well have been born badly into a difficult family situation; terrible things may have happened that never should have, or things may not have happened that are actually indispensable to human life and goodness. But we're born again - we become new children, God's children:

1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

Stop hating God and start really trusting Jesus – and you can start to shake off the sin of three or four generations and its effects, and move into the blessings of a thousand generations. You are no longer your broken family's children; you are God's children.

The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

When we really become Christians, it causes our family dynamics a lot of stress. Changing a rigid system that goes unchallenged by those still under its spell. Jesus said this would happen. Instead of fitting into a broken system, we're now in God's system; those in the old set up will often reject it and deny it, try to guilt trip us back into the old ways.

2 Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. 3 And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

We're free from the curse – we can face God now – because Jesus has set us free.

4 Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. 5 You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. 6 **No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.**

We no longer have to keep on going wrong, generation after generation.

7 Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. 8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

There is a warfare dimension to it also: the devil wants to see families enslaved and broken, hating and being hated, destroying life which God designed and created and has great plans for. But Jesus has turned the tables; he has set us free; we no longer *have* to go on the way we have; it is no longer inevitable. The devil has lost – God will have his good and true and loving way! Things not only *can* be different they *will* be different – God's love and kingdom rule is our assured future!

9 No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. 10 By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

That's why in the Daily Prayer there's a line or two where it's not just about personal sin – *I/Me* – but the sin of the generations.

Discovering family truths was liberating – I learned new ways as my secrets and my family's secrets came into the light in appropriate ways. When I first read about alcoholic family patterns, I felt a he about of relief

– finally the way my family ‘worked’ was laid bare; it could learn to heal and live and life differently. This involved lots of delayed grief, coupled with re-evaluating, re-learning what family life should be – knowing my heavenly Father, receiving a mother’s love. I learned with the Jesus who takes up children in his arms to bless them (Mark 10:13-16) that **“It’s never too late to have a happy childhood”**

That process of change involves taking hold of God’s grace and re-learning in human terms – it will take a lifetime, at least.

But discovering the spiritual aspect was liberating too – it simply meant declaring the works of the devil beaten in my life through Jesus, saying that his blood washed clean the effects of sin, my own sin and all the sin of my family, down three and four generations.

The first time I claimed this over my broken family, long after I’d leasfrnt to do this work with my family hstory, I felt an amazing, real release – it was a sudden quietness I had never expected, like the calm we sometimes notice when the heating goes off, or a background noise The generational trap is smashed to bits; the dysfunctional system need no longer snare us. stops.

It’s important to work on our ‘stuff’ – receiving and extending forgiveness and healing, standing in my true identity as a son [daughter/child] of God – this for is ongoing., and develops over time.

It’s also important simply to claim spiritual freedom day by day., no matter how far we’ve got with our recovery/ sanctification. These lines in the Daily Prayer help re-take the new position as often as we forget:

Thank you for the blood of Jesus: wash me once more with his blood from every sin and stain and evil device, my sins and the sins of my family and forebears down the generations.

PRAYER

New awareness: Rigidity, Silence, Denial, Isolation. *It doesn’t have to be like that any more.* The sinful systems which perpetuate sin and shame no longer need apply. You can be helped, You can be healed.

God may asking you for the first time to consider where you came from; to stop denying and isolating and being rigid and silent.

Turn and believe the good news we have in Jesus and what he has done, and is doing, for us.

Turn! Get real! Get Help! Read about it, talk about it, pray about, learn from those who have come out of it. Learn your personal history, our story, right back to the moment of your conception – forgive and be forgiven – grieve and heal – take on you true identity as His son or daughter – and do it supremely with the help of the Son of God who loves you so much he gave his life for you.

But also *claim spiritual freedom* from family and generations sin and its stranglehold over you.. In Jesus, it no longer has a hold on you; old accusations and lies can now fall away.

If you know any history, name it before God: infidelity, immorality, abuse, violence, anger, whatever. Name it as sin and turn from it yourself, as all involved should have, and you now can ...

If you don’t know your history, let God speak...
he may guide your thinking now...
he may reveal things later.

Claim your new family inheritance now – and claim it every day

If you are willing and obedient,
you shall eat the good of the land

Let's Pray this slowly and carefully. Allow God to guide you and speak to you and reassure you.

Thank you for the blood of Jesus: wash me once more with his blood from every sin and stain and evil device, my sins and the sins of my family and forebears down the generations.

This can be the start or the continuation of a journey: take it – whatever you've been through – because of Jesus, there's real solid joy ahead.

PERSONAL FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

Please proceed with caution and understanding! These questions are challenging and difficult, and unlikely to be suitable for an ordinary group discussion unless the members know and trust each other well. No one should feel obliged to say or discuss anything they are not comfortable about. After thinking about these questions privately, the best course of action in many cases will be to seek out personal prayer and support away from a group setting.

I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

1. How has this shown up in your life?
2. What do you know of family secrets and shame which may have an effect on you even now?
3. What were and are your dreams about family life with God in the future?

Rigidity, Silence, Denial, Isolation.

1. Is this description helpful to you in any way?
2. How far do you recognise these traits in your family of origin?
3. What effects did/do they have?

No family is perfectly functional; no family is perfectly dysfunctional. Can you start to say what is/was healthy in your family and what is/was unhealthy?

Your story – your life history and background – those life events and family patterns that, for good and ill, mark us very deeply...

1. What do you know about it all?
2. Are you willing, with the help of God and others, to work issues through?

Thank you for the blood of Jesus: wash me once more with his blood from every sin and stain and evil device, my sins and the sins of my family and forebears down the generations.

What was/is it like to pray and claim these words and truths?

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. "It's never too late to have a happy childhood": How would you like to do this? How might you take hold of God's love, and the healthy, appropriate love of others?