

# ***My Crazy Family***

## **3. A Family Resemblance**

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Text: Genesis 20 and 26, Genesis 12:1-3

I have always been mystified by people who are able to look at a baby and say, "Oh, he looks just like his brother." Or, "She favors her mother's side." I just can't see those things. I'm terrible at telling who babies look like. I look at them and all I can say is, "Yep, that's a baby." But now, there's an app for that. Microsoft has developed an app that lets you compare a picture of yourself with a picture of a relative, and it will give the percentage match between the two. It measures family resemblance. Now when I see someone's baby, I can just whip out my phone and say, "Your daughter looks 73% like her aunt."

**Family resemblances can be both physical and spiritual.** People in the same family often look alike in appearance. Not all the time, of course, but often. And they might even like pointing that out. Other times, a family resemblance goes deeper than physical similarities. Some kids have voices that sound like their parents. Others have similar habits to one another. Sometimes they choose the same career -- like the Manning family. Archie Manning was an NFL quarterback with the New Orleans Saints. His sons Eli and Peyton became NFL quarterbacks, too. There's a reason that there's an old saying, "The apple didn't fall far from the tree." Family resemblance.

There is also a spiritual dynamic to family resemblance. We can share *spiritual* traits with others in our family tree. Sometimes those are positive spiritual traits. Sometimes they're not. For example, a family can have a heritage of blessing. When I proposed to my wife Linda, I had no idea that I was marrying into a family heritage of ministry. In Linda's family, there are Methodist ministers going back six unbroken generations. In fact, all told, scattered through our family tree, there's a grand total of 600 years of Methodist ministry dating back to 1880. Linda is the daughter, wife, and now mother of a Methodist pastor. She hit the trifecta (so pray for her.) Seriously, she has a heritage of generational blessing.

On the flipside, families can have a heritage of generational sin. Recently, Stephen Paddock committed the deadliest mass shooting in U.S. history in Las Vegas. Decades before, Stephen Paddock's father was a fugitive criminal on the FBI's Most Wanted List. Even though Stephen never really knew his father, they had this in common -- a skill at concealing their criminal plans so carefully that they seemed to materialize from nowhere. When the father was arrested, his neighbors were stunned because he was so friendly and sincere. He had a successful career and in his spare time volunteered with search and rescue and counseled troubled youth. They couldn't fathom he could have a criminal career

spanning five decades. Years later, his son became a mass murderer. And no one can explain how or why. To top it off, another son was recently arrested for child pornography. What's going on here? Why the eerie similarities? It's called generational sin. Stephen Paddock was living out a pattern of sin of the previous generation. On the other hand, Linda has been blessed by the fact that generations before her have followed Jesus. Each of us are influenced by the generations of family that have gone before us. **Generational influence includes both sin and blessing.**

The easiest way to understand this is to think about the positive and negative ways each of us are affected by those who have gone before us. Take our lives as Americans. We enjoy certain liberties as Americans because of what the generations before us have done. They visualized a democratic nation and then fought for it. We enjoy the benefits of that, even though we weren't the ones who launched the revolution. Our life experience living in a free country is much different than someone living under a dictator. At the same time, we also share the national debt that previous generations have racked up, even though we might not have been around when the money was spent. Our lives are impacted by that, too. We live with both the pluses and minuses from the actions of the Americans who have gone before us.

The same holds true in the spiritual realm. We are spiritually influenced and impacted by the generations who have gone before us. The Bible tells us that each of us is impacted by both the sin of Adam and the blessing of Jesus. ***Romans 5:15 For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!*** This tells us we're not born into the world as a completely blank slate. We're born with a heritage of sin from Adam, who was the first one to disobey God. It's not just that we share in the guilt of the sin he committed. It's that we're born with a tendency to sin. If our car's wheels are out of alignment, it will pull to one side unless we steer differently. Original sin is that pull inside of each of us toward sin -- to do it my way instead of God's way. Original sin is why you don't have to teach your baby to say, "No." It just comes naturally to them. And the reverse is true. We receive blessings from Jesus that we did not earn ourselves. Jesus' death and resurrection for us impacts our lives today, even though we weren't there. Because of what Jesus did, we can experience an abundant and eternal life. His blessing can override Adam's curse in our lives.

That is true of all who belong to the human family. Each of us is impacted by the generational blessings and sins that come from our families, too. My sister-in-law is a neonatal nurse. She takes care of newborn babies. Some of the babies she treats are born prematurely to mothers who were addicted to heroin and other drugs. These kids enter the world addicted to drugs themselves. They didn't choose to do drugs. But their parents did. And so their lives are affected. On the other hand, there are other babies who are born to very wealthy people who will leave a fortune to them. Again, the baby didn't do

anything to earn that money they will receive. It's just because of their family. We can say this isn't fair, but that won't change the way family heritage works.

Why does our family heritage influence us? It's not just the biology of genetics. It's the result of the power of community. **Our lives are connected to each other in deeper ways than we know.**

Our actions affect other people, not just ourselves, in either positive or negative ways. Our kids watch us very carefully and do what we do. Our friends spend time with us, and their attitudes rub off on us. Community and our relationship with other people is powerful. This is why the community of the church is so powerful. The church is the family of God, and we are spiritually interconnected with each other. When we're hanging out with people who are pursuing Jesus, something good happens.

In our families, our actions affect those around us on an unseen, spiritual level. We see an example of generational blessings and sins in Abraham's family. In **Genesis 12**, God tells Abraham that he is going to bless him and his ancestors. *<sup>1</sup> The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people, and your father's household to the land I will show you. <sup>2</sup> "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."* God blessed Abraham with the promise of a land and descendants that would become a great nation. For centuries, his descendants lived out that blessing, starting with his son. Abraham's son Isaac lived out the generational blessing from his father. In **Genesis 26:2-5** God speaks to Isaac and reminds him of the blessing he will get because he was Abraham's son. *<sup>2</sup> The LORD appeared to Isaac and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. <sup>3</sup> Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham.* Why is God going to bless Isaac? Because he is Abraham's son. Isaac is going to live in the land God gave Abraham. Isaac is receiving a generational blessing that came through his father Abraham. *<sup>4</sup> I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, <sup>5</sup> because Abraham obeyed me and did everything I required of him, keeping my commands, my decrees and my instructions."*

God's promise to Isaac was exactly the same as the promise he made to Abraham: *"Your descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky."* Isaac was going to be blessed with many descendants who will bless the nations of the world. But it wasn't because of anything he did. It was because of the generational blessing of being Abraham's son. While we see generational blessings at work, at the same time we also see generational sin at work in Abraham's family. For example, in **Genesis 20:2**, at one point Abraham decides to tell people his wife Sarah is his sister. He did that because he was afraid the king would kill him in order to take his wife, which he wouldn't do if she was his

sister. Strangely, six chapters later we read in **Genesis 26:11** that Isaac did the *same thing* to his wife for the same reason. **Genesis 26:11** *When the men of that place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," because he was afraid to say, "She is my wife." He thought, "The men of this place might kill me on account of Rebekah, because she is beautiful."* How do you suppose Isaac got the idea to do a dumb thing like that? Maybe it's because when he was growing up, his mother used to tell him, "You'll never believe what your father did to me once. He told the king I was his sister." This is generational sin at work.

All followers of Jesus are tempted to sin. Learning to deny ourselves and to obey Jesus is a fundamental part of being a disciple. We may not each have the same temptations, but we all have them. We all need to learn to turn from sin and do life God's way. It is a lifelong journey. Some sins are easy to turn away from, and we learn to do it quickly. Other sins are more persistent, harder to kick free from. But as we grow more mature and learn to depend on the Holy Spirit's power, we master those, too. But generational sins can exert a powerful grip on us. They are sometimes called a "stronghold" because they exert a strong hold on us. We have to deal with them a little differently. How do we know when we are struggling with a stronghold of a generational sin?

### **Indicators of generational sin strongholds:**

**Resistant problems.** You know something is wrong, and it's hurting you. You know it's destructive. You try to break free from the sin or the habit, and nothing seems to work. You try prayer, counseling, medical intervention, and even intensive discipleship. You may get a bit of a relief from it sometimes. But it's a problem that always plagues you. That might be a generational sin that's plaguing you. Understand, I don't get to blame my parents for my disobedience. No one makes me do it. It's just that we need to recognize that there is a gravitational pull toward a generational sin. It's like we start in the hole in our fight with that one.

**Family observations.** One reason to learn all you can about your family, even as an adult. If you're struggling in an area, do you notice the same tendency in your siblings? Your parents? Your grandparents? For example, if you struggle with greed, are there others in your family tree who struggle that way, too? It could indicate a generational stronghold. Maybe as a child you found your father's pornography, and today lust has held you captive. That could be generational. It can be helpful to sit down and talk with relatives to learn a little bit about our family.

The Thanksgiving meal can be an opportunity to do a little research. You don't have to say, "I'm trying to discern generational sin in our family." But you can say, "Tell me about Uncle so and so." Or even, "Do we have anyone in our family tree who was a fortune teller? Or involved in the occult?" (These are gateways to allowing evil to get a foothold in us.) Then we want to find the source of those family sins. When did these issues happen? Why did they happen? We need to learn as much as we can through observation and research.

**Discernment.** We may have an intuition that there's something more happening than meets the eye. The Holy Spirit might give you an inner prompting that something is connected to your family heritage. You might feel like saying, "Something tells me that I should talk to my family about this." Or perhaps that you should explore the matter with a spiritually mature person. If you suspect you are struggling with a generational sin, you don't have to just live with it. There are some parts of our family resemblance that won't change. But sin is not one of those. You don't have to live with it. And you don't have to pass it on to your kids. **Each generation can begin a new legacy.** You can live free. Jesus broke the power of sin when he died on the cross. Living free means that we're not living out the sin patterns of generations before us. If you're a follower of Jesus, you're a child not just of your earthly father but of your Heavenly Father. You are growing in your family resemblance to him. You have a different family heritage now. Break free not just for yourself, but for the sake of your children. You can pass on blessing. **Psalm 112:1-2 Praise the Lord! Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in his commandments! His offspring will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed.**

We can live in such a way that our children and grandchildren can be mighty on the land. We can break free from the pull of generational sin. For the sake of yourself and for your descendants' sake, you can draw a line in the sand and say, "No more! Maybe the generations before me were hurt and defeated by this, but ***this ends now!***" Determine that you will pass on blessings and not generational sin. You are not a victim. In Jesus, you are victor.

Maybe there is a line of divorce and broken marriages in your family tree. Through Christ you can say, "That stops with me." Maybe there is a lineage of affairs and adultery. You can say, "No more." Maybe pride, or bigotry, or drunkenness, or despair have been part your family's history. You can be the one to break those chains and write a new story from here on out. You may not have \$1million to pass on to your children. But you can leave them something even more valuable: freedom from generational sin. You can leave generational blessing as a legacy.

Maybe as I have been speaking today, you've become aware that a sin you have wrestled with may be a generational one. You can break free from that starting today. To do this, do the "3 Rs":

**Repent** - ask God's forgiveness and turn from that sin.

**Renounce** - declare that you have nothing to do with the sin of previous generations.

**Receive the Holy Spirit** - ask for God to fill you afresh with his mighty power and presence, that you are dedicated to him.

I'm going to lead us in a time of doing that now. You may not be sure whether there is a generational sin at work in you. I encourage you to go through

the process with us anyway. It can help weaken the power of anything that might be present. First, we'll pray and ask God to show us what might be at work in us. Then we'll renounce it and ask the Spirit to fill us.

**Dear Heavenly Father. I ask You to reveal to my mind now all the sins of my ancestors that are being passed down through family lines. I want to be free from those influences and live in my new identity as a child of God.**

Now, take a moment to read through this declaration so that you can say it aloud with conviction.

**Declaration:**

**I here and now reject and disown all the sins of my ancestors. I specifically renounce the sins you have shown me as I name them silently in my heart. As one who has now been delivered from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of God's Son, I cancel out all demonic working that has been passed down to me through my family. I have been crucified and raised with Jesus Christ and sit with Him in heavenly places. I belong to the Lord Jesus Christ who purchased me with his own blood. I declare myself to be fully and eternally signed over and committed to the Lord Jesus Christ. I now command any other spirit influencing me to leave my presence. Come Holy Spirit and fill me. I commit myself to my Heavenly Father to do His will from this day forward.**

**Amen.**