

3 Key Questions to Help You Remove Generational Sin by Its Roots

When Steve and I were first married, we thought it would be great fun to plant a garden. We rototilled a huge plot of land and eagerly planted lots of vegetables. But life got busy: I was teaching school, and Steve was pastoring a church and working towards his master's in seminary. One day as we sat down to dinner, we looked out the back window to discover that the weeds in our garden had grown to at least a foot tall!

Because we lived in a farming community, Steve was embarrassed by our weeds. We didn't want the local farmers to know that their new young pastor didn't know how to take care of a garden. So Steve chose the quickest solution possible: He mowed our entire garden.

Looking back, I imagine the farmers got a big kick out of seeing Steve mowing his entire vegetable garden. And in just a few days, not only were all the vegetables dead, but the weeds had grown again. To this day, we're still not very good at keeping plants alive!

Our hearts are a lot like a garden. If we aren't willing to face the truth about the lies we have believed and to pull up those lies by the root, those lies will strangle out the truth in our hearts.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart" (Matt. 5:8a). The Greek word for "pure" here is the word *katharos*, which means "being cleansed." In other words, this isn't a one-time deal. You won't be able to achieve complete holiness this side of heaven. Now, having said that, let me remind you that when God looks at you, He sees the righteousness of Jesus Christ. But in order to keep your heart pure, you will need to continually

uproot sin in your life—even generational sin. In *Rewriting Your Emotional Script* (Navpress 2008) I defined generational sin as:

A sinful pattern passed down from one generation to another.

Author Scott Peck wrote that coming “to terms with evil in one’s parentage is perhaps the most difficult and painful psychological tasks a human being can be called on to face.” But if we are going to live pure in heart, we are going to have to face the sinful patterns in our family of origin and then choose differently.

God called Abram to leave his country and his family (Gen. 12:1-4). God wasn’t just calling Abraham to kiss Mom and Dad goodbye; He was calling him to leave that family system behind and to embrace the ways of God in his life.

For you and I, how do we uproot generational sin in our lives and embrace God’s ways instead? This can be a difficult process. It is a process that begins with a few good reflective questions:

What are the secrets of my family tree? Secrets in family systems generally point to sinful patterns. They include things like sexual immorality, abortion, alcohol abuse or drug abuse. Often families hide these issues. But here’s the thing: Secrets usually involve sin, and what’s left hidden can’t be healed. Don’t disown your family, but step away from patterns of sin that are accepted by your family.

Is there a pattern of behavior I am trying to keep hidden? This question digs a bit deeper than the first. It encourages you to be truthful with yourself. If you’re hiding something, it’s probably not good. Practice coming before the Lord with the prayer of David: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my concerns, and see if there is any rebellious way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:23-24). The practice of opening ourselves up to be examined

by the Holy Spirit is a good practice.

Is there anyone I have wronged? If so, I need to apologize and make healthy people apologize when they've wronged another. Defensive people have difficulty apologizing because they can't admit they're wrong. When we begin to grow in Christ, we realize that part of God's growth plan in our lives is for us to take responsibility for our mistakes and messes. There is always grace in God's kingdom! So if you lose your temper with your kids, apologize and make amends. If you lie to a co-worker, confess and make it right. If you have wronged anyone, simply apologize. You'll be respected for your transparency.

Friend, we need to stay on top of weeding out the sinful patterns of our hearts, or else sin will start to take over. However, there is always grace in God's presence. We never need to be afraid that He will reject us for our honesty. As the apostle John says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). {eoa}

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