

Why You're Not a Slave to Your Upbringing

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Like many TV-watching Americans in the 30-50 demographic, Jenifer and I have started watching the new NBC series *This Is Us*. In our opinion, it is must-see TV.

It's worth watching not because the characters are compelling. It's not because the artistic vibe of the show makes it feel almost dream-like at times. It's not even because of the real-life balance of joy and grief that they pull off so effectively. *This Is Us* has all these things, but none of them are what makes it worth watching.

What makes this new show unique is how it simultaneously shows the story of two generations of one family. Movies commonly have flashback scenes that give context as to why a character is thinking or behaving a certain way. But *This Is Us* is the first TV show I know of that seamlessly weaves together complete story lines of two different generations. (*The Godfather Part 2* did it pretty well too.)

Why is this narrative technique significant?

More than just giving us an hour of weekly entertainment, *This Is Us* powerfully reminds us that where we come from matters. What happened in the lives of those who raised us has the potential to significantly impact the people we become. We can try to downplay this with cries of "I'm never going to be like my parents," but the powers of both nature and nurture are hard to fully escape.

What works on the show is that the stories of the main characters and the stories of their childhood happen

simultaneously. We see first-hand how key experiences of their parents' marriage and of the characters' home lives have the power to impact them in the present day.

Where you come from impacts who you are.

As the three siblings in *This Is Us* navigate the challenges of adulthood (marriage, parenting, relationships, career, identity), the flashbacks to their pasts make their story more clear. The same thing happens to each of us every day. We think and behave in ways that were likely established during our developmental years. And if there are key emotional markers from your past, they have a sneaky way of popping up on your radar in the most inopportune moments.

Just as the show weaves these past incidents into the here and now, your mind has a way of weaving your past hurts and emotions into your current life. Some traumatic thing may have happened to you as a child, but the impact is still felt today. And even if you can't think back to anything big from your past, you can't deny that you are a product of how you were raised. Most of our habits and beliefs were established in us long before we reached adulthood.

If it's true that we are products of our upbringing, what do we do?

There are numerous implications to this reality. Here are four things to consider as you strive to pass on a generational blessing to those who come behind you.

1. Don't expend too much energy blaming your parents or grandparents.

Many adults can trace back their challenges to something in their upbringing. The temptation is to look for someone to blame. While you can certainly do that, it is wasted emotion. No amount of finger-pointing will help resolve what is broken

in you, especially identifying the things that are broken in others. Choose to offer grace to those who have wronged you. And if you have some significant baggage, get some help from a trusted counselor.

2. Realize the potential impact you have on your kids.

Some parents (particularly mothers) live in fear that they are going to do something to mess their kids up. While those tightly wound moms and dads need to relax and stop being so worried, we can't deny that our kids are, in many ways, products of their environment. How we raise them—along with their genetic makeup—will dictate much about the adults they become. Love them well, lead them well and be willing to apologize when you don't.

3. Consider the long-term generational impact of your life.

One of my favorite quotes is by Steve Farrar: *"I'm not going to know my great-great grandchildren. But my great-great grandchildren are going to know me."* He reminds us that every one of us leaves a legacy to the generations that follow us. The way you walk with God, spend your money, love your spouse and raise your kids will echo in the lives of those who follow you, even those whom you will never meet.

4. What your Father says trumps everything.

This Is Us clearly shows how what happened in the past has real power in our lives today. What if your daily life could be experienced in the same way? But with a twist. Instead of regular flashbacks to your childhood and what your earthly father did and said about you, what if you could clearly see and hear what your heavenly Father did and said about you?

Your natural mind has a tendency to remember everything negative. These things can often define how you see yourself. But what if your mind was regularly reminded (flashback style) of the positive things Jesus has said about you?

What if you were regularly reminded of how He sacrificed everything on the cross because of His great love for you? What if you truly believed that you are valuable and worthy of God's love because of Jesus? And not some future version of you, but the you He sees right now.

What if you could daily remember how He sees you, how He has given you a new life, how He has made you a new creation, how He tells you that the past doesn't matter and that all things are made new in your life? You need to know that He sees you not based on what you have done but on Who you are.

**By the way, God can and will remind you of all these things as you renew your mind with the Truth of His Word. You'll never believe and embrace this stuff unless you let God speak it over you in Scripture. The lies that the world (or even your parents) have engrained in your heart are too great to overcome if you don't replace them with the Truth.*

Trust God With Who You Are Becoming

There is value in acknowledging the impact of our pasts. We can't afford to downplay the power that the environment of our childhood has on our lives. That's the beautiful (and tragic) thing about *This Is Us*. Again, it's worth watching.

But each of us must make the daily choice to not let our pasts define us. Every day is new. Every day our God offers us the choice to walk in the truth of who He is and who He has made us to be. God is whispering this to each of us: *"You are not who you used to be."*

May today be a day when we acknowledge the brokenness we inherited from the broken people who raised us. And then may

we look to the only One who is able to truly restore us to who we were made to be. This is us, a redeemed people thankful to a Father who gives us hope for tomorrow. {eoa}

*Adapted from , a ministry founded by **Barrett and Jenifer Johnson**. After serving in the local church for 25 years, Barrett and Jenifer launched INFO for Families as a ministry designed to encourage people through speaking, personal coaching and resource development. Barrett served for 15 years in youth ministry before serving for eight years as the Family Minister at Johnson Ferry Baptist Church in Atlanta, one of the largest churches in the South. He has degrees from Texas A&M University and Southwestern Seminary, but he and Jenifer have received their best education through the no-holds-barred nature of everyday family life.*