

Ministering Up a Generation



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This article is for those who sense something should be a whole lot better between themselves and parental figures in their life. Or for those who see negative residue in their lives, with unhealthy patterns from their upbringing. The good news is: there is hope, if you are willing to do something about it.

God has a solution.

What happens between generations is an amazing phenomenon that has been studied in both secular and religious circles. Despite differences across cultures and settings, there is one thing that everyone can agree upon: inter-generational relationships and interactions have great influence as well as long-term effects. This is when you see traits that resound with, “like father - like son” or “like mother - like daughter.” These results can be positive or negative. My heart in this article is to address healing negative effects.

There are typically both communication disparities, and emotional distances between generations observed within many, if not most, families. Through a confluence of causes there can be either a bonding or distancing effect; a passed down family pattern or rejection of family traits, and a parental blessing or cursing. My approach to all of this is coming from the perspective of the Kingdom of God, which is of course spiritual, yet it dovetails into all arenas of life. Though these principles will work in restoring a variety of relationships, I am focusing on cross-generational healing.

In more recent times, new terminology has been adopted, especially in religious circles, to define the impact of successive generations in the areas of behavior, healing of emotional wounds to the soul, and unhealthy patterns of life and thought. We have terms like *father/mother wounds*, *spiritual dysfunctionality*, *a block to the Father’s heart/love*, *generational iniquities*, and *an orphaned heart* (the inability to capture the true meaning of *sonship* in the Bible). Thank God, on the positive side we have terms like *receiving the Father’s blessing* and *joining the generations*.

My desire is to begin equipping those who have found healing in Father God to bring God’s healing and restoration to the older generations. I call this “ministering upwards”. The focus of ministering upwards is towards individuals who are either parental figures, or of an older generation who represent key influential relationships in your life. Oftentimes these individuals continue to struggle with fractured relationships in their own lives and are emotionally crippled somewhere in their souls.

This restoration between generations has been the heart of our heavenly Father for centuries. We see it as a powerful promise for the latter times in Malachi *"Behold, I will send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."* (Mal. 4:5-6). Four hundred years later, in the New Testament, this prophecy reappears in Luke 1:17 as a continued purpose of God through the ministry of John the Baptist.

In this article I'll explain how restoration of family style relations and healthy relationships across generations is a critical aspect of God's will for mankind, especially in the immediate family. I will also discuss why it is important in the spiritual family, a community that consists of spiritual fathers, mothers, sons and daughters with God as the Ultimate Father.

My Story

Though the Bible has a great deal to say about generations and the effect they have on each other, I feel it would be helpful to begin by sharing some personal background testimonies of this process in my own life. Hopefully these stories will bring encouragement.

I grew up as the fourth of five children in a very ethnic Italian family transplanted into the USA. My parents had experienced the harshness of both the Great Depression and WWII. With all the hopes of new life in America, they brought more than their belongings with them when they disembarked the airplane in NY in 1954. They had a lot of generational, as well as situational, history with all of its baggage.

I have a jumble of good and bad memories from the first eighteen years of my upbringing. My mother ruled the roost and busied herself with home care, while my dad worked relentless hours and was a distant, more detached father figure. I was an independent, irreligious young man who went off to college at eighteen and lived the typical college lifestyle with studies, parties, a girlfriend, and not much concern for my parents six hours away.

Six months after I graduated from college at the age of twenty-two, I had a visitation from God. I became pretty radically turned on to God and truly had a spiritual new birth. It was a great introduction into God's kingdom, but there was so much change to come. I began a journey with Jesus that would include making some things right in my history so both I and others could move forward and be free.

God needed for me to learn about ministering upwards into my parents' generation. There were wounds and bondages on all sides that I could affect if I could be rightly aligned with God and do my part, or we could all continue to be out of whack (and blind to it), hurting others as we passed on our junk to the next generation.

The first incident occurred in the early years of our marriage. My wife, Joanne, and I had just finished attending a Bill Gothard week-long seminar called "Basic Youth Conflicts." It dealt with applying Biblical concepts to life. While there, I was convicted of having dishonored my father-in-law and mother-in-law in my dating years. Even though her parents let me marry Joanne, there were many hurts and thick walls between us (especially with my father-in-law) because of things I had done. (I almost got into a fist-fight with him once! Talk about being a foolish young man.) My in-laws were not perfect, but I needed to ask their forgiveness for what I had done. Though I did not use the terminology back then, I had a very *orphaned heart* (I was emotionally self-centered and disconnected from father/authority figures), and had blocks in many areas between myself and God, my parents, and other relationships. Although I saw the symptoms, I was calloused and could not diagnose the problem nor find a cure. I was an enthusiastic follower of Jesus, but still very much in process.

For about a month, I prayed about how and when to speak with her parents. Then God arranged a moment for me to speak with them alone when they were sitting at the picnic table in their backyard one sunny day. I brought them back to some specific key moments where I had disrespected them, been sneaky and very dishonoring of their role as stewards of their daughter's life. Then, I asked them to forgive me. Wow! I saw a miracle! Now you need to understand: my father-in-law had never really been a Believer, as we would see it. But he got up and started bunny-hopping and prancing around the backyard with joy like he was on a pogo stick. It was as if a big weight came off him and he was refreshed by God's Spirit. They forgave me and a good portion of the walls between us came down. In the years to come, he would be more open to the gospel. The Holy Spirit gained some ground in his life.

This taught me the power of giving forgiveness and dealing with my side of restoration. I had to start learning to completely leave my expectations of the other party in God's hands.

Another example deals with a different issue. My own dad was a very unaffectionate man. Even though we were Italian, we were not the loving, hugging, kissy type. You see, my dad suffered from major problems with his own dad (my grandfather), a distant and sometimes violent figure in his household growing up. My dad was a hardened WWII veteran and had very little understanding of parenting, let alone Kingdom parenting. Demonstrative affection was not normal in my family, and you never heard an "I love you." Even brothers and sisters were very formal toward one another.

On the other hand, my wife's family, though they were full of bickering and criticism (another trait of an Italian heritage), were huggy-bears. There was all this hugging, kissing and nibbling on daughter's ears, and then back to arguing. It was disgusting to me! I couldn't understand it. Along with this display, there was our new Christian church family, full of affectionate believers, including a German family that would

love “maul” anything that came through the door. I would get hugged and kissed by all these godly men and women, and then would go back to my frozen family at my parents’ house. What a contrast!

You see, my behavior and values had been shaped by my upbringing and family culture. I either copied my family behavior, sometimes unconsciously, for better or for worse, or made inner vows not to be like them and then did the same thing, but with a different expression. I finally came to the understanding that if I was a real follower of Jesus, if I had the Spirit of God, then I would have to be an agent of light and effect change wherever I went, even within my own family (Dad, Mom, my brothers and sister, etc.). God wanted to “Kingdomize” my behavior. He wanted to bring about change in me first, breaking the generational cycle, so He could then use me to help reach my family.

So, one day I walked into my dad’s house and he was standing in the kitchen. I walked right over to him, gave him two good ol’ Italian kisses, hugged him and said, “Love you, Dad.” He stiffened into Mount Rushmore on a snowy day; frozen solid! I didn’t say another word but a seed was sown. Weeks later I watched my dad from across the room as my younger brother walked in and voila! Would you believe it? My dad bounded across the room grabbed my brother, kissed him and hugged him! My little brother was elated! That change eventually grew and spread to become a family pattern.

In the years that followed, my Dad opened himself up more and more to love. He eventually gave his heart to Christ. Over the years, he was able to release more and more of his pain from the war and early life injustices through talking with friends who were counselors from Italy. You should have seen how he hugged, kissed and told people how he loved them in his latter years. I cannot take all the credit, but I believe that the Heavenly Father’s love that I allowed into my heart, a love that had been void in the life of my dad and granddad, was ministered back to them when I cooperated with the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Now, maybe you’re thinking, “This is just gushy stuff. Not everyone needs that.” But study what happens to babies and children that are not touched or given affection at an early age. They get weird. I cannot tell you how many college age students have come to my wife and I just for a parental hug. We spent years in the bible school world and had to deal with hundreds of *orphan-hearted* students, or just lonely students needing family. Ministering in this way is important and when you look at the New Testament you see that godly, biblical affection is normal for a healed community. (Study John and Paul’s expressions of affection, John laying his head on Jesus’ bosom [John 13:23, 25], greeting one another with a holy kiss [Romans 16:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:26], and Paul’s farewell at the end of Acts 20, etc.)

But let’s get back to the subject of ministering upwards a generation. Go with me and peruse a few scriptures showing the importance of father figures and Father

God. You will see that the blessings or consequences attached to father and mother relationships are critical in our lives.

Isaiah 51:1-3 - Understanding your roots gives you foundational perspective.

Isaiah 63 and 64 - Fathers are supposed to keep us on the right track.

Exodus 20:12 - Dishonoring parents has consequences in this life.

Proverbs 20:20 - Cursing parents brings spiritual blindness.

Proverbs 30:11-14 - A generation that distains its parents, is deluded in arrogance and blind to their own sin.

Proverbs 30:17 - Mocking parents opens a door to enemy attack in your life.

Whew – serious stuff!

There are two common expressions of negative treatment towards parents or authority figures:

Outward – you openly rebel and speak evil of them. You may even cut off your relationship to them and willfully hurt them. This usually leads to disasters in your life.

To express this by contrast, when the Bible speaks of young David being persecuted by his father-in-law, King Saul, he only did one thing: he fled. He did not fight back or speak evil of Saul (see 1 Samuel 24, 26). Even after King Saul died David did not speak harshly of him, only respectfully.

To outwardly attack your parents, even if it seems justified, is out of order with the Kingdom. It is better to leave them in God's hands.

Inward – you make vows in your heart to not be like them or to keep your distance from them emotionally. This can lead to problems in relationships such as setting up unhealthy defense mechanisms, infatuation over people, hardening your heart against those who might wound you, or putting people on a “bad” list. You can develop a “disposable” mentality in which people and relationships can be easily cut off or replaced (this can be a forerunner to divorce). You also can decide to put up defensive walls towards parental figures and authorities before you even meet them, categorizing them as untrustworthy and to be kept at a distance in life.

Both of these tendencies are totally contrary to the nature of God, which is family.

With either type of negative responses people are prone to commit the sins of their ancestors without even knowing why it happens. King David's son Absalom is an example of the first (outward) response. His discontent with his father and family led to a war (see 2 Samuel 15-18). The sons of Abraham and their descendants are examples of the second (inward) response. The root issues of inner vows and offenses were never dealt with through a godly process. This carried into other

relationships and often turned into generational iniquities (Generational wife dishonoring and lying - compare Genesis 12:11-20 with Genesis 26:8-11).

Another Testimony

One of the greatest stories of “ministering up a generation” is told by Jack Frost in his book, *Spiritual Slavery to Spiritual Sonship* (Destiny Image, 2006, see chapter 7). I highly recommend this book. Frost’s parents divorced when he was young and by age twelve he had closed his heart to both parents. His father was verbally harsh and emotionally abusive to him, and his mother became an alcoholic who turned physically violent towards him and his brother. Basically, Frost made an inner vow to function around them, but keep his heart distant. He became an emotional orphan. For the most part, his parents were caught up in their own life struggles, and were oblivious or willfully indifferent to the damage being done to their sons. Without realizing it, Frost carried these same patterns into his own married and parental life, even with a salvation experience and Christian ministry. They also manifested in his work and ministry relationships. Due to his own orphaned heart and inner vows, he was blind to the damaging impact his past was having on his present.

Though Frost was gifted, his ministry was stunted. Other ministers, especially his primary pastoral mentor, an overseer of a large church and a network of ministers, could feel a problem in Frost, and they were cautious with promoting him. On his side Frost felt angry, victimized and that he was being treated unfairly. All this changed when he began to allow Father God’s love to replace his hardened and blinded heart with the heart of a true son. Frost did a lot of repenting to the key authorities in his life and it opened flood-gates in the Spirit.

When he began receiving this new heart, others could feel it. The first to feel it was his immediate family as he began a process of formally repenting to them. You see, there was a block in the flow of true life and love that comes from Jesus. When this dam was broken in his heart by Father God, he was then able to redirect this healing water to others, bringing about kingdom life in them. It is worth mentioning that as Frost’s life circumstances finally corralled him into seeking help, the Father also brought godly counselors alongside him to help guide him through this healing process.

At age thirty-eight, Frost tells the story of going to his parents, individually, and asking their forgiveness for his attitudes and wrong doings. Each response was different. His father was melted by God pretty quickly and asked for Frost’s forgiveness in return. Reaching his mother’s heart took longer, a process of several years, but God eventually broke through. Miracles happened, bondages were broken, and everything changed for the better. When Frost opened his heart to these changes, Father God used him as a catalyst for the healing of others, specifically his family above and below him a generation.

Please note, this does not mean Frost went to his parents and blasted them for their errors and wrong-doings. He did not seek vindication. He had already gone through the process of forgiving them before God. He left their conviction to God and the work of the Holy Spirit. Even if in Frost's understanding he was only 2% responsible for the damage in their relationship, and his parents 98% responsible, he took 100% ownership of his 2%. That is the humble posture he approached his parents with and one that honors God. Finger-pointing just shows a lack of healing in your own heart and a shallowness of forgiveness.

This does not mean that you have to expose yourself to on-going abusive relationships. There is a difference between forgiveness and trust. Forgiveness is our posture of mercy to others. Trust is bestowed when there is evidence of true repentance.

If during times of reconciliation your heart goes after them always wondering "What is in this for me? How will this affect me?" pray for Jesus to invade the orphaned parts of your heart with His love. You are still dealing with a self-centered paradigm that must change.

Positioning Your Heart – Getting Free to Bring Freedom

I have mentioned that the first step towards freedom is developing a heart of true *sonship* towards the Heavenly Father. Believing and relying on the love of God is vitally important (1 John 4:16)! We must learn to trust God's love for us in a very messy and fallen world that can inflict so much hurt. To develop this heart go before God, talk to Him, and process this through with Him until you know that trust and love have broken in. Seek counsel, if needed; counsel that will work with the Holy Spirit to remove any blockages. As you press into this you will be amazed at how faithful the Father's Heart is. God really is good.

Then there is a second key part to this process. Go before God and renounce any bondages, sins, addictions (alcohol, drugs, pornography), iniquities (immorality, lying, anger, etc.), occult connection (witchcraft, dark practices, spiritism), harmful habit patterns (criticism, negativity, controlling others, unbelief, distrust, boastfulness, etc.) that you see in yourself and your family line. Verbally declare these things are no longer part of your life, and that they are broken by the blood of Jesus and your covenant with Him. Speak to the dark forces and command any spirits that have attached themselves to your family line (familial spirits) to be removed from you and your children in Jesus' name.

The third part of the freedom process is to repent of and renounce any inner vows you have made regarding those you are seeking to minister restoration to. Inner vows are conversations in your heart that go like this:

"I will never be like my father (or mother) or do what they do."

"I am closing my heart off to a deep relationship with (*name*) and deciding to go in a new direction and/or relationship."

"Because my parents were a failure in this area, I vow to be successful."

"Because this relationship hurt me or is difficult, it's expendable. I can drop it and just move on to another."

"I am never ever going to be in this type of relationship (friend, romantic, team, work, church...) again; I refuse to get hurt."

"This leader wounded or mistreated me, so I am never going to let myself be fully submitted to another authority figure again."

These negative inner vows are often seen as forms of protection, to keep hurts at a minimal or help prevent repeating other's mistakes. But in reality what may start as self-preservation usually becomes a life-limiter, doing more harm than good. Often times these inner vows cause us to create fear based patterns. These can either be patterns of avoidance or patterns of defense. This is called *reactionary living*.

In order to deal with inner vows you must identify the root cause that you are reacting to. Then ask the Lord to give a healthy understanding from the Kingdom of God in order to be healed. With that understanding then renounce any reactionary vow that you have made in your heart and ask God to put it under the blood of Christ. If there are people that need to be forgiven and released, go ahead and confess that. Then command any powers of darkness or demonic spirits that have attached themselves to this event to be gone from you in Jesus' name. I would encourage you to write a short, positive confession that reflects heaven's perspective on this event.

[Move away from reactionary living, from past inner vows, and move towards living in the positive leading of the Lord. This requires you to confess your kingdom character and create new habits reflecting your freedom. Renew your mind and ways with Scripture and don't re-acquire negative patterns. Now you can be led by the Spirit as a liberated son, instead of being controlled by the past events.](#)

Step number four is to understand that there is power and blessing in getting free to bring freedom. There is an interesting story in the Bible in Judges 6 about Gideon and his father, Joash. They were of a clan of Israel that was under a heavy oppression, and had become fearful and backslidden from following God. Gideon worked in secret, hiding in a winepress so his enemies would not rip him off. His father had fallen so far as to become the keeper of the town idol. I would call that situation pretty compromised. Gideon had accepted his father's defeated outlook on life. God moved mightily to reveal himself to Gideon and replace his spiritual distrust with a confident trust in God. The Lord patiently worked on him to come into his God ordained identity as a follower of God, warrior, and a deliverer of others.

Before he could begin to walk in this identity Gideon had to minister to God Himself, prove his own relationship with God, and demolish his father's idol. This was a

major risk, but God was with him. Gideon took a radical stand for God and God moved on his father's heart, giving Joash the courage to join Gideon. His family and others eventually got free and were used to mightily defeat the enemies of Israel. You must have your own restoration with God first, before attempting to restore others. Be intentional about identifying any family idols and disobediences that stand between you and wholeheartedly following God and remove them from your life. After that you can begin to help knock down the idols in the lives of your family.

Starting the Interaction

So, here are some key ways that you can lay a foundation with the older generation of parents, grandparents, and the spiritual authorities that play some kind of parental role in your life.

1. Honor –

Learn to honor the authority figures in your life and show them respect. Set them in a place of importance in your life in ways that are clearly evident to them and others. (I recently heard a friend's testimony on this topic. This friend ministered upwards to win his father to the Lord. His father had been a violent communist-atheist. At 12 years old, this friend had vowed to kill his father, but then he got radically saved. The Lord invaded his heart and in due time he was able to honor and love his father into the Kingdom. God told him to honor and show thankfulness to his father, not because his father deserved it, but because he himself was an honorable son. The Lord blessed his obedience.)

2. Appreciate –

Recognize the older generations with gratitude, even when you think they don't deserve it. Take active steps to avoid demeaning them to others. Tell them you value them.

3. Love –

Demonstrate affection and openness (Phil. 1:8; 2 Cor. 6:11-7:2). Show that your heart is willing to accept fathers and mothers, both natural and spiritual. Make sure that you are not always seeking their hand (what they can do for you), but their face (how you can focus on having a better relationship).

4. Support Their Life Mission/Vision as a Priority –

Jesus is the model for this. Jesus only did what pleased His Father and He was always about His Father's business (Luke 2:49; John 8:29). Though I don't intend to be exhaustive here about what true biblical *sonship* is, a key to it is honoring and serving the vision of your fathers and mothers (both natural and spiritual parents). As a result they often will bless you with support and an inheritance from the love of their heart. (I recognize

that this is not so easily done in broken situations, but making an effort will go a long way.)

**Please note: There is a need for healthy boundaries here. This should be limited to a voluntary and freeing, life-giving relationship, not a relationship of bondage where one can or will be taken advantage of.

5. Promises–

Keep promises and be covenantal with your family and authorities in your life. Many adults carry childhood hurts from parents that did not keep their word (show up at ball games, take them out, spend time with them etc.). Yet we see an increasing trend of generations that easily break their commitments if something “better” comes along and don’t seem to think twice about it. Our God is a covenant God that watches over His word to keep it. As sons and daughters of the Kingdom we should strive to be the same.

Restoring the Bridge

Pray for a time to go and have a one-on-one conversation with the relationships you are seeking to bring healing to. Remember, every person and situation is unique and the set up and response may have its own way of processing out. What is important is that you do your part in humility, faith and obedience.

Each conversation will be unique but should include some key elements. Allow the Lord to appoint the timing for each:

1. Enter with a posture of love.
2. Express that person’s importance to you.
3. Ask forgiveness for any thing that you have done wrong in attitude, action or word.
4. Do not demand an immediate response but be prepared for a possible emotional “gush” or attack that may set you on the defensive. Do not attack back; remember, we’re moving away from reactionary living. Remember love.
5. Be willing to speak and demonstrate love and affection as you close your time with them.
6. Allow God time to work His process in them. The situation is now in His hands. Just pray, be consistent and be obedient.

Let me leave you with one last story. Some years back we did an “Encounter God” weekend in Alabama. We taught and attended workshops on experiencing and applying the meaning of the gospel, the cross, the Father’s love, the in-filling of the Holy Spirit, inner healing and deliverance from oppression.

One particular middle-age woman got wonderfully set free through this encounter weekend. When she returned home she was greatly changed, but was burdened for her children and her father to experience the same freedom and she began praying for them. There were some stubborn spiritual and emotional blocks in place, but she had been soaked in the love and liberty of God. Within a day, one of her sons came to her and just started weeping and repenting. Something had changed in the spirit realm. She ministered to him, he got right with God, found freedom and a fresh wind began to blow through the family.

A day or so later her father, a tough ol' codger who'd had a wild life, was in the house and saw the redness of her eyes because she had been crying and praying over her family. He asked her what was wrong. She confessed that she wanted a closer relationship with him (from the heart), but there were issues that she needed closure on, issues that had built walls between them. He denied there being any issues and asked for an explanation from her. Reluctantly, she shared how his carousing and drunken bouts when she was a little girl had negatively affected her life. His life style had even caused inner vows and similar wrong patterns in her life, but Jesus had helped her find freedom in those areas. She acknowledged that she had kept an emotional distance from him. She asked his forgiveness and shared that she had already totally forgiven him.

Well, her father completely broke and was convicted of all the hurt he had caused. He repented before God, asked her forgiveness, and heaven came down in the family. Now *that* is power to minister both downwards and upwards in the generations. God wants hurtful disconnects to become healthy reconnects.

In closing, let's be led by the Spirit. Our Father in heaven is seeking to bring His Kingdom into this world. The things offered in this article are keys or tools to help begin bringing it about in important relationships in our lives. We need to be humble and not despise the correction and disciplines of God as a good Father (Hebrews 12:5-11). Learn from them, be transformed and then bring His healing life and peace to others. The effort needs to be made, even if it starts with sowing small seeds. As it says in Hebrews:

"Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord, looking diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God, and lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled . . ." Hebrews 12:12-15

God wants our relationship with Him and with others to be full of love, healed and life giving. If you are a follower of Jesus, then you can co-labor with Him in the lives of others towards this end. Act wisely and take a step of love and faith. There is an anointing in this season to see a fulfillment of the ending words of Malachi ("*... And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to*

their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse ...” Mal 4:6) and to release a blessing, not a curse.

Let's participate with Father God to bring healing to all the generations; let's go for the blessing!