

## **Unearthed Sermon 2 God, You, and Your Messed up Family**

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As we kick off today, I want you to stop and think about the last two or three interactions you've had with someone who you met for the first time—maybe a new neighbor, someone at the gym, a friend of a friend at a party—and try to reflect on the initial, get-to-know-you information they shared with you and you shared with them. These days, not always, but often, as we are introducing ourselves to people, we lead first with our name, then what we do for a living, what hobbies we enjoy doing for fun, sometimes what college we attended, our hometown—those things that help other people learn some of the major components of our life, what makes us who we are. If you were to go back a few hundred years and have the same conversation with someone, they would almost never lead with the sort of information we lead with today. Instead of telling you about their career, hobbies, or college, they would tell you the name of their parents and grandparents. They would tell you about their family of origin, because back then, if you wanted to get to know someone, typically the most helpful way you could do it was by getting to know their family. Though indeed some things have changed with the times, and most of us don't live close enough to our parents or grandparents or live in a small enough community for it to be meaningful, who we are as people is far more shaped and influenced by the family we were born into than we often recognize.

Within the last handful of years, companies like ancestry.com and 23andme have allowed people the opportunity to learn more about their heritage. I created an account this week and got to see a picture of my parents' marriage certificate and the grave of my grandmother, who I never met. She passed away three years before I was born. I also got to read an article written in 1914 from a local newspaper about my great-grandparents' wedding, which, interestingly enough, was held at 6:00 in the morning and was followed by a two-course breakfast. They did things a little differently a hundred years ago. When you stop to look at your family tree, it's actually pretty incredible how many people were involved in your life coming into existence. Everyone knows they have two parents, four grandparents, eight great-grandparents, and sixteen great-great grandparents. That's four generations. If you go back ten more generations, you have 8,190 people from whom you are directly descended. Over 8,000 people! None of us got here on our own. There are parents who had kids, who became parents who had kids, who became parents who had kids, who became parents who had kids—and all the way down the line, eventually you were born.

Here's what I want us to realize as we continue in our series called "Unearthed": you have inherited a lot more than just your DNA and your physical makeup from your ancestors. The family you were born into not only shapes things like the color of your eyes and the color of your hair, your height and skin tone and cholesterol, but also parts of your personality, the way you deal with conflict, the way you interact in relationships, your vision of what marriage is supposed to be like, your values, your approach to faith—the list could go on and on. As one expert on the subject likes to say, "Jesus may be in your heart, but grandpa is in your bones." As we try to go beneath the surface, go several layers down, and allow God to do a deep, transforming work in our lives, sometimes we have to come face to face with how the family we were born into shaped us, formed us, and trained us to engage in the world in particular ways.

I want to say right up front, because I think it is so important when you take a critical journey like this, that the goal today is not to put your parents or grandparents under a microscope, critique them, criticize them, and blame them for all the problems in your life! That is neither helpful nor God-honoring. The first of the ten commandments that has to do with the way we relate to people tells us this: "Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12). So the goal is not to dishonor anyone in your family but rather to discover things about your family, similar to when you see a doctor and they ask your family history: has anyone had cancer, has anyone had diabetes, has anyone had a heart attack? Those things might show up in your life as well, and a good doctor needs to give attention to that if they are going to treat you

helpfully and holistically. The reality is, the home we were brought up in, the atmosphere created for us during our first and most formative 20 or so years of life, has an undeniable impact on who we become. This truth is taught with nuance in Scripture. Let me show you two verses. First, let's look at Exodus 20:5-6.

You shall not bow down to (idols) or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You can't mistake that the scales are tipped radically on the side of grace, with punishment lasting 3-4 generations and with love and favor lasting for a thousand, but you also can't miss that there are generational consequences to choices your parents and grandparents make. Now take that truth from Exodus and lay it next to Ezekiel 18:20: "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son" (Ezekiel 18:20). This passage helps us to understand that no one is culpable or personally responsible for the mistakes of their parents, but they nevertheless inherit some of the consequences of those mistakes. When you look not only at these passages, but at everything the Bible teaches, you realize this undeniable and extremely self-evident truth: people are significantly impacted by the decisions, values, priorities, emotional health, relational health, and spiritual health of their parents and grandparents.

So we want to honor those who came before us, as commanded by God, but we also want to honestly evaluate the lifestyle, patterns, and behaviors of the family members who preceded us so we can discover how we have been shaped by those who brought us into the world, trained us how to live in the world, and shaped the environment where we were raised—being profoundly grateful for all that is healthy and good, and then asking God to meet us in every area where we might need healing, reorientation, or recalibration.

If we don't meet God in the space and allow him to heal us, we'll continue the cycle to the next generation. Because here is the unavoidable truth: that which is not *transformed* will eventually be *transferred*. Not a single person in this room wants to transfer anything but love and blessing to the people in your life, especially those who are closest to you. Proverbs 13:22 says, "A good person leaves an inheritance for their children's children." The inheritance we want to pass on is not financial, it's not about leaving someone an estate or a large bank account. That's all fine and good, but the most valuable, the most meaningful, the most impactful inheritance we can pass on to those we love is a life that has been truly and entirely dedicated to God, a heart that loves deeply and sincerely, a selflessness, maturity and others-centeredness that comes from walking in the way of Jesus by the power of the Spirit, compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, forgiveness, an uncompromising moral compass guided by truth and integrity, purity of motivation, generosity. To move forward in that way, sometimes we have to go backward, into our family lineage, and see ways we were shaped by those who helped bring us into the world.

To showcase this in Scripture I want to look at the family tree of David, the second king of Israel, someone who was said to be a man after God's own heart, and yet someone whose family also had to deal with the ramifications of his decisions. It is true that David did some wonderful things. For example, he risked his life when he fought Goliath as a teenager and won a great victory for his people, and he wrote more than 70 Psalms. But we also know that instead of honoring God and having one wife, he dishonored God and took numerous wives. Eight are listed in the Bible by name, but we know he had more. He also had concubines, women he slept with and had children with, but who did not have the royal status of a wife. He had many kids. Eighteen are named in the Bible, but we know he had more. Time and time again

David refused to honor God's commands about marriage, relationships, and sexuality, and it had an impact on his family.

If you have your Bible, open it to 2 Samuel 11. We are going to do an overview of several chapters, but if your Bibles are open, you'll be able to follow along. In 2 Samuel 11, we read that David, who was the king of Israel at this point, sent his army and all his fighting men off to war, but he stayed back. One evening he got up from his bed and went to the rooftop of his palace, from where he could participate in voyeurism. He saw a beautiful woman bathing and sent for her so he could sleep with her. We don't know all the details, but based on present definitions of power dynamics and coercion, this would be considered at least sexual assault, if not rape, in modern terms. A while later this woman reached out to David to tell him that she was pregnant, and since her husband was off fighting in battle for the king, this baby was certainly his. David tried on multiple occasions to get her husband to sleep with her, to cover it up, but it didn't work. So ultimately, in an attempt to cover his tracks, David had Uriah murdered on the battlefield; others alongside him lost their lives as well. David then proceeded to marry the woman and brought her into his household. In the next chapter, God sent a prophet who confronted David in all his sin, including sexual abuse and murder, and told him he had shown utter contempt for the Lord, and that there would be very real consequences because of his actions. God said that violence and sexual sin would be an ongoing part of his family. Then in the next chapter what do you see? Amnon, one of David's sons, falls in love with Tamar, his half-sister, one of David's daughters. Like his father, Amnon engaged in deceit in order to get close to his half-sister, then when he had the opportunity, he raped her. Tamar's full brother, Absalom, who was understandably furious, set in motion a plot to take revenge against Amnon and had him murdered. Absalom, the brother who committed the murder, then went into hiding for a few years before eventually returning to Jerusalem. When he came back, he weaseled his way into his father's good graces, then he led a rebellion, drew a lot of the people to him, and had himself appointed king. His father, the rightful king, had to flee the city for his life. Then Absalom, David's son, went to David's palace, and as a way of establishing himself as the new king in the eyes of everyone, what did he do? He went up to the rooftop of the palace—the very same roof top where his father went to commit voyeurism—and planned a sexual assault. He had his father's concubines brought to him and he forced them to sleep with him in broad daylight. You can keep reading to see how it all plays out, but what I want you to see is this: with a father there was deceit, sexual sin, and murderous violence. And in his children, you see deceit, sexual sin, and murderous violence. It got passed down from one generation to the next.

It's not just David. We see this elsewhere in Scripture. In the book of Genesis, Abraham, the father of faith, practiced deceit on several occasions. His son and daughter-in-law practiced deceit in their marriage. For years his grandson's entire life was a lie—he deceived and manipulated everyone he met. His great-grandchildren lied to their dad as well. It had a multi-generational component to it. Abraham favored one of his children, which led to hostility with the brothers; Isaac favored one of his children, which led to hostility among the brothers; Jacob favored one of his children, which led to hostility with the brothers. Favoritism and hostility were passed down generationally, with relationally catastrophic implications.

Here's the reality: we don't see this only in the families in the Bible. If we slow down long enough to look, if we are willing to pause and dive deep and get beneath the surface, we will see this very thing working itself out in our own lives. I know of someone who was never particularly good at sharing his emotions with his wife and children, and who, at work, has lots of good ideas, but is always too intimidated to bring them up and share them. When he decided to dig a bit into his family of origin, he remembered that he never once saw his parents express affection to one another. When he was a teenager, his dad would let him tag along with him on trips, but the only stipulation was if he was in the truck with his dad, he wasn't allowed to talk. They had to sit in silence. Looking back helped him realize why he has such a hard time expressing his emotions and speaking up when he has a valuable idea and helped him

gain the tools and the courage to move forward in a healthier way. I know of someone else who is overly sensitive to the slightest critique. Any suggestion for improvement, even when filled with tons of praise, crushes him and makes him feel worthless. He decided to look back into his family of origin, where a parent was hypercritical. Everything he did was scrutinized and examined—the decision, the motive, the outcome—and if it wasn't exactly how his parent (who is kind of a perfectionist) wanted it, he would be shunned and given the silent treatment until he made necessary changes. Love would be withheld until there was contrition and compliance. Looking back helped my friend realize why he is so sensitive and resistant to feedback. Realizing this has helped him to move forward in much healthier ways.

When you grow up in a home that has a specific culture and atmosphere for 18 years, it shapes you. There are obviously going to be some good things. In some families there is a list of a thousand good things. In others, there might only be a handful. Regardless of how many, for every one of them we need to be profoundly thankful and grateful. But there are also harmful things as well: perhaps your parents divorced when you were young, maybe your parents yelled at one another in order to “solve” problems, or maybe you never saw your parents have a healthy disagreement. Maybe there was alcohol addiction, or gambling addictions, or a drug addiction, or a pornography addiction. Maybe your parents had a mindset of perpetual financial scarcity. Maybe your parents were clearly racist against one or many other kinds of ethnicities (even being a part of something like the KKK). Maybe your parents told you that sharing your feelings was a sign of weakness. Maybe anything less than an A+ in school brought harsh critique. Maybe your parents taught you never to trust people outside of your family. Maybe there was abuse in the home, or violence in the home, or the premature death of a family member. The statistics say that if you are a man and your parents divorced when you were in their home, you are 35% more likely to divorce than your peers. If you are a woman and your parents divorced when you were home, you are 60% more likely to divorce than your peers. What happens in our homes impacts us! There is no escaping that reality! Uncovering and responding to this isn't a quick and easy process. It's not done in one intense counseling session. It takes months, sometimes years, but if we are willing to do the hard work, there can be an incredible amount of healing and transformation. Today, I want to encourage us to take three simple steps.

**Step 1: Examine and acknowledge the ways your family of origin has impacted your life.** Think back to your formative years, the atmosphere, the environment, the words, the behaviors. Think about defining stories or experiences, and recognize you were not just launched into the world as an 18 year old with a blank slate. Acknowledge the ways you've been shaped. This is not about pointing the finger at anyone or being harsh toward your parents or siblings. The goal is simply honest data evaluation. While you are doing this, pray and ask God for three things: to help you to see things accurately, not according to any distorted or misaligned perspective, to show you where he was present in your childhood, even if you weren't aware of his presence at the time, and then to have a heart of warmth and grace toward those in your family, even as you give attention to things that may have ultimately had a negative impact in your life.

**Step 2: Celebrate that you have been adopted into the family of God.** It's true that we are shaped by the family we were born into, but if you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, then in the most meaningful way possible, you have been given an entirely new family—a heavenly Father who is perfect in every way, an older brother who loved you so much he was willing to die for you, an eternal home being prepared for you, a spiritual family of brothers and sisters who are being sanctified along with you. The blood in your veins runs deep, but the blood of Jesus runs even deeper. Celebrate this profound, life-altering reality!

**Step 3: Replace any unhealthy mindset or patterns from your family of origin with the mindset and patterns from the family of God**

This really is the essence of discipleship: to say, here are the things that are presently true of my life, here is what is true of the life of Christ, and asking God, through the power of his Spirit, to help you take off the old nature marked by sin and put on the new nature marked by Christ.

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator... Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Colossians 3:5-14).

We take off the old nature, that which was passed down to us and that which we choose ourselves, and we put on the new nature, the nature of Jesus. Let me give you examples of how this has looked in my life. When I was in my college years and early twenties, I realized I had the tendency of being rather stingy. I was always looking to receive generosity from others but not willing to give generously to others. I wondered why that was. As I reflected on my childhood, I remembered how little we had, how we always had to clip coupons and watch every penny. We were on food stamps and frequently had to have financial help from people in our extended family. For my first 18 years, my family had nothing extra to give to others but regularly received from others. That became default behavior for me. But as a grown man and as a follower of Christ I have a heavenly Father who has extreme abundance, who is incredibly generous, and who calls me to be generous to others, as well. So I had to ask the Holy Spirit to help retrain me, to reorient my approach to finances to go from being only a recipient of generosity to being a distributor of generosity.

As another example, if you look one generation above me in my family, there are four different people in my family tree who had a serious gambling addiction. Collectively, they have gambled away hundreds of thousands of dollars. Now, I like watching sports, and I'm kind of competitive and love to predict who is going to win. There have been times when I think I ought to sign up for one of these online wagering sites and put 5 or 10 dollars on a game. That would be fun. But I know how prone my family is to gambling addiction, so I never do it. Period. It's not worth it.

I grew up as one of five children, and for about half of my childhood, we didn't have two parents in the home. My parents loved us kids and cared for us in so many ways, but because of the number of kids in our family and the fact that my parents were separated, I almost never got one on one time with my mom or dad. That has an impact. I didn't always feel seen, known or cared for. Sometimes I felt like I had to achieve something great to get any recognition. When I got older and matured in my faith, I could look at the fact that as a perfect Father, God knows me perfectly, because he is limitless. I can have his entire attention. He is fully present every second, he knows every thought, he has the hairs on my head numbered. I never have to feel alone or overlooked. And as a dad I can try to make sure to do just that: one on one trips and dates and conversations with each kid. Every month or two I write them each a personal letter and file it away to give to them when they are older. I could give you more examples, but those are a few of the discoveries that I made when I did the examination.

In this series called "Unearthed," we are going beneath the surface, getting several layers deep, down to the root, and that is the very place God wants to meet us, heal us, transform us by his grace. 1 John 3:1 says, "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" Let's rejoice that God has brought us into his family. He's done it through the greatest sacrifice of all: the

sacrificial death of his son on the cross so we could be restored, have a relationship with him today and the promise of eternal life forever.