

EHC Week 4
“Go Back to Go Forward”
Exodus 20:1-6

Introduction

Pray. Genesis 12.

We are working through 4 essential movements for “going forward” into emotional health and maturity. (Go Up, Go In)...I want to talk to us today about our 3rd movement. That is - **Going Back to Go Forward.**

I want us to look from the Scriptures how seeing, owning, and asking God to redeem our past is a key to moving forward into emotional maturity.

Epigenetics

In getting ready for today’s sermon, I came across some absolutely fascinating research taking place in the world of neuroscience.

It’s a new discipline that is starting to pick up steam called Epigenetics (Epi - “on or above” and genetics - so think of something placed onto a genetic code).

One of the leading researchers in this field is a professor of neuroscience in NYC, Dr. Rachel Yehuda.

Dr. Yehuda did a study a few years ago where she studied the descendants of holocaust survivors. And what she found was that those who survived the holocaust had a particular stress hormone that she argues came as a result of their traumatic experience.

Now, that’s not all that surprising. We can sort of understand how that much of a traumatic event would shape someone into a particular way. What was surprising is that in her research she found the exact same stress hormone in their kids AND in their grandkids.

So here is a person who has been profoundly shaped (with some implications on their emotional and spiritual health) by an experience, but that has not only shaped them, but it has shaped generations under them.

There was a way that the experiences of this particular person lived on in the very genetic makeup of their descendants.

Now, in some ways, Dr. Yehuda’s research was pretty astonishing. In other ways, it tells us scientifically what we already know anecdotally - **Our present is shaped by our past.**

Or to put it another way - **who you are is shaped by where you come from.**

Your life.

Your lived reality. Things you have done. Things that have been done to you. Where you grew up. Your socioeconomic class, your race, all of that.

Family of origin

If you've been married or had roommates you probably have seen some of the ways your family of origin has shaped you.

And we know this as a society. We have sayings - "Like father, like son." "Like mother, like daughter." "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree."

Our present is shaped by our past. And this has a profound impact on our emotional and spiritual lives with God.

So as we think about how to move forward into emotional health - one of the necessary steps is that we must go back into our past and our family of origin - see it, own it, ask God to redeem it - in order to move forward.

Genesis Walkthrough

****But this is not just a science thing or an anecdotal thing. This is Bible.**

Turn with me to **Genesis 12**. I want to show you how this idea of our past and our families shaping us plays out in the life of one particular family, a pretty famous one at that, in the book of Genesis.

ABRAHAM

Genesis 12:1-3

1 Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

- Abram → Later Abraham
- God's promise:
 - Great Nation
 - Through Abraham's family line God would bring blessing to the entire world
 - Promise about Jesus who would come through this family line as the promised Messiah = salvation + kingdom
- ****FAMILY = Blessing.**

Skip down to v 10...

Genesis 12:10-20

10 Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. 11 When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, "I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, 12 and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. 13 Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake." 14 When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. 15 And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. 16 And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels. 17 But the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. 18 So Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? 19 Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife; take her, and go." 20 And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had.

Abraham does not trust God, so he deceives instead.

But this is not just like a one-time screw up, skip down to v 20...

Genesis 20:1-2

1 From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb and lived between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar. 2 And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.

It happens again, the exact same thing - new king, new place - same story. Ongoing, inset, habitual sin in Abraham's life - **he does not trust God. He deceives others. He self-protects.**

ISAAC

And it begins a generational pattern down through the family. Let me show you...

Fast-forward in the story. Abraham and Sarah have a son, name him **Isaac**. Isaac gets married to a woman named Rebekah. Skip down to chapter 26...

Genesis 26:1-9

1 Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech, king of the Philistines. 2 And the Lord appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. 3 Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. 4 I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, 5 because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws." 6 So Isaac settled in Gerar. 7 When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," for he feared to say, "My wife," thinking, "lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah," because she was attractive in appearance. 8 When he had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw Isaac laughing with Rebekah his wife. 9 So Abimelech called Isaac and said, "Behold, she is your wife. How then could you say, 'She is my sister'?" Isaac said to him, "Because I thought, 'Lest I die because of her.'"

Doesn't trust God. Only interested in protecting himself. Lies and Deception.

JACOB

And guess what? It gets passed down again - from one generation to another and then to another...

Isaac and Rebekah have 2 twin boys - Esau and Jacob.

There's some backstory here, what we need to know for our purposes is that Esau is born first. And as the first born, even though they're twins, in that culture Esau gets all of the rights and privileges and blessing that comes with being the oldest son. There's a special blessing and inheritance he is supposed to get from Isaac.

But Rebekah loved Jacob more than Esau. And God has actually promised that Jacob would get the blessing instead. That the older one Esau, would serve the younger one Jacob.

But Rebekah and Jacob don't trust God's timing or God's hand, so they hatch a plan to deceive Isaac so he will accidentally bless Jacob instead.

Genesis 27:18-19

18 So [Jacob] went in to his father and said, "My father." And [Isaac] said, "Here I am. Who are you, my son?" 19 Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, that your soul may bless me."

Jacob deceives his father, pretends he is Esau, lies to self-protect and get what he wants instead of trusting God.

If you know the story you know this is one lie that becomes a life of lies. He becomes a conman in a lot of ways. In fact one of the meanings for the name "Jacob" is "The Deceiver" - so it's not just living on through generations it's getting worse.

JOSEPH + BROTHERS

One more generation...Jacob has 12 sons. They will eventually become the 12 tribes of Israel. His favorite is his 11th son named Joseph. Because he's the favorite he gives him this spectacular coat of many colors (you've seen the play).

And Joseph's brothers HATE this kid. I mean, hate him. For a number of reasons we can't get into for the sake of time. It boils down to their extremely jealous of him. They want him gone.

So look at what happens...

Genesis 37:18-24

18 They saw [Joseph] from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. 19 They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. 20 Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams." 21 But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." 22 And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him"—that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father. 23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. 24 And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

They eventually end up selling Joseph to a group of travelers and he ends up in slavery in Egypt. They go back to Jacob, their dad, lie about the whole thing and say he was killed by wild animals.

ALRIGHT, PAUSE THE STORY THERE.

Do you see the pattern?

This is the family chosen by God through which the nations will be blessed and Christ the Savior will come, and yet there's a continual pattern... **They don't trust God, they want to self-protect and self-advance, so they lie and deceive.**

- Abraham lies about Sarah (twice!)
- Isaac lies about Rebekah
- Jacob lies to Isaac about being Esau
- Jacob's sons lie about what happened to Joseph

And this, to be honest, is just one of the patterns. You could trace a number of sin patterns through the family line of Abraham - sibling rivalry, favoritism, misogyny and abuse, violence.

Father Abraham had many sons, and they were all really screwed up.

But here's my point - The world (anecdotal evidence), science, and the Bible all agree → your past profoundly shapes your present. Or to use the language of the Scriptures → **Sin lives on from one generation to the next to the next to the next. Both the consequences and suffering and the tendencies and temptations.**

Generational Judgment Principle

There's actually a term for this. Theologians call this the **generational judgment principle**.

It's seen most clearly in Exodus 34. God, appears to Moses on Mt Sinai and the text says this:

Exodus 34:6-7

6 The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

This is the **generational judgment principle**. - Visiting the iniquity of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.

But what does this mean?

Well here's what it can't mean - What the text is **NOT** saying is that you are guilty before God because of the sins of your father or mother or anyone in previous generations of your family. I don't stand condemned and guilty before God because of the sins of Lyden David Olson (that's my dad). In the same way that his faith in Jesus won't save me, his sin won't condemn me. Apart from Jesus, I stand guilty before God because of my own sin and corrupted nature.

But here's what it does mean:

1. Sin has generational consequences.

The story of Genesis and human experience show us that when someone in the generational line has an impactful sin, that leads to suffering and consequences down the family tree.

Jacob wants so badly to receive Isaac's blessing. He turns around and shows incredible favoritism to Joseph. It's one of the reasons Joseph's brothers hate him so much. There's consequences on Joseph for his dad's sin.

Sin has generational consequences. And for us, we can trace that back in our own lives.

- So for some of us, our parents got **divorced** or one of them just up and left and abandoned the family. And that's shaped you. That's had an impact on how you've viewed relationships - you've learned to test people, always afraid someone is going to turn their back on you and leave, it's hard for you to both give and receive love - you've found more of that now carried into your marriage than you realize, there's consequences.
- Our parents were **abused**. Their parents emotionally, verbally, physically abused them. And so maybe they never abused us but they were always withdrawn from us. Disengaged. Angry.
- **Finances** - sins w/ money — consequences.

There's a way in which sin has consequences of suffering passed down through generations.

2. Sin has generational patterns.

Like Abraham, like Isaac, like Jacob, like Joseph's brothers. The sin apple does not fall far from the tree.

Harper. So I think about my two-year old, Harper. I believe she was born created in the image of God. She's a human. And being a human means she's created with dignity, and value, and worth and meaning.

But I also believe based on the doctrine of sin - that she is born corrupted and bent away from God. But not just bent in a generic sense. Bent in a specific sense, bent and corrupt in a way that is shaped by who? Her mom, her dad, her grandma, her grandpa, her honey, her papa and so on and so forth.

And I think we see this in our own lives right?

I mean how many of us when we were younger had this thought - "I swear when I grow up I am not going to be like my parents." Only to find their sins be the sin bent of our hearts?

- We grow up with dads who are absent, workaholics, emotionally distant and we promised - "I'm never going to be that way, only to now be heading into our 20s and 30s and 40s finding ourselves in the exact same patterns?"
- We grow up with moms who are overbearing and perfectionistic and now as we get older we start to see the same sin rise up within us - finding so much worth or value in what we do, or how our kids behave?
- We grew up with our dads constantly reaching for the bottle, and his father reaching for the bottle, and their father reaching for the bottle - and now we see within us this constant desire and pull to run and retreat into our comfort of choice, and indulgences and vices?

There's a way in which our sin nature is particularly bent based on our family of origin.

In the words of pastor Pete Scazzero - **"Jesus may be in your heart, but grandpa is in your bones."**

The point is not that God will punish you for your dad's sin, mom's sin, grandad's sin - but that the odds are that sin in your family of origin lives on in you with some sort of imprint of consequence and temptation and pattern on your soul.

Or to put these two points another way...

We all carry the sin from the past into the present.

Sin lives on from one generation to the next to the next to the next. Both the consequences and suffering and the tendencies and temptations. Both sin done to us, by us, and around us.

The problem is that many of us, as we move into adulthood and establish this life of our own, never take stock of where we've been and what has shaped us.

We never take a hard, honest look at the way our families shaped us, the way our upbringing and experiences and cultures shaped us. The way that all of that mess and sin has a role to play in our spiritual and emotional lives and how some of that might then just lead to spiritual and relational and emotional unhealth. We've never paused to look at how who we are has been shaped by where we come from - both in suffering and consequences and in sin patterns and temptations.

We all carry the sin from the past into the present.

The question for us is - **are we going to carry it into the future?**

Breaking Free from the Past

And this is where the beautiful 3rd reality of Exodus 34 and the generational judgment principle comes into play.

3. The Lord redeems generational sin.

Look back at Exodus 34 with me. Can we get Bible nerd for a second?

“The Lord, the Lord...keeping steadfast love for thousands... visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

Now, you might notice in your Bible, there is in mine, a footnote after thousands that says “Or to the *thousandth generation*”. Do you see that? That’s there as the translators attempt to help us as English readers not miss what the original author is trying to do in the Hebrew.

Because what’s happening here is actually an ancient Jewish idiom. It’s a comparative device where Moses is comparing one thing to another. Thousands and 3rd+4th are set up as comparisons → Steadfast love for thousands, visiting iniquity for the 3rd or the 4th. He’s comparing the two and showing how they match up.

Best way to think about it is to picture a scale. Old school balancing ones you know? What the author is doing is showing ok yes, there’s a tension with God between justice and mercy. You see this all throughout the Scriptures - the justice of God and the mercy of God. But here’s how it weighs out - God visits the iniquity onto the 3rd or the 4th, but his love and mercy - that’s for the thousands. It’s an incomparable amount of weight.

Yes there’s justice and judgment with God, but His base level heart posture towards us and towards our stories and our past and the sin that makes its way down from generation to generation - his heart bent posture is mercy.

For every sin done to you, every sin done by you, every sin done around you → The Lord has steadfast love that outweighs them all.

God says - I have mercy for all of that. My mercy does not run out. My grace does not run out. It tips the scales completely. There is redemption. There is healing. We can wade into all of that together.

- I know your dad was an angry man, and now you see the same lashing out and instant rage in your own heart - but I am a merciful and gracious God.
- I know your mom was a perfectionist and you were taught from an early age to achieve and perform your way to acceptance, and now your life is riddled with anxiety, stress, worry, and fear - but I am a merciful and gracious God.
- I know your parents divorce wrecked you and now your fear of abandonment is driving you to respond in all sorts of sexual sin because you’re afraid you’re not lovable - but I am a merciful and gracious God.

The scale is not even close → iniquity to the 3rd and 4th, steadfast love for thousands.

But here's the key in this promise of mercy, to not carry the sin from the past into the future, we must deal with it. We must, in faith and courage, stair down our past with God.

We must be willing to go back to go forward.

If we aren't willing to address the past, we cannot heal from the past. If we ignore the ways the sin we've done, the sin done to us, the sin around us and in our families have shaped us away from life with God, we will never receive His healing and redemption.

Application

So just with our last few minutes give you a blueprint for what going back to go forward might look like for you as you seek to do this.

1. See your past.

Step 1 is to take a good hard look at both your individual past and your family of origin. Just to be willing to be honest about what you've done, what has been done to you. The marks and scars of your family. Just getting a grasp on the way you've been shaped.

Two really helpful tools for this:

REDEMPTION - Go to Redemption.

GENOGRAM - visual map of your family tree that's used to identify patterns in your family line, both good and bad.

- We're going to have this up on the website this week on our sermon series page of a resource put out by a ministry called Practicing the Way that charts out how to do this for you that I think is going to be super helpful for you.
- I did this a few years ago where you just trace relationships back a few generations. I saw patterns:
 - Perfectionism and workaholism and anger
 - Alcoholism
 - Rootedness - didn't really move around at all
 - Faithfulness in marriage

2. Own your past - both good and bad.

A lot of us - not all of us, but a lot of us - our past is a mixed bag. There's some really bad stuff, some really deep, dark sin that just seems to permeate our stories and our lives and there's also some deep evidence of God's grace.

Jon Tyson - "[My story] reveals the conflict between the tyranny of the world and the wonder of God's grace."

Even in the family line of Abraham, right? Yes he passed on this sinful pattern of lying and deception and self-protection and favoritism. He also passed on an inheritance of God's covenant blessing. His line was kept by God. God kept being faithful.

And I know based on your upbringing this is going to be various amounts of various people. I'm not trying to diminish your story or what you've lived through. I know for some of us we might have a list of 100 bads, and 1 good.

But let me just encourage you in love → “Dad-bashing” is all the rage right now. And I’m not trying to add fuel to that fire. At some point you have to own the sin within your heart - it cannot all be a consequence of the sins of your father.

I’m trying to get you to take an honest look at all aspects of your past and your family of origin. You have to see all parts of it - good, bad, and in between.

3. Bring others into it.

You don’t want to walk this journey alone. I’d encourage you - work the genogram. Do this sort of heart work in silence and solitude and then sit down with someone in your community and process through it together.

We need each other in this. (That’s the sermon for next week).

4. Allow God to redeem your past.

Man, walk back those steps we laid out in weeks 1-3. Take off the false self. Be honest with God. Pray that simple prayer - “Lord, I will not hide my emotional life from you.” Bring him all of your heart AND all of your past. Allow him to begin to redeem it, work it, change it.

5. By the power of the Holy Spirit, work to change.

Work to cut off the patterns. To step into freedom. To live out of a response to and in light of God’s mercy that goes to the thousandth generation.

So that’s the invitation for us this week, **we must go back to go forward.**

Joseph + Conclusion

And really, if you look at the life of Joseph, this is a lot of what happens with him and the steps he takes.

If you’re not familiar with the story post Genesis 37 - Joseph has an incredibly difficult run in Egypt for most of it - betrayed, wrongfully accused of trying to sleep with someone’s wife, ends up in prison.

Through a series of providential events from God eventually he finds himself interpreting a dream for Pharaoh, and Pharaoh is so impressed with Joseph, he asks - “is there anyone else in Egypt who has the Spirit of God like this man? Makes him 2nd in command in all of Egypt.

There’s a famine in the land (remember how we said this whole mess started with a famine that takes Abraham to Egypt). Joseph’s brothers come to Egypt to ask for food. He ends up taking care of them. He moves his whole family to Egypt so he can protect them and provide for them.

And look at how this story ends. Joseph talking to his brothers.

Genesis 50:19-21

19 But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? 20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. 21 So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

He doesn't hide from it - **he sees it and owns it** - you sold me into Egypt. You did this. This was off. You meant evil against me. I'm not going to ignore the past.

He sees how **God wants to redeem it** - "But God meant it for good."

He **works to change** - "I will provide for you and your little ones."

Generation after generation of deception and lying, of not trusting God. Joseph puts an end to all of that. He faces his past, in view of the mercy of God, and brings God in to redeem it.

God redeems the family line of Abraham. Until ultimately we know through this line comes the Messiah - the ultimate plan of redemption.

Communion. Pray.