

BGCC Community Group Guide



Where It Starts

September 13th

It Didn't Start Here

Where It Starts — Your Past Does Not Define You

Introduction

We all carry things from the people and environments that shaped us. Sometimes those things are good: how we love others, how we serve, how we work, or how we trust God. Sometimes they are unhealthy: anger, avoidance, dishonesty, fear, addiction, or patterns of conflict.

The Bible does not teach that we are destined to repeat the sins of our parents. Our family history can influence us, but it does not have the final say over who we become. Scripture holds two truths together: **what is modeled can influence us, but we are responsible for what we do with what has been handed to us.**

Ultimately, our identity is not found in our family history, our failures, or our struggles. It is found in Christ. The gospel does not simply tell us to try harder to become different. In Christ, we are made new.

Section 1 – *Recognize What Has Been Handed Down*

John 9:2 - Ezekiel 18:2-3 - Jeremiah 31:29-30

“The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child.” - **Ezekiel 18:20**

Summary

God directly addresses the idea that one generation's sin automatically determines the next generation's destiny. The people of Israel had a common saying that blamed the parents for what their children experienced. God rejects that way of thinking.

Our parents' choices do not determine whether we will follow God. At the same time, Scripture recognizes that what is modeled in one generation can become normalized in the next. There is a difference between "Generational Determinism" and "Generational Influence."

Abraham repeatedly used deception when he was afraid (Genesis 12:10-13, 20:2-4). Isaac followed the same pattern (Genesis 26:7). Jacob became known for deception, and his sons continued the pattern by lying about Joseph. What was modeled became normalized.

We can inherit patterns without being destined by them. Our upbringing can help explain some of our tendencies, but it does not excuse our sin or remove our responsibility to choose how we will live.

Group Question: What are some positive or negative patterns that people can unintentionally learn from the families and environments that raised them?

Personal Relevance

We often discover that we are more like our parents than we realized. We may hear our father's words come out of our mouths or realize that we handle conflict the same way our mother did. This can be uncomfortable, especially when we recognize unhealthy patterns. But recognizing a pattern is not the same as being trapped by it.

The first step toward change is being willing to see what is there. Psalm 139 gives us a helpful prayer: "Search me, God." Instead of defending ourselves or blaming our family, we can invite God to show us the patterns in our lives that need to change.

Flow Question: Why can it be difficult to honestly recognize unhealthy patterns we have learned from our families?

Reflection Question: Is there a pattern in your life that you recognize as something you may have learned or inherited? What would it look like to bring that honestly before God?

Section 2 – *Remember Who You Are*

Romans 8:15

“The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’”

Summary

Recognizing unhealthy patterns is important, but simply identifying what is wrong is not enough. We need to remember who we are. Joseph is a powerful example. His family history was filled with deception and dysfunction. His brothers sold him into slavery, and much of his life was marked by circumstances he did not choose.

Yet Joseph did not allow his past to become his identity. Over and over, Genesis reminds us that **the Lord was with Joseph**. His identity was rooted not in what had happened to him but in who he belonged to. Joseph could have defined himself by the rejection, injustice, or family dysfunction. Instead, he understood that God was with him and was working even through what others intended for evil.

Group Question: What difference does it make when someone defines themselves by who they belong to rather than by what has happened to them?

Personal Relevance

We can spend enormous amounts of energy trying to prove that we are not like our parents or that we are better than our past. “I’ll never be like my dad.”, “My kids will never experience what I experienced.”, “I’ll make sure I don’t become like my mom.” Those desires may come from a good place, but they can still keep our attention focused on the past.

The gospel gives us something better. We don’t have to spend our lives running from who we used to be. In Christ, we have a new identity. We are children of God—known, loved, adopted, forgiven, and transformed.

Our identity isn’t ultimately, “I am the person who came from that family.” It is, “**I am the person that belongs to the Father.**”

Flow Question: What is the difference between trying to become different from your past and allowing Jesus to give you a new identity?

Reflection Question: What tends to define you more—what has happened to you, what you have done, or who you are in Christ?

Section 3 – *Let God Redeem What Was Meant for Evil*

Genesis 50:20

“You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good.”

Summary

Joseph's story shows that God can work through circumstances that were never good in themselves. His brothers genuinely intended to harm him. They sold him into slavery, and Joseph experienced years of hardship because of their actions. Yet when Joseph finally stood face-to-face with his brothers, he did not use his position to get revenge. He recognized that God had been working through his story to accomplish something greater—the saving of many lives.

Joseph did not pretend his past was good. He acknowledged the evil that had been done to him. But he refused to let that evil have the final word. The same truth appears in the story of the man born blind in John 9. Jesus rejected the assumption that the man's suffering could simply be blamed on his own sin or his parents' sin. Instead, Jesus demonstrated that God could work through his circumstances so that God's work could be displayed.

Group Question: What is the difference between pretending something painful was good and trusting God to bring good from something painful?

Personal Relevance

Some things in our past were genuinely painful. Some things were handed to us that we never asked for. We may have experienced dysfunction, rejection, neglect, addiction, anger, or other struggles because of decisions made by someone else. The gospel does not require us to pretend those things didn't hurt. But they don't have to have the final word.

God can redeem what was meant for evil. He can take the places where we have been hurt and use them to make us more compassionate, more dependent on Him, and more capable of helping others. Our past may be part of our story, but **Jesus gets to determine how the story ends.**

Flow Question: Why is it tempting to believe that our past has more power over our future than God does?

Reflection Question: Is there something from your past that you need to stop running from or 'blame gaming' and instead place into God's hands, trusting Him to redeem it?

Section 4 – *Become New in Christ*

Romans 12:2

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

Summary

The answer to generational patterns is not simply trying harder to become a better version of ourselves. Paul calls us to something deeper: transformation. The patterns we learned do not have to remain the patterns we live by. Because of Christ, we can become different.

The formerly blind man in John 9 gives us a picture of this. When the religious leaders questioned his identity and tried to explain away what had happened, he kept coming back to the simplest truth: “I was blind and now I see.” His story became bigger than his past. Jesus had entered his life and changed him fundamentally.

That is the heart of the gospel. We are not simply people who have learned new behaviors. In Christ, we are given a new life. The past does not get the final say. Jesus does.

Group Question: What does it look like practically for someone to live from a new identity in Christ instead of being controlled by their past?

Personal Relevance

We can become so focused on avoiding the mistakes of the past that we forget to pursue Jesus in the present. The goal isn't to spend our lives saying, “I'll never be like them.” The goal is to become more like Christ. That changes the question. Instead of asking only, “What do I need to stop doing?” we begin asking, “Who is Jesus making me into?”

Maybe the pattern is anger, but Jesus is teaching you gentleness. Maybe the pattern is emotional distance, but Jesus is teaching you love and vulnerability. Maybe the pattern is dishonesty, but Jesus is teaching you truthfulness. Maybe the pattern is fear, but Jesus is teaching you trust.

Transformation happens as we continually bring our lives under the truth of the gospel and allow God to renew our minds.

Flow Question: What is one Christlike characteristic you would want to become more evident in your life and eventually be passed on to others?

Reflection Question: If the people closest to you watched your life for the next year, what would you hope they would see Jesus changing in you?

Conclusion

Our families influence us, but they do not determine us. We may have received patterns that we never asked for. We may carry struggles that have existed in our families for generations. We may recognize things in ourselves that we wish weren't there. But **our past does not have the final say.**

Ezekiel reminds us that we are responsible for what we do with what has been handed to us. Joseph reminds us that God can use even painful circumstances for His purposes. The man born blind reminds us that our past and our circumstances do not determine what Jesus can do in our lives. And the gospel reminds us that our deepest identity is not found in our family, our history, our failures, or our struggles. **We belong to the Father.**

So don't spend your life running from your past. Run toward Jesus. Don't spend your life trying to prove that you are better than where you came from. Let Jesus make you new. What was handed to you may explain some of your tendencies, but it does not determine your destiny. **Jesus does.**