

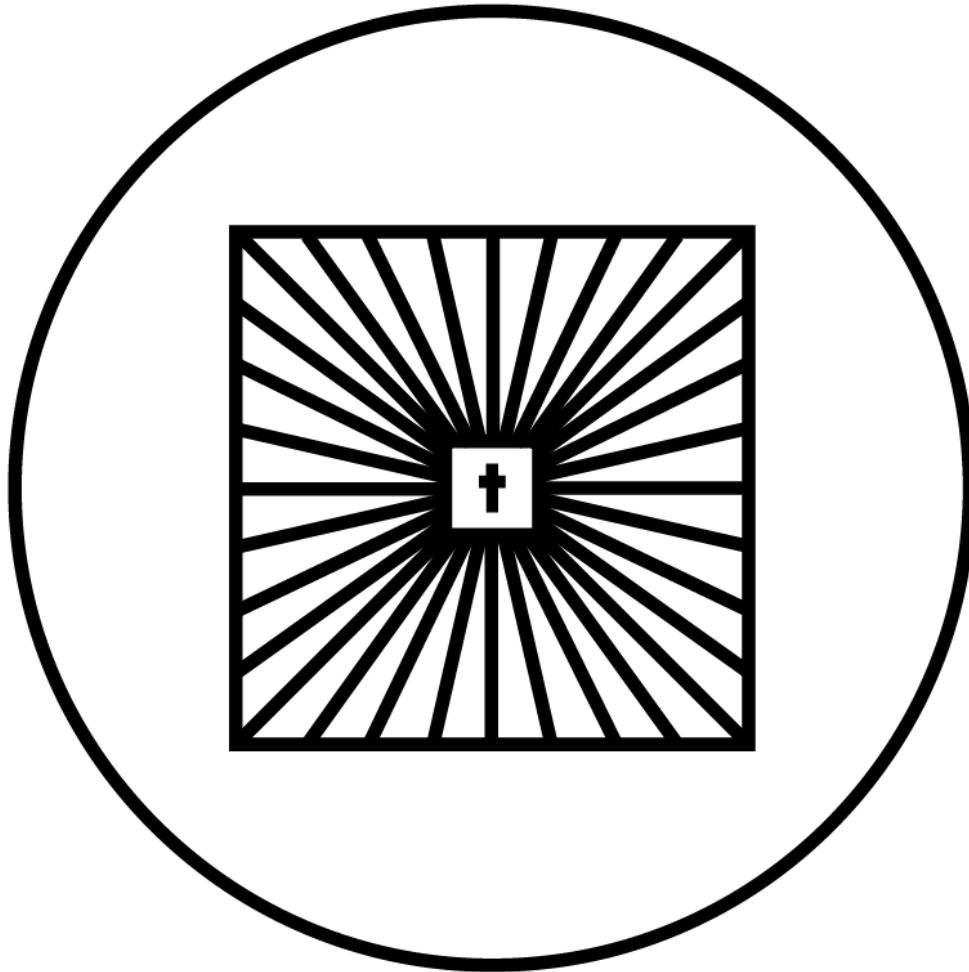
# Dealing with your past

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**Goal**

To identify unhealthy cycles created by our past and pursue the wholeness, healing, and transformation found in Christ alone.

**PARTICIPANT'S PACK**



**Key Passages**

...you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. — **1 Peter 1:18b-19**

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. — **2 Corinthians 1:3-4**





# Practice Introduction

Our past experiences, particularly those that are painful or traumatic, can continue to affect us in negative ways if we don't address them in light of the Gospel. These experiences can lead to unresolved emotional issues such as anxiety, anger, depression, and bitterness that can interfere with our relationships, personal growth, and spiritual development.

We also know that our past has the potential to affect our view of God, ourselves, and others. If we have unresolved emotional wounds from our past, we may struggle to trust God, live in our gospel identities, and form and maintain healthy relationships with others. We may dismiss the past as having no bearing on our present. We think - *the past is the past. I am my own person. My choices are my choices.* We can align to an incomplete understanding of the idea that, as a Christian, I am a new creation and the past has no hold on me. Yes, my sin and sin nature is changed, yet as we grow older, we're bewildered when we make the same mistakes and choices as our parents, grandparents, and even sometimes our great grandparents made. As Pete Scazzero says: "*Jesus may be in your heart, but Grandpa is in your bones.*" He encourages us to take an honest and fearless inventory of our past experiences, including our family history, childhood wounds, and past relationships.

We *ignore* the past because it can be painful. It's painful because of sin - not just our own sin, but sins others have committed against us, patterns of sin that were committed by those around us, sin passed down from generations, and even the plain reality of living in a world broken by sin. The equally detrimental option is to *live* in the past, never accessing true freedom and simply believing it is what it is.

In Genesis, we see the account of Abraham's family, and how sinful patterns of brokenness are passed from generation to generation. Abraham twice lies about his wife Sarah saying that she is his sister in order to save his own neck. He shows favoritism to his son Isaac over Ishmael. Then we see Isaac himself lie about his wife Rebekah *saying she is his sister* in order to save himself. Isaac marries two women, and just like Abraham he shows favoritism to his children creating a bitter rivalry between Jacob and Esau. Then Jacob becomes known for being a liar and a conman. He marries four women and shows extraordinary favoritism to his son Joseph. His other 11 children then lie to him about Joseph being killed by wild animals, when in fact they sold their own brother into slavery. The patterns of sin and brokenness in Abraham's family are passed down through three generations! And it doesn't get better, it gets *worse*.

However, the conclusion of Joseph's story brings redemption to this family and is intended to point us forward to the redemption that is in Christ. Joseph was betrayed by his own brothers and sold for silver. He was then falsely accused and arrested having done nothing wrong. He suffered greatly, yet God miraculously raised him to a place of great power and glory. Joseph became the second in command of all of Egypt by miraculously interpreting Pharaoh's dream. He didn't incite rivalry among his two sons. And when Joseph had reached that place of power, his brothers came to him, starving because of famine, not knowing it was Joseph, and they begged to buy grain. In that moment, Joseph could have continued the broken cycle of sin handed down from his forefathers. He could have killed them, imprisoned them, or sold them into slavery. But instead, in one of the most emotional passages in all of the Bible, Joseph *forgave* his brothers. He brought unity and wholeness to a family line that had been ripped apart by rivalry and deceit.

We could say: "I must be the hero of my family like Joseph!", but that would miss the whole point. Joseph is a type of Christ. We are the sinners walking in the broken ways handed down to us. We have brokenness in our past that we just want to *ignore*. And we desperately need an innocent brother like Joseph, who instead of giving us retribution gives us forgiveness and redemption. Peter declares to all who follow Jesus:

*...you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.*

**— 1 Peter 1:18b-19**

The power and freedom of the gospel isn't the power to ignore the past, *but the power in Christ to redeem it*. As followers of Jesus, we recognize that we have inherited futile ways from our forefathers. But we also know that by the precious blood of Jesus, *the brokenness of the past will not determine our future*. We are forgiven, and the blood of Jesus breaks the cycle of sin! Every bit of our past, no matter how dark, can be redeemed by Jesus - all of it. There is freedom in His name that He so desires us to walk in!

*For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.*

**— Galatians 5:1**

# Self Assessment

How does the idea of dealing with your past make you feel? Scared? Sad? Hopeful? Guilty?

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Read the statements below, and check any boxes that resonate with you. If applicable, write a phrase or sentence explaining why it resonates with you:

I find myself reliving the past thinking about how my life would be better if \_\_\_\_\_ had not happened.

I feel like God would/could use me if \_\_\_\_\_ didn't happen.

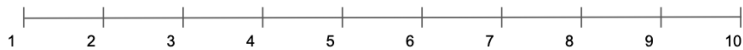
I feel defined by past failures.



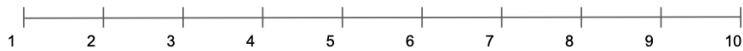
I don't focus on the past, I have more influence over my future so that's where I spend my energy.



I actively hide my past from people because I am afraid or ashamed.



I worry that what happened to me will be passed on to my kids/spouse/friends.



I am trying to make up for my past mistakes by being perfect.



When I do think about the past, I don't know what to do with those feelings.



# Practices for Week 1

This week's practice is to review key events in your family history and identify generational sins, brokenness, relational patterns, and inherited values. Reflect on these things **prayerfully** recognizing the amazing forgiveness and power of Jesus to stop cycles of brokenness. It is also important to notice what emotions surfaced as you complete this practice, so you can engage with Jesus more deeply.

Note - it may be helpful to complete this worksheet over multiple days rather than all at once. Also, this worksheet is a tool for you personally - *you do not need to share what you put down here in life group unless you are comfortable sharing.*

The following worksheet is adapted from [www.practicingtheway.org](http://www.practicingtheway.org)

## Family History

Answer the following questions reflecting on your extended family back to your grandparents (or great grandparents if you are able).

List any history/patterns of mental illness, depression, anxiety, nervous breakdowns, etc...	List all non-Christian religions in your ancestral history (Buddhism, Freemasonry, Islam, Hinduism, Mormonism, the Occult, etc...)	What, if any emotional reaction are you having? Use the attached wheel if you are stuck.
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<p>List any substance abuse or addiction issues.</p>	<p>Has anyone had, desired to, participated in, or sponsored an abortion?</p>	<p>What, if any emotional reaction are you having? Use the attached wheel if you are stuck.</p>
<p>Has there been any notable sexual promiscuity? Any affairs or divorces?</p>	<p>Has there been any history of abuse – sexual, emotional, physical, or spiritual?</p>	<p>What, if any emotional reaction are you having? Use the attached wheel if you are stuck.</p>



<p>Has there been any history of abandonment (physical or emotional absence)?</p>	<p>Are there any notable "earthquake" events in your family history such as sudden death, prolonged illnesses, bankruptcy, etc... were those events mourned or swept under the rug?</p>	<p>What, if any emotional reaction are you having? Use the attached wheel if you are stuck.</p>
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**Relational Patterns**

<p>How would you describe your parents' and grandparents' marriages?</p>	<p>Did your parents show affection? To each other? To their kids? To you? What about your grandparents?</p>	<p>What, if any emotional reaction are you having? Use the attached wheel if you are stuck.</p>
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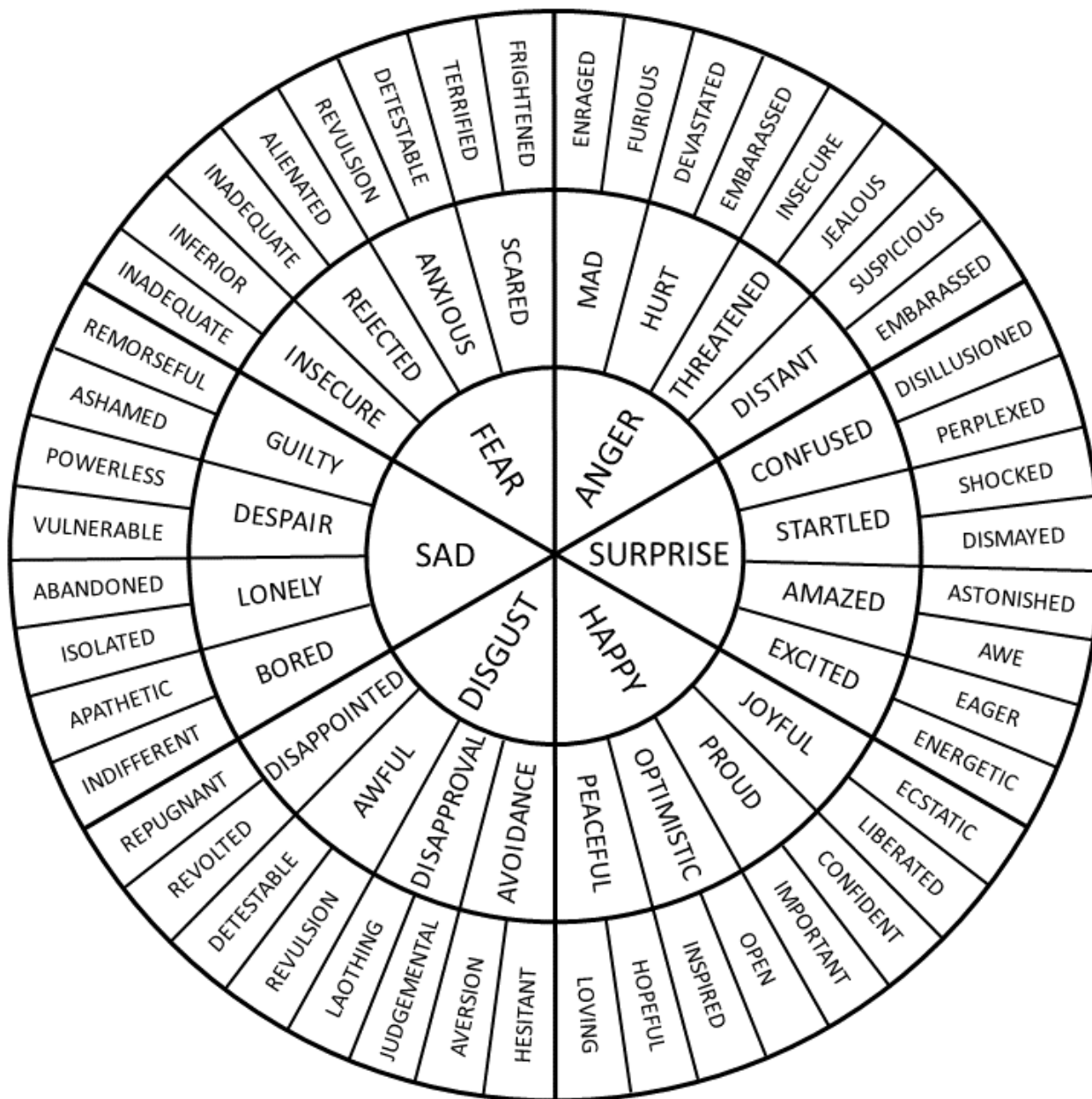
<p>How did your family deal with conflict (fight, flight, freeze, etc...)?</p>	<p>Was your family open to talking about feelings, especially negative feelings?</p>	<p>What, if any emotional reaction are you having? Use the attached wheel if you are stuck.</p>
<p>How did your family deal with sin and failure?</p>	<p>Was your family a safe space or are their current secrets that affect you directly?</p>	<p>What, if any emotional reaction are you having? Use the attached wheel if you are stuck.</p>

<p>How did your family define success?</p>	<p>How was money handled and viewed - was there a mindset of poverty or wealth?</p>	<p>What, if any emotional reaction are you having? Use the attached wheel if you are stuck.</p>
<p>Which role did you play in your family (responsible eldest, baby, black sheep, caretaker, etc...)?</p>	<p>Were there any family secrets (pregnancy out of wedlock, incest, abuse, financial scandal)?</p>	

## Past Traumas

Did processing this list bring up any areas of past trauma or shame?

What, if any emotional reaction are you having? Use the attached wheel if you are stuck.







# Prayer & Ministry

This week is focussed on praying for people in our Life Group based on what was revealed to them during the practices of the week. This is a great opportunity for you to practice what was learnt in the "Hearing God" module as you minister to each other. Here is some space for you to write down either your prayers for someone or any impressions God may be showing you as you pray for revelation, healing and freedom.

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## Breaking the Narrative

As we engage with the practice of dealing with our past, we become aware of messages we've received from our past that are informing us about our present. These messages often come from our family of origin – our parents and siblings and/or other significant caretakers. They speak to what is valuable and what is not valuable. They shape our view of the world, self, others, and even our view of God. They tell a story or a *narrative* to us about the world and how it works.

Even as followers of Jesus, we may be living in a story inherited from our past that is not aligned with God's story. We may be living a story that is not true. And that can keep us from living in the fullness of what God intends for us as His children.

False narratives have held humans captive since the beginning of creation and can come from multiple sources. For example, satan told Eve a false narrative that God was withholding her highest good from her. And that lie has lived in the heart of every person since. It is a message from the past. *God is withholding my highest good; I must take control and do what seems best to me.* Lies like this are not simply incorrect information, they are strongholds of the enemy. They can't be overcome by mere human effort. Paul says,

*For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.*

**— 2 Corinthians 10:4-6**

The "weapons" Paul refers to is the truth and reality of what Jesus Christ has done for His followers. It's the truth of the gospel! The gospel is a weapon with divine power to destroy strongholds! It destroys *arguments* and *every lofty opinion*. It destroys *false narratives* that go against the knowledge of God. God has given us power as His people to correct false narratives of our past. However, it doesn't just happen automatically – we have to engage the weapons of the gospel. *Jesus took my place. Christ lives in me. My sin is paid for. I am a child of God.* Armed with these, we mercilessly take captive every thought to make it obey Christ. How often do we entertain thoughts that are not aligned with the reality of the gospel? How many times do we think *I am worthless, I can never change, I'm an idiot, no one cares?* What does our self-talk look like, and is it what Christ says about us?



This week we want to bring to light the false messages and narratives we've received from our past and intentionally take them captive with the power of the gospel. This is a process and a practice; it doesn't happen instantly. But to have victory we must engage with the fight, and we must be aware of the lies that are affecting us. A helpful exercise is to think about false "commandments" we live by (whether from our family of origin or our past experience), and to combat them with what Jesus says is true about us as His followers. Here are some examples of false "commandments":

- **MONEY** – Thou shalt make lots of money to be secure, important, and successful. Thou shalt *not* make lots of money because excess is evil. Thou shalt never talk about money.
- **CONFLICT** – Thou shalt avoid conflict because it is dangerous and bad. Thou shalt not upset people or hurt their feelings. Thou shalt not be a pushover. Thou shalt always prove yourself right.
- **SEX** – Thou shalt not speak openly about sex. Thou shalt get attention from the opposite sex to be valuable. Thou shalt get sexual fulfillment to be happy.
- **GRIEF AND LOSS** – Thou shalt not feel what you feel. Thou shalt get over it and move on. Thou shalt not bother people with your pain.
- **FAMILY** – Thou shalt always remember you owe your parents for all they've done for you. Thou shalt keep the family secrets. Thou shalt see your family as superior to other families. Thou shalt never set boundaries with family members.
- **RELATIONSHIPS** – Thou shalt not trust people. Thou shalt not be vulnerable. Thou shalt always say "yes" to other people's needs. Thou shalt not let people close enough to hurt you.
- **ATTITUDES TOWARD OTHER CULTURES** – Thou shalt only be close friends with people like you. Thou shalt not marry a person of another race or culture. Thou shalt be fearful of other cultures/races.
- **SUCCESS** – Thou shalt always get it right and not make mistakes. Thou shalt get married and have children to be successful. Thou shalt not let things come easily. Thou shalt always remember that you are not good enough.
- **FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS** – Thou shalt internalize feelings and not express them. Thou shalt always remember that your feelings are not important. Thou shalt always express your feelings because not doing so would be fake. Thou shalt always follow your feelings to be happy.

# Practices for Week 3

This week, we want to prayerfully reflect on untrue messages and narratives we've received from our past, and write down how the good news of Jesus (the gospel) corrects these messages.

The module on GOSPEL IDENTITIES may be helpful as you work through these.

Try to write 10 family commandments down.

For example: *"Thou shalt never apologize, that makes you weak."*

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

Messages I received about life from my Father (caretaker) - both good and bad:  
*This could be a phrase like boys don't cry...*

How the good news about Jesus puts these messages into perspective:

Messages I received about life from my Mother (caretaker) - both good and bad:

How the good news about Jesus puts these messages into perspective:

<p>What these messages made me believe (beliefs that may or may not be true):</p>	<p>How the good news about Jesus puts these beliefs into perspective:</p>
<p>False commandments I've inherited or I'm currently living in:</p>	<p>What Jesus would say about these commandments:</p>
<p>Thoughts and negative self talk that are in my mind.</p>	<p>What Jesus actually says about me:</p>



## Blessed to be a Blessing

So far in this module, we've been doing the hard work of exposing negative aspects of our past to the redemptive power of Jesus, so that we can *move forward* in our spiritual growth.

Now, we want to look at our past from a whole new perspective. We want to recognize the generational blessings that have been handed down to us. We want to see the good, godly, and gracious things that we have inherited from our family of origin, our past experiences, and mentors and peers in the faith.

The reality is that no matter how painful the story of our past may be, there are still good things that have been passed down to us. Even the very fact that we are alive and breathing today is a testimony to that reality. There are good qualities, honorable characteristics, and important values that we have because of the family we came from. Have you ever thought, *What does it mean to be a [insert your last name]. What is the good legacy of my family that I want to pass on?*

In the first week, we looked at the story of Abraham's family from the perspective of generational sins. Let's look at it again from the perspective of generational blessing. Abraham enters the story of the Bible because God chooses him and blesses Him. God says,

*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. 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*

— **Genesis 12:2-3**

This is THE blessing of all blessings. God Himself blessed Abraham and his descendants, and it changed the world forever. Through this one family, God was going to bring His blessing to *every family on the earth*. As the story progresses, God passes this blessing down through the generations of Abraham's family. When Abraham dies, God blesses Isaac (Gen 25:11). Then Isaac passes the blessing on to Jacob, and Jacob passes it onto his children and grandchildren (Gen 32, 48-49).

But what is the blessing? It is to be God's covenant people – His special possession (Gen 17:7). *It is to belong to God and have a life giving relationship with Him*. Now comes the crazy

part – Jesus, a descendant of Abraham, has made it possible for all of us, no matter what family of origin we come from, to receive the blessing that God gave to Abraham. Paul says,

*And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.*

**— Galatians 3:29**

If you belong to Christ, if you trust in His death and resurrection for you, then you have inherited the greatest generational blessing there is. *You belong to God, and you are a part of His covenant people.* Think about that. No matter how shameful your earthly family history may be, no matter how crazy the story, *rejoice* because that story has led you to be alive today and to find yourself in the very family of God!

And just like Abraham, we are not blessed for ourselves only; *we are blessed to be a blessing.* Every blessing we have received is meant to be turned outwards to bless others. And the ultimate blessing we desire for them is to *belong to God.*

Practically this has implications for both the negative and positive aspects of our past. For the negative aspects of our past, as we've seen in previous weeks, God's blessing means freedom and redemption for the pain of our past. But God doesn't only intend to heal our pain, He intends to heal others through us. He turns our pain into purpose. Our story becomes a testimony and a ministry. Other people in our lives are stuck in the same destructive patterns and the same lies that we've walked in. God wants them to be free and to step into a new life with Him! And we are the very hands and feet of His Son Jesus to reach them.

For the positive aspects of our past, these are gracious gifts from God to bless others. For example, some of us have inherited a legacy of being wise with money. Some have inherited a strong ability to relate with people. Some have inherited integrity, or hospitality, or making people laugh. The list can go on, but the point is that we should celebrate the uniqueness of who God has made us to be, and how He has shaped us through our past. These strengths reflect His perfect character, and are meant to bless people and draw them to Him.

This week, we want to reflect on all the positive aspects of our past – the generational blessings. We want to praise God for our story, and how He has brought us into the greatest of all generational blessings. Then we want to practically engage with *blessing others* from the overflow of the reality that we belong to God.

**Exercise 1: Identify generational blessings**

Write out any patterns, scripts, traditions, and values from your family of origin that you want to carry forward to the next generation – your children, or just children you are in relationship with through family, community, church, etc. If you can't identify a blessing from your family line, it's okay. The future is wide open before you. Let the Father start a new family line through your story. Take this time to pray in that direction.

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# Self Re-Assessment

After completion of the module, how does dealing with your past make you feel? Scared? Sad? Hopeful? Guilty?

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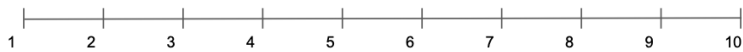
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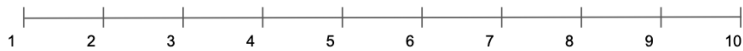
I feel defined by past failures.



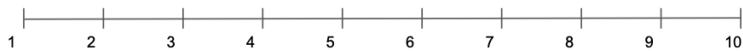
I don't focus on the past, I have more influence over my future so that's where I spend my energy.



I actively hide my past from people because I am afraid or ashamed.



I worry that what happened to me will be passed on to my kids/spouse/friends.



I am trying to make up for my past mistakes by being perfect.



When I do think about the past, I don't know what to do with those feelings.







# Practices for Week 4

**Action Steps:**

What family patterns and blessings do you want to pass on to the next generation? What negative patterns do you want to see stop in the next generation? What new things do you want to start and pass down to the next generation?

Continue:	Stop:	Start:

