

Principle 2: Break the Power of the Past

Do you remember being annoyed or hurt by something your parents or primary caregivers did, then vowing to yourself, "I will never be like this when I grow up"? Yet in our adult life we find ourselves struggling with the same character defects and unhealthy relational patterns as our parents did. Share one example.

In each generation of Abraham's line, identify:

- a. The pattern of deception
- b. the favorite child or scapegoat
- c. sibling rivalry (tension between brothers)

How do you see sins and destructive patterns passed on in this family?

"Ten Commandments" of Our Family of Origin

Growing up, each one of our families operated under a set of "commandments." Some of them were spoken and spelled out: others were unspoken and "understood." Take ten minutes to jot down any rules, attitudes, and underlying assumptions your family had in two or three of the ten areas listed below—spoken or unspoken. How does it continue to influence you today?

Examples:

Money: It's okay to spend it on others, but not on yourself." Or "If I have financial trouble, my parents can bail me out."

Success: "It's getting into the best schools."

Expressing Anger: "When you are angry, it is a sin."

Loss and Grief: "You are not allowed to be sad or depressed."

"Ten Commandments" of My Family of Origin

1. Money:
2. Success:
3. God:
4. Gender Roles:
5. Marriage:
6. Complimenting/Praising:
7. Sex:
8. Play and Recreation:
9. Expressing anger:
10. Loss and Grief

Our family of origin is the single most powerful and formative influence that has shaped the person we are today. Therefore, it makes sense that Christian discipleship is ultimately about transplanting someone from their family of origin and rooting them into the new family of Christ. Just as there were established ways of handling anger, money, conflict, sex, feelings, and the like, in our family of origin, so there are new ways of thinking and acting about these things in the family of God. Discipleship is a process of unlearning and relearning, because through Christ, we've been birthed into a new family tree!

What are one or two things that you believe God wants you to "relearn" in his family?

Refer back to the "Ten Commandments" of our family of origin question. Take a few minutes to rewrite one or two of the family of origin commandments based on your understanding of what God teaches in Scripture.

These questions help a couple get beneath the surface at how the past might be impacting the present. (Answer the questions as if 8-12 years old)

1. Describe each family member with two or three adjectives (parents, caretakers, grandparents, siblings, children.)
2. Describe your parents' (caretakers') and grandparents' marriages.
3. How was conflict handled in your extended family over two or three generations? Anger? Gender roles?
4. What were some generational themes (e.g. addictions, affairs, losses, abuse, divorce, depression, mental illness, abortions, children born out of wedlock, etc.)?
5. How well did your family do in talking about feelings?

6. How was sexuality talked or not talked about? What were the implied messages?
7. Were there any family “secrets” (such as a pregnancy out of wedlock, incest, or major financial scandal)?
8. What was considered “success” in your family?
9. How was money handled? Spirituality? Holidays? Relationships with extended family?
10. How did your family’s ethnicity shape you?
11. Were there any heroes or heroines in the family? Scapegoats? “Losers”? Why?
12. What kinds of addictions, if any, existed in the family?
13. Were there traumatic losses in the past or present, such as sudden death, prolonged illnesses, stillbirths/miscarriages, bankruptcy, or divorce?

Now, think about these:

1. What one or two patterns might emerge of how your family has impacted who you are today?
2. In what area(s) might you be shaping your life and your ministry according to your past rather than Christ’s family and truth?
3. What “hard work of discipleship” might you have before you?

Explore the Iceberg:

R=Recognize

A=Acknowledge and Accept

I=Investigate

N=Nurture

Investigate

Patterns in our lives and relationships are often a sign that we're acting out from deep places in our iceberg. They usually reveal a "bug" in our emotional programming, something that plays out over and over again in our lives. If you or a close loved one notice a "pattern of unhealth" emerging in your life, that is usually a good sign that something's amiss in your internal wiring.

Try your best to complete the statements below.

Most of the time, I feel as if I am _____

(e.g., invisible, unimportant, failing, guilty)

What often happens to me in relationships is _____

(e.g. people leave me, take advantage of me, betray me)

Why do others at work or school keep on _____ me?"

(E.g. ignoring, expecting unrealistic things of, criticizing)

When I am under stress, I often find myself _____

(e.g. fighting, angry, medicating myself, blaming others, losing myself in an unhealthy way)

When I think about the future, I feel _____

(e.g. depressed, anxious, lost, unsure)

Asking the "Whys" It takes the grace of God to get at the bottom of our iceberg. Thankfully, there are "disciplines of reflection" to help us in walking in that grace. One of these is the "Why?" or "What's going on?" question. As we notice patterns in our feelings, situations, and relationships that emerge in our lives, God desires that we ask ourselves the "Why?" question in the safety of his presence.

Share a recent situation in which you have felt some anger, frustration, fear, shame, bitterness, hate, grief, or jealousy. Use the questions below as a starting point to get at "What's going on?"

Rage/Anger: How was I hurt?

Frustration: What did I feel helpless about?

Shame: What was I hiding?

Resentment: What did I expect or hope for?

Depression: What did I lose?

Jealousy: Where did I feel inadequate?

What is one step you can take this week to look beneath the iceberg in your life. Be specific.

It takes courage to ask yourself: What am I really feeling in this situation? What's really going on here? This is especially so when you are experiencing a "negative" emotion such as anger, shame, bitterness, hate, grief, jealousy, fear, or depression. Ask yourself once again: How might God be speaking or coming to me through these emotions?

Think about your life over the last few years. See if you can discern any patterns that emerge in your relationships, family life, ministry, or work. Write down each pattern and begin to ask God to open your eyes to the "whys" behind them. **Keep a journal. Again, bring them to him in prayer.**

Emotionally Healthy Spirituality
Grace Baptist Church December 4, 2021

How Healthy is your approach to yourself?

1. I take time regularly to experience and process my anger, fear, and sadness with God and others.
2. I have a healthy awareness of my wounds, self-protectiveness, and weaknesses—and how I am tempted to sin against other people in my unguarded moments.
3. When I am triggered—have an overreaction—rather than blaming others, I settle myself down and ask. "What from my past might be causing me to react so strongly to this situation or person?"
4. I am honest with myself and a few significant others about the struggles, doubts, and hurts deep beneath the surface of my life.
5. I routinely seek out and embrace feedback from other people about how they experience my flaws as a leader (even as the leader in my family).
6. I take the time to ask hard questions of myself even when I am fearful of where the answers might lead.
7. I consistently seek out guidance from mentors, a counselor, a spiritual director, or other mature believers to help me process how my shadow manifests itself in my leadership.
8. I quickly reach out for help when I am overly stressed or engaging in unhealthy or self-destructive behaviors.
9. I am able to identify the roots of my leadership weaknesses and failures (Mixed motives, fear of what others think, anxiety, anger, etc) in my family of origin or in my personal history.
10. I am able to anticipate moments and seasons that might be difficult for me and to ask for support in advance.

The Wall

When God takes us through a Wall, we are changed. The following are four primary characteristics of life found on the other side of the Wall.

- A greater level of brokenness
- A greater appreciation for holy unknowing (mystery)
- A deeper ability to wait on God.
- A greater detachment (from the world).

Journaling can be a powerful tool to help clarify areas of life where God desires to bring transformation. It illuminates what is going on inside of us. Few tools get us to the “issue beneath the issue” like journaling.

Choose one characteristic from the above list where you sense God is seeking to work in you now. Use the space provided to journal your thoughts and feelings regarding how God is birthing something new in you and/or helping you shed incomplete or immature ideas about him.

Form a group of two or three and share how you sense God might be working in you now.

Make Incarnation Your Model for Loving Well

Hinderances to Loving others Well:

1. Not knowing how to look beneath the surface of your own life.
How will you share well parts of yourself you have never explored?
2. Unable to articulate your own respective stories growing up and how they impacted your present life. How will you probe and explore other people's unique journey when you have not seriously considered your own?
3. Unable to walk in brokenness and vulnerability. Are you loaded with defenses?
4. A lack of understanding of limits and boundaries that sometimes cause you to go beyond what God asks for, often leading to resentment toward others.
5. No knowing how to grieve with people in their pain and loss. Have I grieved my own losses?

Three Dynamics of Incarnational Life:

1. Entering into Another's World

Learn reflective listening. Take this listening test. Check those you can affirm:

1. ___ I make a great effort to enter other people's experience of life.
2. ___ I do not presume to know what the other person is trying to communicate.
3. ___ My close friends would say I listen more than I speak.
4. ___ When people are angry with me, I am able to listen to their side without getting upset.
5. ___ People share freely with me because they know I listen well.
6. ___ I listen not only to what people say but also for their nonverbal cues, body language, tone of voice, and the like.
7. ___ I give people my undivided attention when they are talking to me.
8. ___ I am able to reflect back and validate another person's feelings with empathy.
9. ___ I am aware of my primary defensive mechanisms when I am under stress, such as placating, blaming, problem-solving prematurely, or becoming distracted.
10. ___ I am aware of how the family in which I was raised has influenced my present listening style.
11. ___ I ask for clarification when I am not clear on something another person is saying rather than attempt to fill in the blanks.
12. ___ I never assume something, especially negative, unless it is clearly stated by the person speaking.
13. ___ I ask questions when listening rather than mind-read or make assumptions.
14. ___ I don't interrupt or listen for openings to get my point across when another is speaking.

15. ___ I am aware when I am listening of my own personal “hot buttons” that cause me to get angry upset, fearful, or nervous.

12 or more = outstanding listener; 8-11 = very good; 5-7 = good; 4 or fewer = “you are in trouble.”

After you score yourself, ask your spouse or closest friend to rate you as a listener. You may be surprised.

Practice:

When you are the **speaker:**

1. Speak using “I” statements (rather than “you” statements). In other words, talk about your own thoughts, feelings, and desires.
2. Keep your statements brief
3. Stop to let the other person paraphrase what you’ve said
4. Include feelings in your statements.
5. Be honest, clear, direct, and respectful.

As the **listener:**

1. Give the speaker your full attention (don’t be thinking about your rebuttal)
2. Step into the speaker’s shoes (feel what they are feeling, then get back out.)
3. Avoid judging or interpreting
4. Reflect back as accurately as you can what you heard them say (paraphrase)
5. When you think they are done ask, “Is there more?”
6. When they are done ask them, “of everything you have shared, what is the most important thing you want me to remember?”

Validation:

Validation is not necessarily agreeing with the other person but saying something like “I can see how you would see it that way” [even if I don’t agree].

“From your perspective that makes sense.”

“I can understand that.”

“That makes sense.”

The key is to say it and truly mean it, entering into the other person’s world.

This takes humility.

Exploring:

To function as a good reporter and ask questions. “Tell me more, help me understand.” How did you draw that conclusion?’ The goal is to set aside any need to respond, defend, or correct the other person. This is especially challenging when you are feeling attacked, annoyed, afraid, or angry. Exploring tests your ability to remain non-defensive. Do not think about what you are going to say next, but be attentive to their world and reality.

2. Holding On To Yourself

It is a great challenge to hold on to yourself and not lose yourself when you enter another person's world. It is ok if someone else is not happy with you. It is ok to have different convictions.

3. Living Out the Third Dynamic: Hanging between two worlds

Jesus hung between heaven and earth. Matt. 10:24 "Students are not above their teacher, nor servants above their master." When we choose to incarnate, we hang between our own world and the world of another person. We are called to remain faithful to who we are, not losing our essence, while at the same time entering into the world of another.