

Chapter 4: Relationship with Family

Part 33: I am my Family

Begin with three minutes of silence. Share something of where you are now.

I am my family

Our earliest experiences of life were in connection with formative people in our lives, primarily our parents and siblings with perhaps some relative who lived in the same house. Our concepts of ourselves developed largely in terms of the way these people saw us and related to us. We were being cast and shaped in the mould of these people using the flexible raw material that we were.

As we grew and developed, so different attitudes, dispositions and ideas grew. Where, however, we had a crisis in any area, that part became distorted and its smooth development damaged. For example, if at some time we had a frightening experience, the normal development of our trust may have been impaired and we may ever since have struggled with fear in similar situations. We also developed ways of behaving, some of which fitted in with familial expectations and some which ran counter to them. We will find in ourselves much of what our parents were for us. At times we may find ourselves responding in the same way as a parent or sibling and realise that we are not being our true selves. A particular tone of voice or the use of their words and gestures give us away here. We learned many things from our parents – both the good things and those things that are not helpful to us.

Some of these unhelpful areas may be:

- Never having seen our parents disagree or argue (or even fight). This may cause us to see them in an idealised light and then feel guilty when we see ourselves as far less than ideal.
- Not seeing our parents showing feelings, particularly our dads. This may cause us to avoid or even feel threatened by our feelings.
- Topics that were taboo and not discussed but avoided. (Some parents refuse to talk about sex, religion or politics.) This will make these areas difficult for us to explore or accept as a normal part of us.
- Our parents' prejudices or particular attitudes will tend to carry over to us and we in turn will have to own and work through them. The good ones are no problem, but the harmful ones take considerable effort and prayer.

'The sins of the parents are visited on the children to the third and fourth generations.' (Exodus 34:7) and 'The parents have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge.' (Jeremiah 31:29)

In other words, the children suffer for the ways of the parents. Children inherit all the heritage of their family, the good and the bad.

For this exercise, spend 20 minutes writing down some of your parents' mottos or life sayings and see how they apply to you. (See your own mottos of part 31.)



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- How much do you see and work with life through the eyes of your parents?
- How does this make you feel?

Journal and share in the group.

At home this week pray through and reflect on all you carry of your family and self. Express gratitude for all the goodness that you have experienced through them and begin to own some of the hard things as yours to work through.



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