



GENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF TRAUMA

Exodus 20:5–6 – “...visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

Exodus 34:6–7 – God is merciful but acknowledges iniquity passing through generations.

Numbers 14:18 – “The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

Deuteronomy 5:9–10 – Repeats the generational consequence of idolatry and sin.

Lamentations 5:7 – “Our fathers sinned and are no more; and we bear their iniquities.”

Generational transmission of trauma is a profound concept that blends insights from psychology, family systems, and theology. It speaks to how the wounds, behaviors, and patterns from one generation can ripple into the lives of the next. Let me break it down for you in clear sections:

Generational (or intergenerational) transmission of trauma refers to the way the effects of trauma experienced by one generation are passed down to subsequent generations. This can occur through:

- **Biological pathways:** Stress and trauma can affect gene expression (epigenetics), influencing how children respond to stress.
- **Psychological pathways:** Parents' unhealed trauma affects their emotional availability, parenting style, and attachment bonds.
- **Social & Cultural pathways:** Family secrets, silence, cultural stigmas, or unhealthy relational norms get repeated.

Examples:

- **Historical Trauma:** Enslavement, genocide, displacement, or colonization affecting entire groups (e.g., African Americans, Native Americans, Holocaust survivors' families).
- **Family Trauma:** Abuse, addiction, neglect, poverty, or violence shaping patterns in parenting and family systems.
- **Church/Community Context:** Spiritual abuse or unhealthy church cultures that perpetuate fear or silence across generations.



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Scripture recognizes that the brokenness of one generation can affect the next:

- “The Lord is slow to anger... yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.” (Numbers 14:18, Exodus 34:7) – highlights generational consequences.
- “In those days people will no longer say: ‘The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’” (Jeremiah 31:29–30, Ezekiel 18:2–4) – emphasizes personal responsibility and God’s justice.
- Hope in Christ: Through Jesus, the cycle can be broken. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: the old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Psychological Dynamics

- Attachment disruptions: Trauma in parents often leads to insecure attachment in children.
- Repeating patterns: Abuse, addiction, or fear becomes normalized.
- Unspoken rules: “We don’t talk about that” leads to silence and shame.
- Projection of fears: Parents project unresolved fears onto children.

Breaking the Cycle

- Awareness: Naming the trauma and how it has shaped the family system.
- Healing: Counseling, prayer, deliverance, and discipleship for those carrying inherited burdens.
- New Narratives: Telling the story differently; redeeming what happened with God’s truth.
- Intentional Parenting: Modeling healthy attachment, forgiveness, and resilience.

Spiritual Reclamation: Renouncing generational curses and embracing generational blessings in Christ.

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