



Practicing The Way

DEALING WITH YOUR PAST

What does our past mean for our present?

Very few of us want to revisit the past. But the reality is, our past has influence on our present. Who we are has been shaped by where we come from. For most of us, our family of origin is the single greatest influence on our life, for good or for evil. And no matter how healthy your family and childhood experience was, at some level every family is dysfunctional. We all inherit ways of living from our family of origin and culture that are out of sync with the way of Jesus. So a key task in our apprenticeship to Jesus is re-learning how to be human in relationship with the Father. But first, we have to go back, to go forward.

Weekly Practice

Use this practice alongside the “Genogram Handbook” available at practicingtheway.org. We recommend you work through it with a community like a small group, a weekly meal with friends or neighbors, your roommates, whatever works. Get a group of people, set a time each week to share a meal, then talk and pray for about an hour. Transformation happens in community.

Learn more about Practicing The Way
practicingtheway.org

Week 1: Generational Sin

By John Mark Comer

Begin with prayer

5 min

Gather together as a Community in a comfortable setting (around a table, on the couch, the floor of a living room, etc.). Have somebody lead a prayer asking the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together.

Debrief the teaching in small groups

15-20 min

If you are in a Community of seven or more, divide into small groups of 3–4 people each (ideally same gender).

Spend a few minutes catching up on life...

Then talk through the following debrief questions:

1. Did you listen to the teaching? What did you think?
2. How would you describe your family or origin?
3. How does the idea of dealing with your past make you feel? Scared? Terrified? Sad? Guilty?

Transition back to one large group

5 min

Ask a few questions about the last week's practice:

1. How does everybody feel about going on this journey as a Community? Scared? Excited? Unsure? Ready to bolt for the door?
2. How can we make this Community a safe place to deal with emotional pain from our past?
3. How can we "be there for each other" during this practice?

Read this overview

Who we are today has been directly shaped by where we come from. Put another way, our present has been directly shaped by our past. For most of us, the single greatest influence on our life other than Jesus is our family of origin. Not only the color of our skin, our height, or our genetic code, but our strengths and weakness, the patterns of how we relate to other people and deal with conflict, the values we live by, the faith we practice - all of this and more has been shaped by our past - specifically our family and childhood.

No family is perfect. At some level, every family is dysfunctional. We all have some kind of “emotional baggage” that we carry from our past. And this baggage often holds us back from the life of freedom and joy that Jesus has for us. Dealing with our past is one of the first steps in our apprenticeship to Jesus. We have to “go back to go forward.”

We begin our Practice by making our own genogram. A genogram is a visual map of your family tree, and it’s used to identify 1. generational sins, 2. relational patterns, 3. scripts, 4. blessings, and more. We’ll start our genogram this week, but it will take several more weeks to fill it out and finish. Take your time. Go at your own pace. Let God give you his peace as you work through this Practice.

Week one of our Practice is focused on generational sins. Our goal is to identify and then to begin to break off sins in our own life that go back for generations.

Please note, this is one of the hardest practices in our apprenticeship to Jesus, but it’s also one of the most powerful. If you’re up for it, dealing with your past could unleash your future in ways you never dreamed possible.

Open to the Bible together

10 min

Have somebody read Genesis 26v1-11

Talk about the following questions:

1. Here we see Isaac repeating the same sin as his father - lying about his wife, calling her his sister, and exposing the woman he loved to great danger to save his own skin. In what ways have you seen generational sins like this one play out in your own family? (Please only share what you feel ready to share with your Community)
2. Have you ever thought about sins in your own life going back to your parents’ lives? Or your grandparents’ or great-grandparents’ lives?
3. Do you live under any kind of fear that if you ever have children, you will pass on a generational sin to them?

Talk about the coming week’s practice as a Community

10–30 min

Here’s the practice for the coming week:

- Watch the Genogram Tutorial.
- Then take out your Genogram Workbook and start on page 1. Our first step is to fill out our Genograms, going back as far as we can (ideally 3-4 generations). For now, just fill in names, and we’ll add symbols next week.
- On page 2, there’s a list of questions to help you navigate the next few weeks of Practice. Don’t feel like you need to answer them all. Maybe tackle a few each week. Each week, you’ll start to have “aha” moments of revelation. When those come, write them down in a journal or your workbook, and share them with somebody in your Community.
- Once you have your genogram done, there are five exercises to do over the coming week.

Note: The following four exercises are found on pages 3 – 4 of your Genogram Workbook.

Exercise 1: Key Events

- Fill out the four boxes of key events:
- In “Trauma” write in any traumatic moments in your own life - the death of a parent or sibling, a divorce, growing up in poverty (or wealth), a childhood disease or accident, moving every two years in an Army family, etc. You’re looking for key events that shaped you in ways you might not yet have realized. For example, people who grew up frequently moving (say, in an Army family or an expat family), often have difficulties with relational intimacy later in life. Making those connections is the first step toward freedom.
- In “Redemptive Moments” write in any redemptive moments in your own life - getting saved in high school, getting into your dream college, your parent getting sober, moving to a new city or school where you discovered something you loved, a best friend, etc. You’re looking for key events that Jesus has used for good in your life.
- In the second column, do the exact same thing, but for your family going back 3-4 generations. Under “Trauma”, put things like the premature death of a grandparent, a family scandal, an illegitimate child, etc. Under redemptive moments, put things like an ancestor coming to follow Jesus, or immigrating to America, etc.
- Remember: you’re trying to identify key events that have made you who you are.

Exercise 2: Generational Sins

- List out any generational sins in your life and in your family going back 3-4 generations. For example, things like alcoholism, anger, adultery, abuse, etc.
- If you feel safe, this can be a very healthy conversation to have with a sibling, parent, or grandparent.
- Spend some time in prayer over each sin you write down on the list. Ask the Father, “What do you want to say to me about that?”
- When you finish your list, before you move on, ask the Father, “Are there any generational sins I’m missing here?”
- Pause for a moment and remember the death of Jesus on your behalf, to “forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1v9)

Exercise 3: Generational Brokenness

- List out any generational brokenness in your life and in your family going back 3-4 generations.
- “Brokenness” is a much larger category that includes anything outside of what God intended in the beginning. For example, things like premature death, disease, infertility, miscarriages, addiction, obesity, mental illness, eating disorders or unhealthy relationships with food, poverty, wealth, cult practices such as Freemasonry or Scientology, etc.
- Spend some time in prayer over each item on the list. Ask the Father, “Is there anything I need to know about this?”
- When you finish your list, before you move on, ask the Father, “Is there any generational brokenness I’m missing here?”
- Pause for a moment and remember this line from Paul’s letter to the Romans: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8v28)

Exercise 4: Generational Sins and Brokenness That I Carry Forward

- Now it's time to put it all together. This will be the most difficult exercise so far, but also the most important.
- Look over your lists of generational sins and brokenness. Write down anything that you carry forward in your own life.
- Spend some time in prayer over each item on the list. You might need to spend some time asking God for forgiveness or asking for grace to change.
- Ask the Father, "Is there anything you want to say about these sins in my life and family line?" Remember, conviction is from the Holy Spirit, but shame and guilt are never from God. Silence the voices of shame and guilt in your heart and mind. Open yourself up to the voice of the Holy Spirit, who has direct access to your interior world.
- Pause for a moment and sit in this declaration of God's name from Exodus: "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation." Realize that the number one description of God's character is "compassionate." Sit in the reality that God's baseline emotion toward you is mercy.
- If you're up for it, share this list with your Community or a close friend that you trust. Don't go on this journey alone!

Work through these discussion questions

10-15 min

1. Any thoughts, creative ideas, or feedback on this coming week's Practice?
2. What do you think will be the most difficult part for you?
3. Do you feel guilty exposing the sins and brokenness of your parents and grandparents? If so, what's a healthy way to deal with that?

Close in prayer

10 min

Week 2: Relational Patterns

By Bethany Allen

Begin with prayer

5 min

Gather together as a Community in a comfortable setting (around a table, on the couch, the floor of a living room, etc.). Have somebody lead a prayer asking the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together.

Debrief the teaching in small groups

15-20 min

If you are in a Community of seven or more, divide into small groups of 3–4 people each (ideally same gender).

Spend a few minutes catching up on life...

Then talk through the following debrief questions:

1. Did you listen to the teaching? What did you think?
2. Did you find it difficult to complete your genogram? Why or why not?
3. What was one insight, event, or pattern from your family of origin that was surprising or new to you? If nothing stood out to you, then share the event or pattern from your family of origin that you believe has had the greatest impact on your life to date.

Transition back to one large group

5 min

Ask a few questions about the last week's Practice:

1. Any stories from the last week's Practice with which you would like to encourage the whole group?
2. Any "aha" moments of breakthrough?
3. Any highs or lows?

Read this overview

Going back isn't always easy.

As many of you have discovered, identifying generational sin and brokenness is not a task for the faint of heart. But the ultimate goal is to develop a framework of your life that will help you identify where you come from, so that you can better understand who you are, and where you're going.

As we press further into our past we will discover that there are not only sins, but also patterns in our family of origin that have had great influence and power over our lives. Patterns, by their very definition, are repetitious and for that reason many of these patterns have served as platforms upon which we've built our lives. But if our foundation is cracked, our whole house is in danger.

In week two of our Practice we will focus on identifying relational patterns from our family of origin and how those patterns have impacted our ability to relate to others, and to God. After all, how you relate is how you relate.

We'll focus on identifying relational patterns like, separation, divorce, remarriage, abandonment, adoption, emotional unavailability, etc., and then start to identify more subtle and covert relational patterns we have learned in our family of origin or early years that continue to shape the way we relate to others and God today.

Please don't let this practice scare you. Trust the Holy Spirit to help you with the task ahead and lean on your Community for emotional support.

Open to the Bible together

10 min

We were created as emotional beings and as we press into things from our past we are bound to experience a range of emotions. With that, it's important for us to remember that God has gone there before us and is able to meet us in those places.

Have somebody read Psalm 139v13-18

Talk about the following questions:

1. As you read this Psalm, what phrase stands out or is comforting to you and why?
2. How does this Psalm help you to feel more loved and valued by God?
3. How does the fact that God knows you intimately affect you, specifically as you look at your past?

Talk about the coming week's practice as a Community

10–30 min

Please note, we expect this exercise to take about 1-2 hours, and it may require you to connect with a family member or two.

Exercise 1: Relational Patterns

- Pull out your genogram workbook from last week. Settle into a comfortable, quiet place, and put away any other distractions.
- Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your mind and heart, and give your peace through this exercise.
- Review your genogram, then turn to pg. 5 and fill in the following relational patterns using the key provided.
 - Separation, divorce, remarriage, abandonment, adoption, relational enmeshment, codependency,

emotional unavailability, sexual relationships, living together, sexism, cutoffs, cutoffs repaired, closeness distant relationships, sexual abuse, physical abuse, or emotional abuse.

- Take a few minutes and identify and write down any relational patterns you've discovered. Listed below are a few examples of what to look for:
 - Patterns of births, deaths, natural crisis
 - Patterns of closeness and distance
 - Patterns of emotional availability, codependency, and depth
 - Patterns of emotional cut-offs or enmeshment
 - Patterns of dominance or submission
- At this point be mindful about the emotions you are feeling. Invite and allow the Holy Spirit to help you identify and process these emotions.
- Journal: Take a few minutes to write how doing this exercise has emotionally impacted you.
- Pray: ask God to comfort you, protect you, and continue to help you make connections between your past and present.

Exercise 2: Attachment Theory

- Read through each of the listed attachment styles on page 6.
- Take a few minutes and pray. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you review the attachment styles listed.
- Check the box that you feel applies to and describes your relational default.
 - Please note these are not prescriptive. Do your best to identify the style that best fits you.
- If you're married or dating seriously, talk through your findings with your spouse or significant other.
- If you want to go deeper on this exercise, see a therapist or couples counselor. (You can refer to Bridgetown's suggested list of counselors.)

Exercise 3: Evil for Good

- Locate the third box of week 2 in your genogram workbook on page 6, read and respond to the following question: What evil things in your life and family history has God used for good? And how?
- Answering and thinking through this question should foster a spirit of gratitude. Take a minute or two to thank God for his ability to heal, transform and deliver.
- If you want, re-read the story of Joseph from the end of Genesis. Meditate on Genesis 50v19-21. Look for parallels to your own story.

Work through these discussion questions

10-15 min

1. Any thoughts, creative ideas, or feedback on this coming week's Practice?
2. What do you think will be the most difficult part for you?
3. Do you feel guilty exposing the sins and brokenness of your parents and grandparents? If so, what's a healthy way to deal with that?

Close in prayer

10 min

Week 3: Narrative Scripts

By Bethany Allen

Begin with prayer

5 min

Gather together as a Community in a comfortable setting (around a table, on the couch, the floor of a living room, etc.). Have somebody lead a prayer asking the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together.

Debrief the teaching in small groups

15-20 min

If you are in a Community of seven or more, divide into small groups of 3–4 people each (ideally same gender).

Spend a few minutes catching up on life...

Then talk through the following debrief questions:

1. Did you listen to the teaching? What did you think?
2. Were you able to identify a few relational patterns in your family of origin? Was it difficult to do? Why or Why not?
3. What do you think was helpful about identifying an attachment style?
4. If you're able, share one thing from your life and family history that was evil, but that God has used for good. And how?

Transition back to one large group

5 min

Ask a few questions about the last week's Practice:

1. Any stories from the last week's Practice with which you would like to encourage the whole group?
2. Any "aha" moments of breakthrough?
3. Any highs or lows?

Read this overview

As we observed last week, each of us have inherited some kind of framework or pattern from our family for how we exist in relationship.

But that's not all you inherited.

From our family of origin and from key life events we have developed something called narrative scripts. Narrative scripts are messages from our life that inform our behavior. These scripts are essentially our way of making sense of the world around us. Our narrative scripts are usually rooted in our family of origin and are often linked to messages that were spoken over us, about us, or to us. These scripts can also come from our understanding and interpretation of ourselves through difficult or traumatic life events.

Since narrative scripts are largely rooted in our family of origin, and our family of origin is not perfect, we can rightfully assume that not all of our scripts may be true or accurate. Meaning, it is essential for us to identify and learn the narrative scripts that have and are influencing our lives.

In Week 3 of our Practice, we will focus on identifying our narrative scripts. For many, the most influential messages you received came from your parents. This is where we will start. From there we'll identify the messages we received from key events in our lives, and then we'll take time to identify the messages you believe and are living into today.

Optional: Many may have a hard time getting started on this practice. If you're wondering what one of your scripts may be, you could (bravely) ask a friend, parent, or someone in your community if there is something you repeatedly say about yourself, others, God, or life in general. This is often a good indicator of a narrative script that has or has had influence over your life.

Open to the Bible together

10 min

As we continue to press into our past, it is important and helpful to remember the nearness, kindness, and faithfulness of God. Wherever you find yourself on this journey, remember that you lack nothing good in his presence and that he lovingly draws near as you call out to him.

Have somebody read Psalm 34v1-10

Talk about the following questions:

1. As you read this Psalm, what phrase stands out or is encouraging to you and why?
2. How are you currently looking to God for protection, provision, or a taste of his goodness?
3. In this scripture, we see the Psalmist recount God's faithfulness, what is one way that God has been faithful to you on this journey of dealing with your past. How have you responded to his faithfulness?

Talk about the coming week's practice as a Community

10-30 min

Here's the Practice for the coming week:

Note: Many of your narrative scripts will come from specific memories from your past. Therefore, it is very important to allow yourself space and time for memories to come up. We suggest doing this practice in a peaceful, distraction-free environment.

You may also want to have a separate sheet of paper or a notebook available for this exercise.

Step 1: Messages I received from my Father or paternal caretaker

- Pull out your Genogram Workbook from last week. Settle into a comfortable, quiet place, and put away any other distractions. Turn to page 7.
- Invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your mind and heart, and to give you discernment and insight throughout this exercise.
- Jot down the messages you received about life from your father or a paternal caretaker. (e.g. “Failure is not an option” or “Life isn’t easy or fair, but it is good.”)
- Jot down the messages you received about yourself from your father or paternal caretaker. (e.g. “You’re lazy” or “You are beautiful just the way you are”)
- Next, ask the Holy Spirit to show you a memory that might give you insight into the messages your father or paternal caretaker passed on to you about life.
 - What is the message you received based on that memory?
 - Ask the Holy Spirit if there are any other memories he wants to show you.
- Now ask the Holy Spirit to show you a memory that might give you insight into the messages your father or paternal caretaker passed on to you about yourself – this includes your worth, value, place, competencies, failures, successes, etc.
 - Ask the Holy Spirit if there are any other memories he wants to show you.

Step 2: Messages I received from my Mother or maternal caretaker

- Jot down the messages you received about life from your mother or a maternal caretaker. (e.g. “No one will ever care about you more than you care for yourself” or “Money is the key to a happy life”)
- List the messages you received about yourself from your Mother or maternal caretaker. (e.g. “Your weight is the barometer for your beauty” or “You are special”)
- Next, ask the Holy Spirit to show you a memory that might give you insight into the messages your mother or maternal caretaker passed on to you about life.
 - What is the message you received based on that memory?
 - Ask the Holy Spirit if there are any other memories he wants to show you.
- Now ask the Holy Spirit to show you a memory that might give you insight into the messages your Mother or maternal caretaker passed on to you about yourself – this includes your worth, value, place, competencies, failures, successes, etc.
 - Ask the Holy Spirit if there are any other memories he wants to show you.

Step 3: Messages I received from key life events

- Jot down key life events that have shaped or impacted you. (e.g. divorce, death, loss, abuse, financial stress, etc.)
- List the messages you received from these key life events (e.g. “You’re all alone” or “Money is security”)
- Next, ask the Holy Spirit to bring to your mind any other key life events that you may have missed or forgotten. If there are more, be sure to record the messages you received. (e.g. “No one is safe.”)

Step 4: Cumulative Messages I Believe (beliefs may or may not be true)

- Take a few minutes and read through the messages you have listed.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to show you the messages you believe. Don't be afraid to wait on the Holy Spirit.
- List the messages you are believing.
- Now, ask the Holy Spirit to show you whether those messages are true or not true.
 - Some may be easy to identify, but others may not. Don't rush this – take time and allow the Holy Spirit to show you the truth.
- Next to each of the messages you've listed, mark whether they are true or not true.
- Spend a few minutes praying over the messages you have marked "not true"
 - Ask the Holy Spirit to show you the truth related to that specific message.
 - Take a few more minutes and write down the truth he reveals.
 - Now, ask him to exchange the old, untrue, narrative scripts with the truth he revealed.
- Close your time by thanking God for his help and truth.

Work through these discussion questions

10-15 min

1. Any thoughts, creative ideas, or feedback on this coming week's practice?
2. Is there anyone you need to connect with this week, maybe a sibling or a parent, who could help give you better insight into your narrative scripts?
3. What are the emotional roadblocks or defenses you might be tempted to put up as you do this exercise?
4. What is most daunting about discovering and gaining insight into your narrative scripts?

Close in prayer

10 min

Week 4: Generational Blessing

By John Mark Comer

Begin with prayer

5 min

Gather together as a Community in a comfortable setting (around a table, on the couch, the floor of a living room, etc.). Have somebody lead a prayer asking the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together.

Debrief the teaching in small groups

15-20 min

If you are in a Community of seven or more, divide into small groups of 3–4 people each (ideally same gender).

Spend a few minutes catching up on life...

Then talk through the following debrief questions:

1. Did you listen to the teaching? What did you think?
2. Doing this practice, what narrative scrips were revealed to you?
3. Did your time in listening prayer and/or community replace any lies you've been believing with truth?

Transition back to one large group

5 min

Ask a few questions about the last week's Practice:

1. Did you have any revelations or breakthrough moments from the last week's practice that you would like to encourage the whole Community with?
2. Would somebody be willing to share a narrative script that was revealed to you through this practice? Maybe a lie you've been believing?
3. What are ways we can help speak truth into your life to counter the lie?

Read this overview

It's been a long, hard four weeks, but now we're finally ready for the pay off. The focus of this week's practice will be on generational blessing.

In the teaching, we looked at the story of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and his twelve sons - four generations that formed the nucleus of Israel. But this time, we didn't look at generational sins, but generational blessings. The reality is, that family was a mix bag of good and bad. Most families are like that.

A key task in our apprenticeship to Jesus is to identify the patterns that we inherited from our family of origin, but then to decide which patterns we need to stop, start, and/or continue. But especially, the goal this week is to identify the “blessing” or “heritage” that you carry from your family line, if there is one. To celebrate it. Thank God for it. And then make sure it lives on in the next generation.

To that practice we now turn. This week should be a lot of fun.

Open to the Bible together

10 min

Have somebody read Genesis 12v1-3

Talk about the following questions:

1. Abraham’s blessing was passed down from generation to generation. What are some blessings that you’ve inherited from your family or origin?
2. God’s promise was to bless every nation on earth through Abraham’s family. Why do think families play such a key role in God’s plan for the world? In a society where the family is rapidly breaking down, what does this say about how we do family in the church? And in this little community?

Talk about the coming week’s practice as a Community

10–30 min

Here’s the practice for the coming week:

- This week is the roadmap for how to move forward. After four emotionally grueling weeks, we’re finally ready to put it all together with three simple exercises.
 - If you’re single, now is a great time to clarify what you want to break and what you want to carry forward into the generations that come after you.
 - This is an especially helpful practice to do if you’re a newly married or just starting a family. You now carry two very different family of origins into a new family unit. The result will be a whole new combination. What will you keep? What will you discard? What will you contribute? Spend time together going over your list of stop, start, and/or continue.

Exercise 1: Stop

- Write out any patterns, scripts, traditions, and values from your family of origin that you want to break.
 - Think over the last three weeks of exercises and glean the highlights.

Exercise 2: Start

- Write out any patterns, scripts, traditions, and values that you want to start with your generation.
 - It might be a simple script like, “The family that plays together, stays together.” Or a fun tradition like always cutting down a Christmas tree the day after Thanksgiving. Or it might be a value for

community or generosity or the practice of Sabbath. Anything goes here. Dream a little. Then see those dreams become reality.

Exercise 3: Continue

- 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 due to the emotional pain of your story, don't let it ruin you. 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.
 - This is a key part of the practice. It's essential that we identify the blessing of our family line, thank God for it, and carry it forward.

Work through these discussion questions

10-15 min

1. Any thoughts, creative ideas, or feedback on this coming week's practice?
2. If you had to summarize your family's "blessing" in one sentence, what would you say?
3. If you have children, or hope to have them in the future, what is the main blessing you hope to pass on to your own kids?
4. If you're not sure about kids, how can you pass on your blessing to the next generation? Is it through a niece or nephew, a child in your community, a student you mentor, a kid from church, or some other way?

Close in prayer

10 min