

Cast a Long Shadow

Bruce Bird—April 26, 2025

Should we live generationally? I say yes, because back in 1974 there was a man by the name of Harry Chapman that wrote a song called *Cats in the Cradle*. Most of you will remember it from 50-odd years ago. It goes like this.

My child just arrived the other day. He came into the world in the usual way. But there were planes to catch and bills to pay. He learned to walk when I was away. He was talking before I knew it, and as he grew up, he said, 'I'm going to be just like you, Dad. I'm going to be just like you.' And then the chorus says: when you're coming home, Dad? I don't know when. But when we do, well get together. Well have a good time then.

And the song progresses along. The boy becomes a man, and he's involved in his pursuits. Dad's involved in his pursuits. And he realizes that, I don't think were going to develop that relationship that I'd planned on. It never really happened. He says, as I hung up the phone, it occurred to me, 'the boy was just like me. The boy was just like me.' And the song is so indicative of the lives we live.

We get so busy in everything that we kind of pass things by. And he realized that was not going to happen. He was just like me. That's the international influence, or universal influence, that one generation can have on a next generation. Family traits are passed down from one generation to the next, whether positive traits or negative traits. Some of these may be positive and beneficial, and others may be destructive. But you have to live and think generationally.

When God calls us, He opens our mind. We may not realize how our relationship with Him is going to impact us and future generations, yet to come. One family member can impact other family members. But we have to live and think generationally.

- How should we do this?
- Why should we do this?
- What are the benefits if we do?

Exodus 20:5: "You shall not bow yourself down to them, nor serve them, for I, the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands of those who love Me and keep My commandments." (vs 5-6).

God blesses those who are obedient to Him, and He doesn't bless those who aren't. And curses

are the result of breaking God's Law, and many sins are perpetuated. Often the next generation, they're the ones who pay big time. Their children born with fetal alcohol syndrome, we see that quite a bit around these parts. Some are born with drug addictions, no fault of the poor little kid. Some families have their own strengths, their own weaknesses.

In this district, I've been here since I was one-year-old. I know some of our families in the district for five generations, and I see some of those strengths down through from old great-great-granddad and grandma right down to today. Of course, they can see in my family, as well.

Often certain natural endowments are inherited from birth, perhaps long life or maybe some predisposition toward low blood pressure or high blood pressure or diabetes or heart disease. Those also can be passed on, too. Grandparents and parents *cast a long shadow*, whether they realize it or not, whether good or bad. We'll check into some of those today.

I never had a grandfather. They were both dead when I came along, but I had an old grandma. She was a matriarch. She never drank, never smoked, never cussed. She was a good big help in the community. I don't know what she did, actually. I guess she had fun doing something. She raised six good kids anyway. They're all dead and gone now, but they've left a lasting memory. It's a heritage that she passed on. Some of us come from family backgrounds like this, or

- defeatism
- divorce
- pessimism
- selfishness
- greed
- anger
- addictive personalities
- laziness

and we've got to break those!

Unless we break this curse, these traits are passed on down to our children and to our great-grandchildren. Often these continue until somebody realizes somewhere along the line says, 'I've got to change things,' and they do.

Our kids grew up at our feet in the Worldwide Church of God. Our daughter took to the piano and she would play hymns for us at Church from age 12 up. Friday nights, we would go through the hymns; I often did the song leading. Our son

now is an elder or a deacon in one of our sister Churches. So, those are the best of times, and I have the warmest memories for those things.

2-Tim. 1—we find here a letter from Paul to young Timothy. Paul showed that even one parent or grandparent can have a remarkable effect on a young person growing up. Young Timothy had the benefit of being taught the Scriptures by his mother and his grandmother. What a wonderful influence that would be.

1-Timothy 1:5: “When I remember the unfeigned faith that is in you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice, and I am convinced that it dwells in you also.”

Of course, Timothy’s father was a Gentile. He was not a believer in the faith, but his grandma and mother was. Young Timothy grew up to be a co-worker alongside the Apostle Paul. So, you often wonder, was Timothy home-schooled? Probably, we don’t know.

The Bible has a number of examples that we should look to as generational. Abraham comes to mind, one of the first ones.

James 2:23: “...‘Now, Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness’; and he was called a friend of God.”

Gen. 13—there’s a lot said here about Abraham. Abraham rejected the pagan sinful culture of his family line. He chose a new and a positive way of life when he left his own home.

I read in the account of Jasher. I love that book. It’s not the inspired Word of God, but it parallels the life and times of our old patriarchs. If you do the math, Shem outlived Abraham. Noah was still alive when Abraham was a young man. Jasher says he spent time with his old grandparents. Wow! What a benefit that would be! What a heritage to pass on!

Anyway, Abraham was called ‘the father of the faithful.’ God made specific promises to him about the future of his descendants, because we see that here:

Genesis 13:16: “And I will make your seed as the dust of the earth, so that if a man can count the dust of the earth, then shall your seed also be counted.”

Nobody can count the dust of the earth; that means a lot of us.

Genesis 12:2: “And I will make of you a great nation. And I will bless you and make your name great. And you shall be a blessing. And I will bless those that bless you and curse the one who

curses you. And in you shall all families of the earth be blessed” (vs 2-3).

What a heritage to pass on. Blessings and cursings. The entire world came to be blessed through Abraham, because he was the father of the faithful!

- he was faithful
- he broke the patterns of past generations
- he embarked upon a new way of life

Let’s take a look here at Acts 13. in the New Testament, and well see what we can find here, which relates to the same theme. Here we find a generational living.

When we consider King David, for instance, such an example that he will be king again (Ezek. 37). Future tense, he will be, David will be king. He will rule again. He’s been dead for generations, centuries, so that is future tense. A promise!

Acts 13:22: “And after removing him, He raised up David to be their king; to whom He also gave testimony, saying, ‘I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will perform all My will’”—and he did!

This man’s seed—as God, according to His promise—raised up to Israel a Savior Jesus. We know that Jesus Christ was a descendant of King David, as was Abraham. So, he was a descendant of Abraham.

Now, 1 Kings 15, we can turn to 1 Kings chapter 15, back to the Old Testament again, because King Abijam was a great grandson of King David, and *he did cast a long shadow*, even all those years, like 50 years later, after David was dead? We’ll find that out right here, because Abijam was not faithful to God’s Word.

1-Kings 15:1: “And in the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam the son of Nebat, Abijam reigned over Judah. He reigned three years in Jerusalem. And his mother’s name was Maachah, the daughter of Abishalom. And he walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him. And his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God as the heart of David his father” (vs 1-3).

So, he didn’t cut it. It was 50 years afterwards. Did David cast a long shadow that Abijam would benefit from? Because David, the Lord, kept Jerusalem, or the God kept Jerusalem safe because of David.

Verse 4: “But for David’s sake the LORD his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem to set up his son after him and to establish Jerusalem because David did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and did not turn aside from all that He commanded

him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite” (vs 4-5).

So this is 50 years after David is dead and gone and buried. We’re finding David cast a long shadow that looked after descendants thereafter, 50 years later.

2-Kings 20—we’ll find more of the same. Here we find the account of King Hezekiah. He’s sick in bed, He’s dying and the Assyrians are at the gate. They want to destroy Jerusalem. What is he going to do? Well, it does not look good for him at all, but Isaiah brings him some news”

2-Kings 20:5: “Return again and tell Hezekiah the prince of My people, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father, “I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears. Behold, I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD. And I will add fifteen years to your days. And I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria. And I will defend this city for My own sake, and for My servant David’s sake”’” (vs 5-6). Brethren, this is 250 years after David is dead!

- How could we do this?
- Would our presence here send a shadow 250 years into the future?
- Why not? David is a man just like us, only he’s special!

Even if we send a shadow that went 10 years, I guess that wouldn’t be too bad. It’ll work both way for good or evil. Now, here’s a story of an example that went back just before the America’s Civil War. Anyway, there are two examples were going to cover.

Example #1: In 1874, a member of the New York State Prison Board noticed that six members of the same family were incarcerated at the same time. And they looked into it. They said, why should this be?

They traced the family line back to an ancestor born in 1720, a man who is considered useless, worthless, a brawler, lazy, had a reputation as a town troublemaker. He was also alcoholic and viewed as having low moral character. What does he do? He complicates his life! He goes and marries a woman with the same problems. They have six daughters and two sons, and 154 years later, this is what the report revealed of these 1,200 people from these two:

- 310 were hopeless and homeless
- 160 were prostitutes
- 180 suffered from drug and alcohol abuse
- 150 were criminals who spent time in prison, including seven for murder

The report also found the state of New York, at this time, had spent \$1.5 million on these people trying to ‘re-get’ them back in society and get them going to care. They found that there was not one member who made a significant contribution to society.

So sadly, we can see from this example how **powerful dysfunction is** on through the generations.

Example #2: Together, they had 11 children. Eventually, he became the president of the Princeton University. And here is what the study revealed—1874—this is over 171 years:

- 13 were college presidents
- 65 were college professors
- 100 were attorneys
- 32 were state judges

Now, this doesn’t mean they were perfect either, BUT:

- 85 were authors of classic books
- 66 were physicians
- 80 held political office, including:
- 3 state governors
- 3 were state senators
- 1 became Vice President of the United States

What a difference it makes in the kind of example and the values that are passed on down from a patriarch to matriarch over 174 years!

Those people got to be out there still living with us today. One wonders: Why was I called? You probably wondered that! Could it have been that a grandfather or a grandmother or a parent did some praying about this thing?

Maybe one day somebody in this family will start reading their Bible and turn the mess around. You know, you wonder. My old Grandpa Pierce had a fire in his belly, he was a good Sunday-keeper. And he set a good example. Saturday afternoons, they would go to town for shopping. The women would do the shopping and the men would pick up a few things. And usually, they’d all go to the pub. Well, come time to go home, Grandpa Pierce didn’t have to go to the pub. Or Grandma did not have to go to the pub to find him.

If any of you remember, years back, the Salvation Army used to come out on Main Street and they had a band and they’d play hymns. If you stood too close, you had a hymn book shoved in your face and you were expected to sing. And that’s where they’d find Grandpa.

So, he set a sterling example to his children and grandchildren that he’s respected to this day. Now, parents with negative or positive attitudes tend to produce offspring who mirror these lifestyles, and

we find that in Deut. 30. We find those lifestyles perpetuated.

But it doesn't have to be a wrecked life. We can be the Abraham or the David in our lineage. We can break the curse of family dysfunctionality in our families. God wants us to be productive and happy.

Deuteronomy 30:19: "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Therefore, choose life, so that both you and your seed may live."

So he's saying here, He wants us to choose the right way. There are so many panhandlers that they all have a story and not many will climb out of it. Here's a story from the Good News magazine from 2007 by an individual in UCG [United Church of God]. He said, I had a personal interest in this subject for a number of reasons. My own grandfather immigrated to United States from England in 1905. My family and I don't know exactly what kind of a culture he came out of, but it certainly was negative as reflected by his parenting style. When his sons reached 13 years of age, he would force them to leave home and start supporting themselves.

Brethren, at 13-years-old, you're just a kid. That's got to have devastating effects. My father was put in this position with terrible consequences. Even though he grew to become a skilled tool and dye maker, he also became an alcoholic and he was isolated from his family. He says,:

My mother left him because of this and other abuse when he was just a small boy. My father became transient to avoid child support and he was isolated. Sadly, he ended up taking his own life in a trailer, a dilapidated trailer home that he owned.

A very sad story. In spite of this, he says:

I was fortunate for two reasons, he says: My mother remarried this time to a fine man who modeled excellent values and strong work ethics. So, he's turning around. She chose to turn things around, I was blessed.

He comes into Worldwide Church of God. He meets a lady there. They get married. They have kids. Now they've got grandchildren. The years are rolled by and life is good. But it's because somebody broke that cycle of dysfunctionality!

That's a tragic story. But the second resurrection will look after these poor individuals that don't have a... kicked out at 13! It messes your whole life up. Pretty tough sledding!

The choices we make don't just affect ourselves, but also our children and generations yet unborn. It would be wise to think generationally because it can benefit or harm our future generations. A lot of families are searching their ancestry. Maybe in the family tree one day, one descendant may say, 'here is where it turned around and we cleaned up our act as our family.' It can go either way.

When people think of us, do warm memories flood their mind? Because I think of lots of my friends and warm memories come to me!

Do they think of warm memories than they think of us? I guess we've got to work on that one! Anyway, the good news is we don't have to do it all alone. God offers His Spirit so we can put a stop to the destructive habits that make and make a more productive life and self and for others.

There's a story of a young man' he wasn't young, he's younger than me anyway, so he's young. We'll call him George.

I met him at the Church in Calgary back in 2008. He looked like he'd had a rough life. I found out what his story was. George ended up in a motorcycle gang doing drugs, selling booze, selling guns, using guns, almost killed a man. I said, 'George, why did you do all this?' He says:

Well, I had a pretty rough upbringing. My dad used to beat us pretty bad. We had to become invisible. If we made any noise, he'd beat us. We had to learn to cry without making any noise.

It's got to be tough. And the old man raped his daughter, George's sister. So, these are pretty hard things to deal with. I said, 'Well, do you have any kind of relation with him?' He says:

Well, funny thing, yeah. I was out there a long time back. I saw him getting onto the pickup truck and he was holding on to a couple of sticks and he's all frail and weak. I went over and I hugged him.

I thought, WOW! And he said:

All my anger and hurt floated away.

I thought, WOW, how could he do that? That is amazing! So I said, 'You've established a rapport with him.'

Yeah, I have.

What about your siblings?

It ain't gonna happen in this life!

Brethren, here again is the old second resurrection! It's gonna save a lot of lives. You

wonder, what did the old man go through? I don't know. But there's a lot of hurt out there! What a family tree and what a legacy to not pass down. That's kind of what we find in:

Gal. 5:19—here we find the works of the flesh!

- Did we find that in George's life? Yes, we did!
- Is George still alive? I don't know!

He fell through the cracks somewhere and I don't know where he is or what... That was a number of years ago.

Galatians 5:19: "Now, the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, strifes, jealousies, indignations, contentions, divisions..." (vs 19-20)

You might say the Democrats, and for Canada, the liberals and the NDP.

Verse 21: "Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such things as these; concerning which I am telling you beforehand, even as I have also said in the past, that those who do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God."

Wow! That's obvious. But some family trees need to be replanted. What are the kind of seeds that are going to help them replant that seed? Well, we can find that in:

Verse 22: "But **the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, meekness, self-control; against such things there is no law**" (vs 22-23).

Scriptural References:

- 1) Exodus 20:5-6
- 2) 2-Timothy 1:5
- 3) James 2:23
- 4) Genesis 13:16
- 5) Genesis 12:2-3
- 6) Acts 13:22
- 7) 1-Kings 15:1-5
- 8) 2-Kings 20:5-6
- 9) Deuteronomy 20:14
- 10) Galatians 5:19-23

Scripture referenced, no quoted: Ezekiel 37

BB:bo/po
Transcribed: 5/1/25

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