THE DYNAMICS OF INTERGENERATIONAL BEHAVIOR AND FORGIVENESS THERAPY

By: Susan Jones

Presented at:
NACSW Convention 2012
October, 2012
St. Louis, MO

Susan Jones, MSW

The Dynamics of Intergenerational Behavior and Forgiveness Therapy

University of Nebraska at Omaha

Abstract

In this article the author presents an overview of various research themes regarding the dynamics of intergenerational behaviors. Intergenerational behaviors can be presented through ancestry lines as attitudes, beliefs, actions and habits. These intergenerational transmissions can present in a positive manner such as determination, hard work and success, or in a negative manner such as rage, greed and pride. This article will focus on how the negative intergenerational transmissions affect individuals and families. The social work field is committed to helping those suffering from issues such as addiction, depression, abuse (emotional, physical, sexual), fear, manipulation, violence and low self-esteem. In most cases, these behaviors are not only prevalent in the life of the individual, but in additional family members as well, and can be traced through intergenerational family lines. In an effort to help these individuals break free from their suffering, it is imperative that social workers understand how intergenerational behaviors are passed down, and how to affectively help a client work through these patterns. If these intergenerational patterns persist, then the suffering client is likely to pass down the same destructive behaviors to the following generations. Thus, the negative pattern continues through successive generations. Research indicates that the only way an individual is truly able to completely break free from reoccurring negative intergenerational behaviors is to involve spirituality and God in the process of forgiveness. Forgiveness is a significant factor in the process of healing and restoration from intergenerational behaviors.

Keywords: intergenerational patterns, forgiveness

"The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation" (*NLT Complete Reference Bible*, Numbers 14.18).

Introduction

Emily laid awake in her bed for the third night in a row. Darkness engulfed her thoughts making it impossible to sleep. Her mind was racing and the pit in her stomach ached from anxiety and stress. "What if I don't make enough money this week, then how am I going to pay my bills? I'm going to be in debt forever. What if I don't get into school, then what am I going to do? What if Daniel cheats on me? He's probably more attracted to a younger, thinner girl. Or worse, what if he breaks up with me? But I love him! What am I going to do without him in my life?" The worry and anxiety over things in life she couldn't control were eating her up, causing Emily many restless nights.

Unfortunately Emily was not the only one in her family to suffer from severe anxiety and stress. She seemed to be a mini female version of her father. For as far back as she could remember he was always anxious or stressed about something, primarily work and money. Anxiety seemed to consume him day and night. He would sit at the kitchen table with his hands rubbing the top of his head or pace around the room unable to calm himself to sit down. Was it possible she inherited this frustrating, at times debilitating, behavior from her father? Perhaps she subconsciously internalized those behaviors she was so often exposed to and now they were a part of her life. How else could she have become a mirror image of her father?

Daniel grew up just one block from the beach. He spent most of his time surfing, and worked the occasional odd job. It would appear on the outside that Daniel's life was relaxed and carefree, but behind closed doors was a different reality. His parents were in the middle of a

bitter divorce because his father was unfaithful to his mother. The peaceful, serene setting was washed away and replaced with screaming and arguing that took place just a few feet away from his bedroom. When his father finally moved out, Daniel, at age 14, was now the oldest male in the house. He was left with much of the responsibility to care for and parent his younger brother and sister. Often times Daniel became the target of his mother's anger and pain towards his father.

This was not the first time Daniel's family was exposed to infidelity. His grandfather also committed adultery. This behavior was apparently inherited through the past two generations. Daniel often wondered what his chances were of being unfaithful to Emily, his future wife, with the sin of adultery that his father and grandfather graciously passed down now weighing heavily on his shoulders. He hated thinking he could be the third generation to continue this behavior and his children would one day grow up like he did in a home divided by sin.

This story is not unique to these characters, but is symbolic of the dynamics in many American families today. Some families display a more favorable view of intergenerational behaviors such as determination, hard work or integrity; while other families breed destructive behaviors such as control, abuse or rage. The patterns of sin associated with these behaviors gain strength as numerous generations survive and these types of harmful behaviors shape the future for the next generation. Abusive, violent and manipulative behaviors become so engrossed within families that they eventually become viewed as standard or typical behavior. Suffering family members have no choice but to accept this as normal family functioning. As a result, individuals will most likely begin to cope with their painfully dismal reality by turning to

additional behaviors that are damaging or self-destructive. Those types of behaviors will inevitably affect and influence the lives of the following generations.

Transmission of Intergenerational Behaviors

Intergenerational behaviors can be administered to future generations by way of attitudes, beliefs, actions or habits that are passed down through family lines. The term intergenerational pattern is often used to describe the specific dispositions that are inherited and repeated through generations (Foundational Truths, 2010). The following section provides research supporting the premise that negative behaviors are transmitted intergenerationally from parent to child.

The intergenerational transmission of childhood problem behaviors is a widely discussed topic. Family studies provide research indicating that many types of child psychopathology run in families. Van Meurs, Reef, Verhulst, and Van Der Ende (2009) conducted a longitudinal community study of numerous problem behaviors in two generations, with a time difference of 24 years, were measured with the expected outcome to reveal the intergenerational transmission of various problem behaviors from parents to their children. Van Meurs et al. (2009) desired to determine associations, using similar methodology, between adults' problem behavior assessed when they were children with the behavior of their offspring.

The results confirmed the hypothesis showing an association between child behavior of parents and their offspring. Research indicated that behavior scales for the parent significantly predicted similar scales for their children in all of the following assessment categories: Anxious/Depressed, Withdrawn, Somatic Complaints, Social and Attention Problems, Delinquent and Aggressive Behavior, Externalizing and Internalizing (Van Meurs et al., 2009). The only scale that was not significantly predicted was Thought Problems. To strengthen the

argument further, except for the results of the Thought Problem scale, problem behaviors were not shown to differ in the extent to which they were transmitted to the following generation.

There is a discrepancy to consider when researching the transmission of a father or mother's behavior onto a child. Negative behaviors are not transmitted equally between parents and their offspring. Several studies reveal that destructive patterns are significant and highly correlated between fathers and their children, as opposed to mothers and their children (Van de Rakt, Nieuwbeerta, & Apel, 2009). Research reveals that children are directly affected by their father's criminality, while for mothers the behavior is transmitted primarily through parenting practices. Analyzing a father's behavior is proven to be the most critical when attempting to predict the criminal behavior of a child, especially a son (Van de Rakt et al, 2009).

Previous research concluded that the existence of crime and delinquent behavior within families can be explained by intergenerational transmission. One study by Farrington et al. (Van de Rakt et al., 2009) revealed that a majority of all delinquent acts can be attributed to a small proportion of families responsible; concluding that persistent delinquents tend to be raised in families with deviant conduct. The probability that an individual will commit a delinquent act increases if they have a family member with a criminal history. Van de Rakt et al. (2009) states that research findings indicate a significant association between the criminal behavior of parents, and the subsequent delinquent behavior of their children. This research reveals that the intergenerational transmission of behaviors is not only destructive to the family, but also to the immediate community and society as a whole.

Development of Intergenerational Behaviors

The previous section provided research concluding that behaviors are transmitted intergenerationally from parent to child, and each generation does in fact have subsequent influence on the following generation.   Next, it is important to consider intergenerational behaviors from a developmental perspective. This perspective allows for understanding the actual process of how the behaviors are transmitted from one generation to the next. Studies indicate that when behavioral problems are present in children they are often chronic and evolve into adulthood (Van Meurs et al., 2009). These negative behaviors are often associated with a wide range of negative outcomes as an adolescent and adult, including substance abuse, poor academic outcomes, and criminality (Bailey, Hill, Oesterle, & Hawkins, 2009). The following research provides merely a glimpse at the various perspectives offering to explain the development of intergenerational continuities.

One popular developmental perspective states that specific genetic factors are involved in the intergenerational transmission of behaviors.   Van Meurs et al. (2009) states that there are specific genes present in each individual that make them particularly vulnerable to developing problem behaviors. As a result, parents are genetically predisposed to problem behavior and pass the predisposition on to their offspring (Van de Rakt et al, 2009). However, this perspective is limited because it lacks a discussion regarding the specific behavior causing genes that are intergenerationally transmitted. Although this perspective provides a link between genetics and intergenerational behaviors more research is needed to increase the validity.

Another perspective indicates the environment as having a significant role in the development of intergenerational behaviors.   A risky environment can be a vulnerable place for a child's problem behaviors to develop and slowly manifest. Eventually over time as a child

develops into an adult, self-destructive behaviors encouraged by an unhealthy childhood environment become a constant part of life. Van Meurs et al. (2009) research findings state that when an adult becomes a parent they are likely to create an environment for their children based on their own maladaptive behaviors that originated in their childhood. This unfavorable social environment resembles the setting they grew up in and will often be the same setting their children will grow up in as well. For example, when a child is reared in an unstable environment surrounded by drugs, alcohol, sexual abuse or domestic violence, they are more likely to create a similar environment for their children because that environment is what is most familiar.

In another study Bailey et al. (2009) presents a perspective that states parenting practices are significantly associated with the developmental transmission of intergenerational behavior. Research findings have repeatedly linked an association between parenting practices, including parental monitoring and harsh discipline, and child externalizing behavior, including evidence of continuity across generations. Data presented from two longitudinal studies linked three generations to the intergenerational transmission of child externalizing behavior, which was characterized by poor impulse control, and oppositional, aggressive, or delinquent behavior (2009). The results of this study suggest that although parenting positively correlates with childhood problem behavior, it was parent substance abuse that had a greater association between the second and third generations (2009). Results suggest further research regarding necessary interventions for eliminating parental drug use in an effort to break cycles of intergenerational problem behavior.

When considering the development of behavior transmission from parent to child, the process of imitation is significant and should not be overlooked. Research indicates that children learn most of their behaviors by imitating or modeling the behaviors of their parents or primary

care giver (Van de Rakt et al., 2009). In some ways this type of learning can be positive for the child and produce encouraging outcomes. Children may learn acts of service for others, appropriate communication and honesty. However, it becomes concerning when the imitative behaviors of the adult are negative and self-destructive. The latter provides the opportunity for the parent and child to fall into the 'cycle of deprivation,' a term that researchers use to refer to repetitive undesirable behaviors transmitted through generations, such as domestic violence, teenage pregnancy and substance abuse (2009). When a child is raised in a home where a cycle of deprivation has existed for a number of generations, there is a relatively small chance the child will develop the appropriate, positive behaviors necessary for thriving as an adolescent and adult.

Murray Bowen's Family Systems Theory provides a theoretical perspective for the development of intergenerational behaviors. Bowen's theory views the family as a complex, multigenerational network of relationships. There are six interlocking concepts to this theory including: differentiation of self, emotional triangles, sibling position, emotional cutoff, societal emotional process and multigenerational emotional processes (Nichols, 2010). The last concept specifically provides insight regarding how family problems are passed down intergenerationally. The multigenerational emotional process refers to the emotional forces in families that operate over the years through interconnected patterns (2010).

Bowen states that psychological problems are passed down intergenerationally through emotional fusion (Nichols, 2010). Emotional fusion was derived from anxious attachment and tends to present in an individual as either dependency or isolation. Emotional fusion affects an individual's ability to become differentiated, meaning the ability to think and feel without making impulsive emotional responses. Problems are transmitted intergenerationally through undifferentiated families of origin from a parent to a child, allowing the dysfunctional cycle to

survive into future generations. Research supports Bowen's belief in multigenerational

transmission and that suggests negative behaviors such as violence, divorce, eating disorders,

depression and alcoholism are transmitted intergenerationally from parent to child (2010).

A Spiritual Perspective

The research discussed in the previous sections clearly indicates that hundreds of

thousands of families have suffered from decades of destructive behaviors. Each person is an

agent with the ability to make choices free from certain kinds of restraint, which means no one is

responsible for making a person sin except themselves. However, spiritual pressure exists and

can tempt an individual to commit the same sin as their ancestors (Fundamental Truths, 2010).

When an intergenerational pattern is negative or destructive it can be referred to as generational

sin. Sin is considered rebellion against God by means of disobedience of God's law and

instruction (2010).

A spiritual perspective views sin, or moral evil, as first entering the world through the

original rebellion against God by Satan and his following of angels. In the Bible the book of

Genesis states God views his making of the world as 'very good' (see Appendix D). In this

context it is implied that God did not create matter to be evil, however it has been corrupted by

original sin (Pendergast, 2009). Numerous religious theologians attribute the fall of the human

race to the original sin of Adam and Eve, and as a result humans became subject to moral and

physical suffering and death.

Original sin directly correlates with the development of negative intergenerational

behaviors. In the spiritual realm, Satan is aware of intergenerational disobedience towards God

and uses the unconfessed sin of our ancestors against every individual and family to kill, steal

and destroy. This perspective indicates that both original sin and negative behaviors can be traced back to the creation of the first man and woman

Perhaps the most famous example of the intergenerational transmission of negative behaviors is presented in the Bible involving the three patriarchs: Abraham, Issac and Jacob. Abraham was the father of Issac, and Issac was the father of Jacob. These historical figures capture the essence of how destructive behaviors, specifically manipulation and lying, are passed down intergenerationally. The following provides a brief summary of how three generations of deceitful behaviors were embraced by each of the infamous individuals.

The Bible reveals first how Abraham lies to King Abimelech in Negev by saying his wife, Sarah, was his sister for the purposes of manipulating his own safety. Abraham believed that the people of Negev would kill him in order to take his beautiful wife for one of their own. Instead of losing his life, he lied and was provided safety. However, as a consequence for deceit and manipulation, King Abimelech took Sarah for himself (see Appendix A).

Next, the Bible reveals the intergenerational transmission of lying and manipulation that Abraham directly passed down to his son Issac, who later found himself in the same situation as his father. Issac was traveling with his beautiful wife, Rebekah, and when the men asked him about her he feared he might lose his life on account of her, and reacted by saying she was his sister. He behaved in the exact same manner as his father by using lies and manipulation to ensure his own safety (see Appendix B).

And finally there was Jacob, son of Issac and grandson of Abraham. The destructive intergenerational pattern of manipulation and lying is passed down to yet another generation. Jacob had an older brother named Esau who, as the firstborn, was set to receive his father's blessing and inheritance. Jacob, with the help of his mother Rebecca, imitates his elder brother

and through manipulation and lying convinces his father that he is Esau (see Appendix C). This example indicates the necessity for individuals to understand their family's past in order to eventually end the bondage of intergenerational behaviors.

Family Ties

In the book *Sins of the Family*, Tauke (2004) provides an in-depth look at the journey that every individual has the ability to go through in an effort to break free from a cycle of pain and dysfunctional family habits. The destructible choices of our ancestors eventually form an environment where future generations are molded to take on similar personality and character traits. As social workers, our clients are in need of emotional help and are desperate to find hope in life where all they can see is despair, loneliness, depression and guilt. After completing psychosocial assessments and family history, the majority of clients reveal they have made destructive choices and are haunted by perpetual toxic behaviors similar to those of their parents or grandparents. This is not only the lifestyle they grew up in, but also the lifestyle they are now providing for their children. As stated previously, they are trapped in a seemingly endless cycle of self and family destruction. Tauke (2004) also discusses the importance of using faith-based principles to gain understanding and healing from family hurts.

An individual's family provides a number of insights into how and why the pattern of intergenerational behaviors continue to exist. A client may say, "No matter how hard I try to break this pattern of adultery in my life, I simply can't. What's wrong with me? My behaviors mimic my father's and his father…I don't want the same life for my son." Physical, emotional and spiritual wounds run deep within a person. There can be generations of unhealthy behavior spiritually weighing an individual down. Those burdens are then handed off like a bag full of rocks for the next generation to carry on their shoulders.

In order to successfully move forward, minimizing the possibilities of relapse, an individual must first look back at the past. Going back through families' past indiscretions and family secrets will be painful and at some times unbearable. It can lead to recovering repressed memories of traumatic events or uncovering certain undesirable realizations about individual family members. Dark emotions such as shame, guilt, rage and blame may escape during this process. Social workers and other support systems can help ease the understanding of how these revelations are relevant and necessary in order to move through the healing process and towards forgiveness.

The memories of life's great losses and disappointments need to be mourned. Painful life events can have a negative effect on an individual leaving them obsessed with anger or fixated on inflicting pain towards others in hopes of shedding even a tiny amount of the anger and pain they themselves are haunted with day and night. The emotional functions in our brains can actually be readjusted and through the grief process wretched memories can be reduced (Tauke, 2004). By grieving these difficult memories a person can appropriately process and face the intense emotions tied to important past events. Assessing emotions appropriately limits the possibility of inappropriate behaviors being passively displayed during everyday behaviors.

Once an individual has visited the past and mourned painful losses, the next step is for guided discovery of the negative intergenerational patterns that exist in their family of origin (Nichols, 2010). As discussed in previous sections, patterns of intergenerational behaviors are so deeply rooted within a family of origin it will most likely be difficult for an individual to differentiate their own beliefs and emotions from those of their family. A social worker can assist the individual in cognitively recognizing how they are undifferentiated and subsequently repeating negative family patterns. After they fully understand the intergenerational behavioral

patterns, they can then begin to work on permanently discontinuing their role in the family cycle of distress. A commitment to breaking the intergenerational behaviors will lead directly to the final, most crucial step in the process of breaking free forever.

The Power of Forgiveness

"Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, that you and your descendants might live! Choose to love the Lord your God and to obey him and commit yourself to him, for he is your life" (*NLT Complete Reference Bible*, Deut. 31.19-20a).

Destructive cycles of intergenerational behaviors that cause decades of distress, suffering and sorrow can be broken by one word: forgiveness. Forgiveness is one of the most powerful tools each person has in their possession. The decision to forgive another can take place in an instant, but the impact can be eternal. God designed humans with the ability to forgive immediately using their own free-will. Forgiveness is not only considered to be a key aspect in religiousness and spirituality, featured in all mainstream world religions, but is also found to be a common feature discussed in the realm of psychology and philosophy (Hirsch, Webb, & Jeglic, 2011).

Literature regarding forgiveness struggles to provide a unified definition of the word. Hirsch et al. (2011) describes the process of forgiveness as a voluntary means of responding to an offense by seeking a change from negative to positive cognitions, behaviors, and affect in the context of self, others, and God. Forgiveness can also be described as a two-part process involving first the reduction of negative emotions towards the offender such as bitterness and anger and increasing positive emotions such as compassion and empathy (Wade, Meyer, Goldman, & Post, 2008). Christian theology describes forgiveness as the process of healing

emotional wounds and promoting healthier development of spiritual and relational assets (DiBlasio & Benda, 2008).

Research knowledge and clinical practice experience are beginning to indicate the importance of forgiveness in restoring hurt and broken relationships. DiBlasio & Benda (2008) provide several factors associated with an individual's increased ability to forgive including: "mutual empathy between offender and victim, rebuilding of trust, commitment and attachment levels of the relationships, repentance and remorse of the offender, forgiving cognitions and decisions, emotional readiness, spiritual connectedness and the passing of time" (p. 150).

Forgiveness not only promotes the well-being of interpersonal relationships, but is also found to be a primary function of healthy marriages (DiBlasio & Benda, 2008). Individuals who choose to forgive allow themselves the opportunity to create a new reality by cognitively altering their previous view of the relationship with the offender. Forgiveness allows for emotions such as depression and anguish to be replaced by emotions such as hope, joy and peace.

The power to forgive an offender for the hurt and pain they caused is monumental for both parties. An individual's religious commitment or spiritual faith can have a positive influence on the behavior of forgiveness resulting in increased interpersonal relationship satisfaction and decreased depression (DiBlasio, 2010). Research indicates an individual is less likely to have the ability or desire to forgive when religion or faith are not a central part of their lives (Wade, Meyer, Goldman, & Post, 2008).

World religions place a high value on forgiving others as a means of conflict resolution and overcoming interpersonal hurt. Despite this commonality, many religious traditions or denominations vary significantly in the beliefs, practices and theological understanding of the concept of forgiveness. In Judaism for example, some offenses are considered unforgiveable

compared to Christianity that teaches to forgive others regardless of the offense. The Bible references the word "forgive" (or a variation of the word) approximately 24 times, as well as illustrates numerous interpersonal examples of the act of forgiveness (DiBlasio, 2010, p. 291). It is clear by the overwhelming number of times forgiveness is mentioned in the Bible, both directly and indirectly, that this is a theme God wanted humans to focus on, understand and obey.

Christians believe we are to forgive others just as the Father has forgiven us. Forgiving with Christ-like love reconciles the past and builds a strong foundation to prevent hurtful, destructive behaviors in the future (DiBlasio, 2010). For many individuals forgiveness is a process and takes an undefined amount of time. However, Scriptures do not indicate that God promotes a process of making a decision to forgive over a period of time (2010). In fact, DiBlasio (2010) highlights Scriptures relating to the importance of interpersonal forgiveness including: unforgiveness is a sin, love keeps no record of wrong and forgive unceasingly regardless of the number of repeated offenses.

The consequences of unforgiveness may result in negative health-related outcomes, impaired social and interpersonal functioning, and a decline in mental health (Hirsch et al, 2011). Research indicates a relationship exists between unforgiveness and symptoms of depression (Ingersoll-Dayton, Torges, & Krause, 2010). Toxic emotions such as rage and resentment can have a tight grasp on an individual's cognitive process, inhibiting the person from enjoying positive emotions such as peace and joy. Instead they are bound by the ruminations of past offenses and thoughts related to revenge. Aspects of unforgiveness should be considered when working with clients in a clinical setting, especially those suffering from possible mood

disorders. An individual's inability to forgive themselves often causes obsessive negative

reflection, which in turn is associated with depressive symptoms (2010).

Implications for Social Work Practice

Social workers can help individuals work through the process of forgiveness. Once an

individual is truly ready to take the steps necessary to forgive there are therapeutic forgiveness-

based interventions designed not only for individuals, but also for couples and groups. Some

treatments utilize psychotherapy strategies, or psychoeducation and social marketing strategies

(Hirsch et al., 2011). As a result, individuals may finally be allowed to cognitively and

emotionally progress beyond the distressing experiences caused by past generations, or original

sin, and move towards restoring broken relationships (2011).

It is imperative the therapeutic process not remain focused on the past too long. If the

individual is allowed on-going rumination and ventilation lasting several weeks or months, then

the process has the potential to cause more harm than good (DiBlasio, 2010). Research reveals

treatment and interventions assisting individuals with forgiveness has resulted in lower reports of

depression, anxiety and interpersonal distress, as well as improved resistance against substance

use, and increased positive emotions such as love, empathy, hopefulness and self-esteem (Hirsch

et al., 2011; DiBlasio & Benda, 2008).

Forgiveness Therapy

Forgiveness therapy is a psychotherapeutic process that focuses on decision-based

forgiveness. This therapy encourages the individual to willfully make the decision to release the

need for vengeance, along with negative cognitions of bitterness and resentment towards the

offender or the offense (DiBlasio & Benda, 2008). This step-by-step process typically takes

place in a three hour clinical setting. The outcome of this intervention has shown people often

experience emotional healing followed by a period of reconciliation and behavior changes

resulting in long-term positive changes over time.

The therapeutic forgiveness session is a 13 step process potentially lasting three or more

hours. The session is broken down into three sections: defining and preparing (Steps 1-3),

seeking and granting forgiveness (Steps 4-12) and a ceremonial act (Step 13). Below Chart 1

provides a look at the step-by-step process of the forgiveness session (DiBlasio, 2010).

Chart 1:   FORGIVENESS SESSION

Step 1: Definitions of forgiveness are discussed.
During the initial step, the topic of forgiveness is discussed and both parties share their thoughts on forgiveness and what it means to them. The individuals are asked if they agree with the decision-based definition of forgiveness which includes releasing cognitions of resentment, bitterness and vengeance and incorporating self-sacrificing acts of forgiveness and love.

Step 2: The focus on each person having the opportunity to seek forgiveness for his/her wrongful actions is established.
This step emphasizes the need for the offender to take responsibility for their actions by confessing their sin or wrong doing. This step potentially lowers the defenses of the offended individual that have gone up in an effort to self-protect, and encourages an attitude of forgiveness.

Step 3: Introduction to the forgiveness treatment and decision whether or not to participate.
At this point, the remainder of the steps are explained and each individual can make the decision to continue with the session.

Step 4: Statement of the offense.
The offense is clearly and specifically stated which demonstrates that he or she has done something wrong.

Step 5: Offender provides explanation.
The therapist joins with the offender to offer aid in providing an explanation. The therapist attempts to inquire about the factors leading to the offense. At this point, pain and hurt experienced in the past are likely to arise providing deeper insight.

Step 6: Questions and answers about the offense.
The therapist provides coaching to ensure an objective atmosphere is established where productive questions are asked, and harsh or destructive questions are avoided. Forgiveness is easier to give once one has answers and facts about the offense. During this step it is imperative that the truth is revealed regardless of if it will cause the offended person more hurt or pain. Forgiveness cannot be built on partial truth.

Step 7: Offended person gives emotional reactions.
Intimacy is developed or deepened as the offended person shares their hurts, pains and sufferings. This step allows the offended person to ensure their deep emotions are heard and understood by the offender.

Step 8: Offender shows empathy and remorse for the hurt he or she caused the other.
The offender reflects on the other's hurt and responds with empathy, which signifies to the offended person that their suffering was understood. The therapist coaches and encourages the offender's empathetic expression.

Step 9: Offender develops plan to stop/prevent behavior.
A specific plan is developed designed to end the offensive behavior and prevent it from occurring in the future. This corrective action step promotes forgiveness by the offended person and repentance by the offender, as well as establishes accountability.

Step 10: Offended person shows empathy for the offender's hurt.
The offender's behavior is usually partly explained by previous hurts they experienced in the past, which the previous steps help identify, and arouses feelings of true empathy and love from the offended person.

Step 11: Emphasis on choice and commitment involved in letting go.
Therapist discusses decision-based forgiveness addressed in Step 1 and the offended person decides whether or not to forgive the offender. If the decision to forgive is made, the offended person must choose to purposefully release the offense and refrain from using it as a weapon in the future. (This does not mean hurtful emotions or issues surrounding the offense cannot be discussed.)

Step 12: Formal request for forgiveness.
A face-to-face encounter where in his or her own words the offender requests forgiveness and forgiveness is granted by the offended. Typically, this step exposes a tender moment where intimacy is renewed.

Step 13: Forgiveness ceremonial act.
The final step involves a symbolic expression to cognitively, emotionally and spiritually solidify the forgiveness decision.

DiBlasio and Benda's (2008) study involving couples completing forgiveness treatment revealed that Christians experience greater forgiveness, marital satisfaction, and contentment than non-Christians. One explanation for this outcome is that Christians are suspected to have elevated interpersonal forgiveness as a result of their comprehension of Christ's sacrifice and belief in his forgiveness of our sins. Christians are taught through biblical passages that God's will is for humans to love and forgive one another, and therefore they have a desire to uphold those values and spiritual beliefs (DiBlasio & Benda, 2008). Another theological explanation involves the discussion of the Holy Spirit that Christians believe upon being asked will dwell within their heart. Individuals who allow the Holy Spirit to do God's will during the forgiveness session experience much anticipated freedom from feelings such as bitterness, anger and

resentment. The decision to forgive and love like Jesus brings restoration to broken relationships and increased intimacy between couples.

DiBlasio (2010) reports that in most cases the forgiveness session has proven effective in not only reducing, but permanently eliminating an individual's feelings of resentment and bitterness. However, it is not uncommon, in fact it is encouraged that offended individuals continue participating in therapy to learn how to handle future resentful or angry thoughts or feelings, especially when the offence is infidelity. Addressing rumination with an offended individual in cases involving infidelity is a greater challenge and typically requires multiple therapeutic sessions. Continued therapy can offer additional care and support to individuals working through the process of forgiveness.

Conclusion

The destructive intergenerational behaviors that plague families are not going to simply disappear. Intergenerational patterns that threaten to keep individuals and families in bondage are going to continue to cycle from parent to child without ceasing, unless a decision to change is determined. A relationship with God and commitment to faith are essential aspects of permanently breaking intergenerational patterns. Individuals and families can practice forgiveness as a way to not only permanently break free from present negative behaviors, but also provide hope and encouragement for future generations.

Emily and Daniel sat looking deep into each other's eyes. Daniel watched the tears stream down Emily's face as he spoke tender words forgiving his family for the past and promising to be faithful to her as they began their future together. When he finished Emily responded by forgiving her family for the anxious and stressful behaviors that previously consumed her daily. She reached out to Daniel and holding his hand she promised to always

trust in the Lord to provide for their every need. They embraced and could feel each other

breathe deeply for the first time. In that moment all the bondage of the past was broken and they

were finally free.

References

Bailey, J. A., Hill, K. G., Oesterle, S., & Hawkins, J. D. (2009). Parenting practices and problem

 behavior across three generations: Monitoring, harsh discipline, and drug use in the

 intergenerational transmission of externalizing behavior. *Developmental Psychology*,

 45:5, 1214-1226.

DiBlasio, F. A. (2010). Christ-like forgiveness in marital counseling: A clinical follow-up of two

 empirical studies. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 29:4, 291-300.

DiBlasio, F. A. & Benda, B. B. (2008). Forgiveness intervention with married couples: Two

 empirical analyses. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 27:2, 150-158.

Hirsch, J. K., Webb, J. R., & Jeglic, E. L. (2011). Forgiveness, depression, and suicidal behavior

 among a diverse sample. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 67:9, 896-906.

 doi:10.1002/jcip.20812

Ingersoll-Dayton, B., Torges, C., & Krause, N. (2010). Unforgiveness, rumination, and

 depressive symptoms among older adults. *Aging & Mental Health*, 14, 439-449.

 doi:10.1080/13607860903483136

Pendergast, R. J. (2009). Evil, original sin, and evolution. *The Heythrop Journal*, 50, 833-845.

NLT Complete Reference Bible. (2003). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Foundational Truths. (2010). Retrieved from http://restoringyourlife.org

Smedes, L. B. (1996). *The art of forgiving*. New York, NY: The Random House.

Tauke, B. H. (2004). S*ins of the family*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Van de Rakt, M., Nieuwbeerta, P., & Apel, R. (2009). Association of criminal convictions

 between family members: Effects of siblings, fathers, and mothers. *Criminal Behavior*

 and Mental Health, 19:2, 94-108.

doi:10.1002/cbm.715

Van Meurs, I., Reef, J., Verhulst, F. C., & Van der Ende, J. (2009). Intergenerational

transmission of child problem behaviors: A longitudinal, population-based study.

Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 48:2, 138-145.

doi:10.1097/CHI.0b013e318191770d

Wade, N. G., Meyer, J. E., Goldman, D. B., & Post, B. C. (2008). Predicting forgiveness for an

interpersonal offense before and after treatment: The role of religious commitment,

religious affiliation, and trait forgiveness. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 27:4,

358-367.

Appendix A

^{1} *Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar,* ^{2} *and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." Then Abimelech king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her.* ^{11} *Abraham replied, "I said to myself, 'There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife'* (NLT Complete Reference Bible, Gen. 20.1-2, 11).

Appendix B

^{7} *When the men of that place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," because he was afraid to say, "She is my wife." He thought, "The men of this place might kill me on account of Rebekah, because she is beautiful."*

^{8} *When Isaac had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked down from a window and saw Isaac caressing his wife Rebekah.* ^{9} *So Abimelech summoned Isaac and said, "She is really your wife! Why did you say, 'She is my sister'?"*

Isaac answered him, "Because I thought I might lose my life on account of her" (NLT Complete Reference Bible, Gen. 26.7-8).

Appendix C

^{1} *When Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see, he called for Esau his older son and said to him, "My son."*

"Here I am," he answered.

^{2} *Isaac said, "I am now an old man and don't know the day of my death.* ^{3} *Now then, get your weapons—your quiver and bow—and go out to the open country to hunt some wild game for me.* ^{4} *Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die."*

^{5} *Now Rebekah was listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau left for the open country to hunt game and bring it back,* ^{6} *Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "Look, I overheard your father say to your brother Esau,* ^{7} *'Bring me some game and prepare me some tasty food to eat, so that I may give you my blessing in the presence of the LORD before I die.'* ^{8} *Now, my son, listen carefully and do what I tell you:* ^{9} *Go out to the flock and bring me two choice young goats, so I can prepare some tasty food for your father, just the way he likes it.* ^{10} *Then take it to your father to eat, so that he may give you his blessing before he dies."*

^{11} *Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, "But my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I'm a man with smooth skin.* ^{12} *What if my father touches me? I would appear to be tricking him and would bring down a curse on myself rather than a blessing."*

^{13} *His mother said to him, "My son, let the curse fall on me. Just do what I say; go and get them for me."*

^{14} *So he went and got them and brought them to his mother, and she prepared some tasty food, just the way his father liked it.* ^{15} *Then Rebekah took the best clothes of Esau her older son, which she had in the house, and put them on her younger son Jacob.* ^{16} *She also covered his*

hands and the smooth part of his neck with the goatskins. ¹⁷ Then she handed to her son Jacob the tasty food and the bread she had made.

¹⁸ He went to his father and said, "My father."
   "Yes, my son," he answered. "Who is it?"

¹⁹ Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me. Please sit up and eat some of my game so that you may give me your blessing."

²⁰ Isaac asked his son, "How did you find it so quickly, my son?"
   "The LORD your God gave me success," he replied.

²¹ Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Come near so I can touch you, my son, to know whether you really are my son Esau or not."

²² Jacob went close to his father Isaac, who touched him and said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." ²³ He did not recognize him, for his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau; so he blessed him. ²⁴ "Are you really my son Esau?" he asked.
   "I am," he replied.

²⁵ Then he said, "My son, bring me some of your game to eat, so that I may give you my blessing."
   Jacob brought it to him and he ate; and he brought some wine and he drank. ²⁶ Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come here, my son, and kiss me" (*NLT Complete Reference Bible*, Gen. 27.1-26).

Appendix D

31 Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!
And evening passed and morning came, marking the sixth day (*NLT Complete Reference Bible*, Gen. 1.31).