

DiscoverMagazine.com recently reported on a really cool study that seems to indicate the experiences of our ancestors have more impact on than previously thought. Whenever we suffer a traumatic experience or face hardships...these molecules attach themselves to our DNA, and then get passed on to our children.

“According to the new insights of behavioral epigenetics, traumatic experiences in our past, or in our recent ancestors’ past, leave molecular scars adhering to our DNA. Jews whose great-grandparents were chased from their Russian shtetls; Chinese whose grandparents lived through the ravages of the Cultural Revolution; young immigrants from Africa whose parents survived massacres; adults of every ethnicity who grew up with alcoholic or abusive parents — all carry with them more than just memories.

...our experiences, and those of our forebears, are never gone, even if they have been forgotten. They become a part of us, a molecular residue holding fast to our genetic scaffolding. The DNA remains the same, but psychological and behavioral tendencies are inherited. You might have inherited not just your grandmother’s knobby knees, but also her predisposition toward depression caused by the neglect she suffered as a newborn.”<sup>1</sup>

This article says this also works in positive ways and you can change the heritage you pass on to your children...

If your grandmother was adopted by nurturing parents, you might be enjoying the boost she received thanks to their love and support. The mechanisms of behavioral epigenetics underlie not only deficits and weaknesses but strengths and resiliencies, too. And for those unlucky enough to descend from miserable or withholding grandparents, emerging drug treatments could reset not just mood, but the epigenetic changes themselves. Like grandmother’s vintage dress, you could wear it or have it altered.

If the research continues to confirm this it is a powerful reminder that our actions and the actions of others really do affect the lives of hundreds and thousands of other people.

We are working our way through the Book of Jonah, and last week we saw how God called Jonah to go preach to those in Nineveh...but Jonah ran. He got on a ship and headed in the opposite direction. He is not the first to disobey and go his own way. He will not be the last.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://discovermagazine.com/2013/may/13-grandmas-experiences-leave-epigenetic-mark-on-your-genes>

And like us when we sin, Jonah failed to realize that his disobedience and his sin was about to affect the lives of many people other than just him. His actions did not just affect him alone took others along for the ride.

I sure we have all heard someone say, "This is my decision. it is no one's business."

The truth is that every decision you and I make affects someone else. And every time you and I sin...it affects some one's life...whether we like it or not.

### **Our disobedience affects the lives of others we don't know.**

Because Jonah fled from God and refused to go to Nineveh, he put every single life in that city at risk. God had told him to preach a message that if they didn't turn from their sin, their city would be destroyed...and while Jonah was fine with them no longer existing...we are still talking about thousands of people. Later in Jonah, when he preaches, because he preaches the message of God...they repent and turn and their lives are saved.

His refusal to obey withheld the grace, mercy, and forgiveness of God from those who needed it.

This isn't just a story about Jonah and his disobedience...this is a reminder that other people's lives are at stake when you and I disobey the call of God.

When we refuse to pray...other people don't get prayed for...and because of that they don't get healed...they don't get the help they need.

When we refuse to do the work of evangelism...people don't come to know Jesus...and they die in their sin and are separated from God.

When we refuse to take part in the Kingdom of God where He is calling us...we are hindering the work God wants to see done.

But just as important is the fact that

### **Our disobedience affects the lives of those around us.**

Jonah flees from God, and hopes a ship, and

Jonah 1:4-5 says,

Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.

Jonah's disobedience directly imperiled the lives of the sailors. The sailors were frantically trying to keep the ship afloat in the midst of this storm. His sin, just like our sin, directly affects the lives of those around us.

It is easy to see this in the big things...

Every day the lives of a family are affected directly because of one member's decision to do drugs or succumb to their alcoholism.

But we can also see it in the small decisions we make as well...

How does our failure to control our eating affect our children...

How does our example of disobedience and failure to truly seek after God in more than just words affect our families...

Every decision we make, every act of sinfulness has consequence, not just for us, but also for those right around us.

So Jonah's sinfulness was putting all these people in peril...but the last part of Jonah 1:5, says that Jonah was sleeping soundly in the bottom of the ship.

"But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep."

Have you ever noticed when you are mad at someone...that they don't seem to even notice or care? It is like they are not aware of what they have done wrong! If they do, then they don't care...and that just makes us madder.

This is why there is so much truth in the power of forgiving others. That person who made fun of you in high school that you have allowed to affect you so deeply...most likely hasn't given you a thought since that day.

The customer that came in to your work that ruined your entire day...never thought of you again even though you complained about them for an hour after they left...you allowed it to put you in a bad mood...allowed it to set the tone for the drive home where you screamed at the drivers around you...yelled at your kids and spouse...allowed it affect every other thing you did that day. Despite all this affect they had on your life... they never thought of you again.

Jonah was putting the people of Nineveh at risk of being destroyed for their sins because he disobediently ran the other way. Jonah put the entire crew of the ship at risk of drowning and dying...and here he is able to sleep soundly.

Sometimes we have this image of someone sorry for their wrong doing...fretting over what they have done to us...But how many times does the offender not even care...they don't have a guilty conscience.

How many times have we slept soundly while acting disobediently toward God? I would say that have also been many times we have gone about not even realizing we have been disobedient?

A few years ago, I was praying and asked God if there was anything I hadn't noticed in my life. He pointed out something that I had to write a letter and send money back to a guy to make restitution for something I had done when I was 19 years old.

There are times when God just has to give us a wake up call. When we need to be willing to ask and listen to God's corrective measures in our lives.

This begins when

**We admit what we have done.**

Jonah 1:7-10

Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"

He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."

This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the Lord, because he had already told them so.)

Jonah had to come to a place where he admitted his sin, he admitted what he was doing was wrong, and that it deserved God's judgment.

So many times, when faced with the reality of our own sin, we might be tempted to downplay how important it is... "Oh, it isn't that big of a deal!" Or, to deny it, or to try to run away from it again...But none of those approaches result in God being able to work in our lives.

The only way God is able to bring healing and forgiveness into our lives is when we accept that we what we have done is sinful and then turn it over to Him. God doesn't force his healing and forgiveness on someone who doesn't want it or doesn't think they need it. It comes when we open our heart and accept that what God calls sin is actually keeping us from Him.

**We have to accept the consequences.**

Jonah 1:12

“Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.”

In many ways, I think this might have been another attempt by Jonah to run...admitting you have done wrong is not the same thing as being sorry for doing it...and if he can't sail away from obeying God maybe he could die and get out of it. But it also might be that he was willing to accept this as God's judgment for His sin.

If Jonah was trying to run away from God, I love the comedic justice here.

Jonah 1:17

Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Jonah thought he was getting away...but God prepared a large fish to swallow him up and turn him around. And in the belly of the fish, Jonah finally came to a place where he accepted his own need for God.

There are times when God will use the hardships and consequences of our actions in an attempt to wake us up...He will use an absence of His sensed presence to get our attention... in a hope that

### **We will return to God.**

Jonah 2:8-9

“Those who cling to worthless idols  
turn away from God's love for them.  
But I, with shouts of grateful praise,  
will sacrifice to you.  
What I have vowed I will make good.  
I will say, ‘Salvation comes from the Lord.’”

In the belly of the fish, Jonah repented and cried out to God for forgiveness.

There are times when I try to look at things as someone from outside the Christian faith. How does all this sound from a non-Christian point of view. And there are time when God seems harsh or the message seems a bit crazy.

But then I ask myself, If I truly love someone and want the best for them...will I just stand by and allow them to do something that harms them? The answer is no. I will try everything I can to get them to stop.

And God is like that with us. He truly loves us, and He will use a variety of methods to get our attention so we can be forgiven and healed of our hurts. And the

### **The power of God's grace means we get a second chance.**

Jonah 3:1-3

Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."  
Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh.

Jonah got a second chance to make things right. He got a chance to do what God had called him to do.

We so often get not only a second, but a third, fourth, and fifth chance to make things right and live obediently. Speaking from personal experience I wish I made that choice to obey sooner sometimes so the consequences on myself and others wasn't so great, but I'm stubborn...like I'm sure some of you are too.