

# NINTH GRADE RITE OF PASSAGE

## THE FAMILY STORY

Your influence lasts three to four generations. That means you are a spiritual patriarch or matriarch all the way down to your great-great-grandchildren. What you do as a parent matters and you have a responsibility to your teenager to help them understand where they come from. The story of our family is the story of us.

As your student is entering into High School they begin to wonder, “Who am I?” and “Where do I belong?” And it is no wonder. Look at what happened when you entered high school. Everything starts to change. Your whole social world is turned upside down and your own identity gets boiled down to the lowest common denominator: the jocks, the cheerleaders, the nerds, the emo kids, etc.

So this rite of passage is all about reminding your student of who they are and helping them feel a strong sense of belonging to your family. It is what we belong to, and it has a say in who we are. One of the best ways you can help your 9th grader discover their identity is to lead them to discover their family heritage.

Whether the story of your family is a page-turning novel or a comedy sketch or even if it reads like a police report, your teenager needs to hear the good, the bad, and the ugly of your family. When your 9th grader is given the Family Interview Questions that we have provided, they will be sent out like a reporter from a newspaper with the mission of learning the heart of their family members.

But this is not just a homework assignment that they will do on their own. You will work together with them to make this happen. The cool thing is that this project will end up different for each kid depending on the stories that peak their own interest and the things that they relate to themselves.

### STEP ONE: READ

Read through this packet including the Supplemental Materials.

### STEP TWO: PLAN

Find a time on your calendar several months from when you begin this project when your family will be with extended family. So, if your family gets together on certain holidays or over the summer, plot out at least three months beforehand for when you need to begin. If you need to reach out to your family members to make sure that they know that you and your student will be presenting this project.

### STEP THREE: TALK

Tell your student that you are going to be working on a project together and presenting it at your family gathering. Make sure they know that you will be helping them with this, but ultimately, the more they put into it, the more they will get out of it.

### STEP FOUR: SCHEDULE

You will need to schedule out six different sessions over the next six months where you will work on this project together. Meet together and go through the outline for that session.

### STEP FIVE: ENJOY

Once everything is compiled, help your student tell their family story to those who have gathered.

## SESSION 1: FAMILY TREE

Your first assignment is to fill out your family tree. Family trees can be complicated and you may not be able to fill in all the blanks just from the top of your head. So this may involve a little bit of research. You don't have to go too crazy over this. You are not going to plot your family tree out to the 1700s. The goal is to fill out the family tree to your student's great-great-grandparents (see example below).



And, we know, your family tree might not be this clear cut and that is totally fine. Perhaps there were adoptions, divorces, or weird things sprinkled in among your lineage. That is fine. In fact, now is a great time to talk about these things. The goal here is to get the names of most of the big players in your family down on paper. If you want to go into aunts and uncles, that would be great, but you don't necessarily need to go into great aunts and uncles.

That is session 1.

## **SESSION 2: SEND OUT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Now that you have names, it is time to collect some stories. Now your student will send out some pre interview questions to our family members. They should choose several different people on either side of the family and send them the following email or letter.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am writing to let you know that I am working on a project about our family and my place within it. To help me with this project I was wondering if you could help me out by answering the questions I have included below. If you would rather talk about them over the phone just let me know and I would be happy to give you a call. You don't have to answer every single question. However, my project would be greatly helped if you would answer as many as you can. Thanks in advance for helping me with this project.

Sincerely,

Your Name

### **Questions**

What is the greatest thing that you have ever learned in life?

What has been the greatest influence in your life?

Do you have a favorite Scripture? If so, what is it?

What are your beliefs about God?

Tell me about your parents and your relationship with them?

Tell me about my parents and your relationship with them?

One day I might be a parent. What advice would you have for me as a parent?

If you are married, tell me the story of how you met your spouse and fell in love.

Based on your experience in marriage, what advice would you give me about love and marriage?

Tell me about your career. How did you choose and get into your career?

What advice would you give me about work that you have learned in your career?

What significant historical event do you remember the most that happened in your lifetime?

If you could do your life all over again, what would you do differently?

What is the coolest place you have ever traveled to?

What is the greatest movie you have ever seen?

How do you want people to remember you?

Tell me an interesting story about yourself.

That is session 2.

## **SESSION 3: MAKE SOME CALLS**

Session 3 is all about getting the most answers to the questions you sent out that you possibly can. If someone did not send the answers back, give them a call and see if they might answer them over the phone or send them in the next couple of days. When you talk through the questions with someone on the phone, be sure to jot down their answers so you don't forget.

That is session 3.

## **SESSION 4: READ THROUGH MATERIAL AND ASK QUESTIONS (3 THINGS)**

For this session, you will want all of the material you have collected so far. Print off the emails you recieved, have your phone call notes handy, and whatever mail you have recieved back. Read through all of the material together. As you ad your student read through the material, expand on what is revealed. If your brother told your student that you were a nerd in high school, talk about it. If your mom said that her greatest influence had been Mother Theresa and you remember her talking about Mother Theresa all the time, let your student know. While your student runs through the material, they should ask these questions and take notes:

Do I need to ask more questions about something I don't understand?

Are there any common themes in the answers I have recieved?

Is there anything that sticks out to me that I would like to know more about?

How am I like each person? In what ways am I different?

## **SESSION 5: WRITE YOUR STORY**

This story is all about making connections to their family history. Note: This story does not have to be long.

Your student should have identified a few ways that they are like some people in their family history. We'll call those their connection points. They will use those things to fill in their story. They might have uncovered some strong themes that play throughout your family history as well that they don't feel connected to. We will call those Individual Points. Here is a simple outline to help get them going:

### **1. BRIEF FAMILY HISTORY**

**A. NAMES, PLACES AND DATES**

**B. AN INTERESTING STORY THAT TIES TO A CONNECTION POINT**

### **2. YOUR CONNECTION POINTS**

**A. WHAT ARE THEY**

**B. WHY DO YOU FEEL CONNECTED TO THEM (USE STORIES FROM YOUR LIFE)**

### **3. AN INDIVIDUAL POINT**

**A. WHAT IS IT**

**B. HOW DO YOU FEEL IT DISTINGUISHES YOU AMONG YOUR FAMILY MEMBERS**

### **CONCLUSION**

**A. WHAT YOU LEARNED ABOUT YOUR FAMILY**

**B. WHAT YOU LEARNED ABOUT YOURSELF**

## **SESSION 6: EDITING**

Spend some time going over the story with your student and help them edit it. Take some time as they share this with you to point out some of the good things that they say about themselves and affirm them. This is a great time for you to speak truth and love into your student's heart. Tell them what you like most about them and point out the themes from your family's history you see playing out in thier lives as well.

## **PRESENTATION**

The day has finally come where your student will present their family story. They might be a little nervous so make sure they know that you like what they have to present. Here are a few tips to help it go as planned.

### **1. You speak first.**

When it is time for your student to present their family story, you get up and introduce them. Obviously, you don't have to go into a whole lot of detail about who your student is, just let your family members know what this project was all about and why you are excited for your student to share it with them. Just set the stage.

### **2. Let your student present however they are most comfortable.**

If they want to read it straight from their paper, that is totally fine. If they would like to just pass out copies of his project and highlight one or two things in there, that is cool too.

### **3. Emphasize that this presentation is just the start of a conversation.**

Bring old family photos with you. Have your relatives do the same. After the presentation, pull them out and put faces to the names that your student talked about. "Oh, here is a picture of your grandpa doing that dance that you talked about in your presentation."

### **4. After it is all over, tell your student that you are proud of them and who they are.**

Make sure you let them know that you like their connection points and their individual points that they have identified. Tell them that you are grateful that you get to be their parent and maybe talk about a connection point that you have with them.



N I N T H      G R A D E  
R I T E      O F      P A S S A G E

**SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL**



There are no perfect families, so give yourself a break and believe that God can work with your family story--whether it's a constant drama, a gut-splitting comedy, a royal tragedy, or a pretty ho-hum Reader's Digest version of family.

"I was wrong" and "Please forgive me" are two of the most important sentences family members can learn to say to each other.

Make time for playing together and sharing food together. Feeling good has a powerful effect on our relationships.

## **FRAMING UP OUR PURPOSE:**

### **Deeply Rooted in Each Other**

When we think of a family tree, we think about all the different branches of people and stories that we can trace. But what if we help our teens think of their family tree as the fruit of an unseen root system? It's a tricky picture to paint, because every generation is a branch off of another generation. But every generation also has the potential to put down deep, enduring roots for the next generation. The whole idea is to be able to see where our family is rooted and to recognize when and if we need to be replanted in healthier relationships with each other. See if these ideas can help you communicate and work out a family story that is growing toward God's best for all of you. God calls us to be deeply rooted in Him and with each other.

## **Scripture**

Here are a few biblical truths you can share or use as the backdrop of your conversations. Feel free to look up these verses in a translation that resonates with you.

"8 Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.<sup>9</sup> Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing." --1 Peter 3:8, 9

Everyone plays a role in the family. There are birth-order tendencies, gender differences, and personality traits that all come into play. Family is a micro-community that has macro impact on how we see and respond to our world. Here are some questions that might help you and your teen (or your whole family) identify how to be more deeply rooted in each other.

What's my job in the spiritual community of my family?

How will I do that job well in my relationships with siblings and parents?

What does it mean to be called to live a certain way?

How can that make a difference in my family?

Deep roots produce strength, fruit, and shelter for generations.

"10 The visions of my head as I lay in bed were these: I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. 11 The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. 12 Its leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it." --Daniel 4:10-12

The tree that Daniel sees in his dream is a magnificent sight. It is strong and beautiful. But what makes it a remarkable tree is not just what it looks like but also what it produces: fruit, shelter, and a place to come together. That is such a wonderful picture of a strong family. You can use this verse



to ask your teen to evaluate your family tree. What does your family tree have in common with this picture of a magnificent tree? What doesn't your family tree reflect in this scripture? What small or big things could help your family produce the kind of fruit and shelter that this tree provides?

Deeply rooted families can withstand the powerful storms that come.

"...For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." --Acts 2:39

"Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time?" --Psalm 77:8

"For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations."  
--Psalm 100:5

We've already established that no family tree is the perfect family tree. God understands that sometimes we mess up the family system. He understands that sometimes someone else messes it up for us. Part of our deep-rootedness is to actively trust that God wants to bless our siblings, grandkids, great-nephews, long-lost 3rd cousins twice removed, and everyone else in our families through the promise He first gives to us. Those we love may be far off, but God still knows where they are, and His arm of grace extends that far. We may have endured some terrible storms and felt ourselves bent almost as far as we can bend without breaking, but we can hold onto the promise that his lovingkindness keeps us from being uprooted.

Many of those kinds of storms can happen during the turbulent adolescent years. Tangible encounters with grace, forgiveness, healthy conflict, and restoration will help your teen eventually trust these promises. It's also important to allow grief and disappointment to run their course. Just because we believe that God has not abandoned us during our storms doesn't mean we can't admit that it certainly feels like He has vanished during those times.

## **//IDEAS FOR GROWING DEEP ROOTS IN OUR FAMILY**

Do family reviews. Reminisce about fun; retell stories that bring a smile.

Sibling rivalry is obviously normal, but you still play a role in refereeing teachable moments.

Encourage your teen to make a coupon book of activities and treats they are willing to redeem for a younger sibling.

Eat dinner together often. This is a lost family art in our busy lives.

Cook with your teen, and let them pick the recipe to tackle.

Work in the yard together planting and cultivating; create a garden together.

Show up for each others' big stuff. There's nothing like a family cheering section!

Do a family mission trip together instead of a theme park vacation.

## **rites of passage phase check**

9th grade is the phase of your student's life when friendships shift, grades count and interests shift so often your teenager has to explain, "This is me now."

### **PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT**

Has difficulty falling asleep before 11 pm but still needs 9 hours of sleep per night.

Guys are getting taller, smellier, hairier, and gaining muscle mass; may also experience voice changes, weird dreams and increased acne.

Girls typically outpace boys in development.

Girls bodies take on adult physical appearance; after menstruation, increase in height will slow and then stop.

Sexual desire is awakened, and the temptation to be sexually active is common.

They have a need to develop exercise routines and healthy habits.

### **EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Feels empowered through choices rather than rules.

May still feel insecure about their changing body.

May experience changes in motivation.

Seeks experiences that create intense feelings and emotions.

More vulnerable to addiction, such as self harm, alcohol and pornography

Exhibit impulsive behavior with friends and peers

Not responsive to adult lectures, feeling they know better what is going on than the adult does

Become better at setting and achieving goals

### **RELATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Girls begin to wear makeup on a regular basis.

Increased interest in sexual expression, but dating is often short-lived.

Say they want parents to listen more than advise.

May be tempted to change their behavior or appearance to gain acceptance.

Less time may be spent with family, while more time may be spent with peers.

Relationships with parents become focused on a negotiation to get what they want.

Girls have a tendency to be interested in older boys.

Popular peers, adults, and celebrities are strong influences.

### **MENTAL DEVELOPMENT**

Increasingly able to focus, recall and organize information

Overly self-aware; May think "Everyone is watching me."

Wired for risk taking

Resists embarrassing situations

"I'm bored," often means "I don't understand."

Their capacity for self-discipline increases.

Summer camps and mission experiences influence them spiritually because of the peer connections that those events create.

Rather than being told what to believe, they need spiritual leaders to help them develop their beliefs.