

SESSION 3: TRACING FAMILY INFLUENCES

*How has your family of origin—your parents, grandparents, siblings, and childhood events—
influenced who you are today?*



SHARE A PRAYER

Open the session with prayer requests and a prayer.

INTRODUCTIONS

Last week's homework was to bring a "before" picture of a pleasant memory or a special person or you enjoying a moment.

- **Who wants to share their picture first?** If you don't have a picture, please tell the group about a picture that captures a pleasant "before" memory.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Brooks was blessed with a loving family. His parents modeled compassion, generosity, and a God-centered life. The snowflake scene and all of the Brazilian flashbacks are real moments Brooks remembers verbatim with fondness and "saldade" (a Brazilian word meaning "deep longing for something/someone lost"). Though his parents were gone, memories of their examples stayed with Brooks and guided him through challenging times and points of indecision.

Our family is no accident. God chose our parents for us. He knew us in the womb (Psalm 139:13) and fashioned our future (Psalm 139:16). For some, our family of origin is a source of strength, comfort, and security. For others, family memories represent a sense of loss, disappointment, resentment, and/or regret.

Each disciple had different kinds of families and roles within that family. If you look back to their descriptions on page 16 each carried on characteristics from their family of origin. Andrew and James had "responsible oldest-sibling" traits, Thomas was quarrelsome like his father, and Judas grew up spoiled then dejected by his parents. As twins, James and Judas

Alpheus had striking similarities and together James and John Zebedee were known as the “Sons of Thunder” for their family of origin and possibly their bold personalities.

Developmental psychologist William Damon was fascinated with why some succeed against all odds while others continue to struggle. He studied several highly successful business leaders who came from varying family backgrounds. In interviews, he found that most of the business leaders had both a mentor (one who led by positive example) and an anti-mentor (someone who had qualities the leaders did not want to emulate). Damon (2004)² writes: *“often the influence of the anti-mentor was as great or greater than those who were positive role models. In a few cases, the leaders gave the anti-mentors more credit for (inadvertently) helping them shape their values than any positive mentors they could think of”* (p. 149).

In our childhood and throughout our lives, God allows both positive and negative experiences to shape our character and view of the world. How does your past influence who you are today? As you watch this clip, think about how Brooks’ childhood experiences prepared him for his future.

MOVIE CLIP – *Play Session 3: Tracing Family Influences*

THINK-PAIR-SHARE QUESTIONS

Before discussing these questions as a group, take a minute to write your own responses (think), discuss them with a partner (pair) then join together for a group discussion (share).

- 1) If you were to create a flashback scene of your childhood, what would it look like? Think back to a specific event when you were 5-10 years old. Who is in the scene? What are you and he/she/they doing? What are they saying?

- 2) In your flashback scene, what character traits do the adult(s) model? Are they positive and/or negative traits?

- 3) What emotions did you feel as a child in your flashback scene?

²Damon, William. (2004). *The Moral Advantage: How to Succeed in Business By Doing the Right Thing*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

- 4) In the snowflake scene and other flashback scenes in *The Amendment*, how did Brooks' parents prepare him and Leslie for their future? Give specific examples.

- 5) How did the adults in your childhood influence your future? Choose one or two key figures (parent, mentor, anti-mentor) who had a significant influence on who you are today.

FAITH WALK

Read Psalm 139:13-16 in which David praises and thanks God for carefully creating him and purposefully crafting his future.

- **Why do you think God chose your parents and childhood environment for you? Does anyone want to share?**

- **If you grew up in a challenging childhood environment, what personal strengths do you have that counterbalance the negative influences in your life?**

God promises that when our families fail, He will be a comfort and strength for us. He will be a father to the fatherless (Psalm 68:5; 2 Samuel 7:12-15) and a guide in times of trial (Psalm 23:1-4). Read Psalm 27:10-14.

- **How has God comforted you through your family or when your family couldn't? Does anyone want to share an example?**

[See the next page for homework reflection questions to start after or during the session.]

HOMWORK

Each generation passes down a combination of positive and negative examples and experiences for the next generation.

- What positive character traits from your family do you want to embody and share with others?

- Are there any negative character traits you want to leave behind and not model in your own life? If so, please explain more.

- What *new* characteristics (not part of your childhood) are you trying to model and make part of your life?

*EXTRA CREDIT

For an additional perspective, talk to someone who knew you in your childhood or knows you well enough to know about your childhood.

- Ask, “*How has my family influenced who I am today? In what ways am I similar to my family of origin (parents, grandparents, siblings)? How am I different?*”

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful. I know that full well.

—**Psalm 139:14**

FROM BROOKS

How did your parents lives and examples prepare you for your future?

First, my parents were, and had the reputation for being very truthful and straightforward. They were the kind of people who did what they told you they would do. This became most clear to me when I ran for the Oklahoma State Senate at the age of 26 (although I turned 27 before I took office). I would go to people's doors as I was campaigning, and at first they would look at me like I was crazy (partly because I looked like I was 16). But when I told them my name, or they saw it on my campaign flyer, they would ask, "Are you Richard and Marilyn's son?" When I answered, "Yes," they would answer with, "If you're half the person your mom and dad were, you're going to do OK." I learned from that not only how important those qualities that they lived by were, but how important a reputation is. I also learned how important a name is. They had left me a good name that would help me get a good start. It was critically important that I keep that name reputable, and it must be protected as a gift I can pass on to my own children.

My parents were also two of the hardest working and diligent people I've ever known, even to this day. They woke up with a sense of purpose. They engaged in tasks and projects that were meaningful to them and didn't allow many distractions from the task at hand.

I have the privilege of playing my dad in the movie. The words from the sermon he preached the day before he died was about forgiveness. Perhaps his last message to me. I heard it years later when I was given a recording of it.

Leslie and I had the honor of accepting, posthumously on behalf of my father, his 9th award from the Freedom Foundation in Valley Forge, PA for writing. Only two other people had received 10 of these awards in history. He continues to be an inspiration for achievement. And for several years that I was in the senate, I had the honor of handing out the Marilyn Douglass Award for Outstanding Achievement, from the Oklahoma Arts Council, where she had served for several years on the board, by appointment of the governor.

It's as if my mother and father knew that they didn't have long on this earth. They died when he was 43 and she was 36. They set the bar very high.

FROM RICHARD – BUILDING CHRISTIAN HOMES

By Richard B. Douglass, July 20, 1973



Several years ago the leading historian of his time called attention to the fact that the decay of homelife had always led to the decay of nations. About the same time, an outstanding European political figure visited the United States. He wrote a letter of appreciation to the President of the United States saying that he felt that our homelife was the most sound anywhere in the world. "The future of your nation seems secure because your homes are havens of strength," he wrote.

Now modern social scientists are claiming that family life in our country has decayed more rapidly than in any nation in the world. No realistic person would deny that something is wrong with family life in our country. Since no nation in history has managed to survive the decay of the family, it seems that something needs to be done to correct this problem. A return to biblical principles is a solution worth considering.

The home was the first institution established by God. It was meant to be the basic unit of society. Love and strength were to be gained from it. It was also to be the basic center of educational and spiritual training. Currently, these responsibilities are turned over to the schools and the churches. Spiritual values need to be taught by churches, but no church can accomplish much when they have the child for only a few hours, and the child is often taught conflicting ideas for the rest of the week. Churches and schools must do what they can, but this is merely a supplement to what must be done in the home.

God emphasized the importance of the home by including one of the Ten Commandments that related to the home. "Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee," were the words used. The parents were to be viewed as God's representatives for the guiding of homelife. And it is of keen interest that the future of the nation seemed to depend on how well they keep solidarity in the homes. This seems to be a principle that God has written into the very structure of the universe.

As the Old Testament developed, God made it clear that the home was the place where obedience to God had to be taught. In Deuteronomy 6, the parents were told to teach the commandments of God diligently to their children. When Paul wrote concerning the home in the New Testament, he pointed out that there was to be a Christ-like love for the wife by the husband, a respect for the husband by the wife, and obedience to God and the parents by the children. Again, the emphasis is on the importance of the Christ-centered home.

The promise of God belongs to the nation that puts God first. The basic unit of society is the home. Unless God is first in our homelife He cannot be first in our nation. If we worked half as hard at making our homes Christian as we do making them prosperous, we would soon begin to transform our society. The future of our nation, and of our children, depends on building Christian homes.