

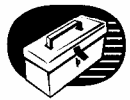
RULE 3 ■ Know Your Family

The Family We Inherit



Surveying the Site

1. What's your funniest memory of your father, or another man who was influential when you were young?
2. In your family, whom do you most look like or act like?
3. If you could say just one more thing to your father, what would it be?



Checking Your Toolbox

There's a good chance that your earliest memories are about the family that you were born into, or the family that raised you. During your most formative years, these people were the biggest influence on you, and probably shaped a number of your traits. People in the same family not only often look alike but also probably share the same language (and maybe even the same accent), some of the same interests and hobbies, and maybe even some quirks that no one outside the family has. So much of who we are is inherited or learned from our parents and the rest of our families. Even as many people grow older, their closest and most intimate relationships may well be with members of the family. This is the family that we inherit—the people close to us before we were old enough to choose whom to be close to.

Psychologists have recognized the important influence that parents play in a person's development, and so did the writer of the Old Testament's book of Proverbs

many years ago. Other sayings have been popular in our country, such as "the apple never falls far from the tree." In recent years, experts have been able to locate many sources of human behavior within the "family of origin"—the group of people with whom one's earliest experiences happened. Many factors shape people, and no two humans are alike, but there have been some noticeable patterns. For instance, a family's oldest child is often more dominant and aggressive, a middle child might be more withdrawn, and a youngest child sometimes needs more protection and approval from others. Of course, these patterns have many exceptions.

- Describe the family that you inherited. What do you treasure most from the experience of growing up in that environment?

Your family experiences probably also shape your image of God. For instance, when you call God "Father," you may be transferring to God some of your thoughts about your earthly father. For some of us, this helps us to see God's goodness. If your father was strict and overbearing, that might make God seem more rule-oriented to you, but if your father was weak and ineffectual, you might think of God as not having much ability to affect your life. Some men today realize that their fathers were distant and emotionally unavailable, and so many men think of God as far away and not really concerned with their lives.

It is also important to remember that many people have had bad experiences within their families. At best, families can be an excellent place to learn God's love, but

Blueprints

Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.

Proverbs 22:6

many families are damaged and dysfunctional, and so it is hard to imagine God's deep love if you grow up in such a family.

Think about the positive elements in your life, and ask yourself how many of them trace back to your parents, your family, or your early childhood experiences. Then think about the negative parts of your life, such as fear or mistrust or anger, and ask if those have roots in your family as well. Also, be aware of people outside your immediate family who were also influential in your life. Many men spend their lives repeating their childhood experiences, trying to make them turn out right. For instance, if your father did not pay enough attention to you, you may be going through life trying to get attention from others. Think about your family of origin and how you are experiencing life today. Remember: no matter what your family experiences, you are one of God's most special children, and God loves you.

■ What does it mean to you to be part of God's family?

What do you believe the rewards and responsibilities to be?



Conversation with the Master Carpenter

Close your session with prayer. Lift up any prayer concerns or insights. In an attitude of prayer each of you may lift up the first names of family members who were significant influences in your life. After each

name mentioned, the whole group will respond, "Pour your blessing upon (name of person), O Lord." Thank God for each of these individuals.



On-the-Job Experience

1. Write a letter to your father (or another influential older man) and tell him how you really feel about him. You might want to share the letter with him or with a close friend.
2. Do something special for some of the older people in your congregation. You might take them out to dinner or spend some time talking to them.