

CREATION

Featuring downloadable clips
from the film *Creation*,
in cinemas 25th September 2009



Housegroup

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It's All Relative

Understanding the stresses and strains of family life

Introduction

This house group material is based on the film *Creation* (cert PG to be confirmed, in cinemas 25th September 2009) which tells the story of Charles Darwin's life as a scientist and as a family man.

The film portrays Darwin's struggle to accept the death of his daughter and the challenge he faces in trying to reconcile his love for his deeply religious wife with his discovery of a world where it seems that there is no place for God. The film also shows the Darwins' dilemma over the publication of his ground-breaking work on the theory of evolution, which he fears will lead many people to reject their religious faith. The film also shows Darwin's own doubts about religious faith, influenced in part by his scientific research and his sense of grief at the death of his beloved daughter Annie.

In this session we will focus on Darwin as a father and a husband, looking at how his doubts and discoveries affect his relationship with his children and his wife. We will also look at the life of the Darwin family to help us to consider the themes of family, faith, parenthood and love.

The biblical material in this session will also focus on family life and help us to reflect on what it means to encounter struggles as members of human families and as members of God's family.

Bible Briefing

Most of us – whatever sort of family we belong to – would admit that our family isn't perfect. That is certainly true for many of the families in the Bible, including that of Jacob. In this session we are going to use the life of Jacob to explore what it means to be part of God's family and to live as God's people in our human families.

Jacob's search for blessing: Genesis 25:24-34 & 27:1-29

Jacob and Esau were the first children born to Isaac and Rebekah, and from the very first moment of their lives the two boys were at odds with each other. When they are born, Jacob is clinging to his brother's heel (25:26), as though trying to overtake him and be born first. Also, their parents each have their own favourite child: Isaac loves Esau, whilst Rebekah favours Jacob (v.28). Later in this chapter Jacob craftily encourages Esau, the firstborn, to sell him his birthright (vv.29-34).



The name 'Jacob' means 'took by the heel'; it has the sense of 'coming from behind' and 'reaching ahead to overtake the one in front'. Jacob seems restless within himself, as though he cannot bear to be the youngest child.

In chapter 27, Isaac is old and blind and it is time for him to bless his successor. He sends his favourite, Esau, to prepare him some favourite food after which he will give Esau the blessing which will pass God's promises from father to first-born son.

However, Rebekah overhears her husband's instructions and helps her favourite son to trick Isaac and thus inherit the promised blessing (27:5-17). Although Isaac is suspicious (27:20-24), he gives the blessing which, once given, cannot be taken back. It seems like Jacob has what he has been seeking all this time. However, this family rivalry does not end here: Esau resolves to kill his brother and Jacob flees for his life (27:41-45).

A dream of hope: Genesis 28:10-22

As Jacob flees for his life, he has a strange dream. As he sleeps, Jacob has a vision of a ladder set up between heaven and earth – a highway for God and his angels. When he wakes, Jacob is profoundly aware of the presence of the living God. Jacob's dream of angels has reminded him of the presence of God, and given him hope. He takes great comfort from his dream. He understands it to mean that, despite his trickery and deception, God has not abandoned him. God knows all about Jacob, and has a plan for his life.

Session notes

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Introduction for the group:

No family is perfect, and all families encounter difficulties from time to time. In this session we are going to explore some of the struggles and strains of family life, and to see how our Christian faith can help us to deal with and make sense of them.

To help us to do this we are going to look at two particular families, to see how they dealt with the difficulties of family life. We are going to see some clips from the film *Creation*, which tells the story of the family of the scientist Charles Darwin. We're also going to follow the story of the family of Jacob in the Old Testament of the Bible. Although these two families may at first seem poles apart (and they are certainly many hundreds of years apart) we will see more than a few similarities in them.

Of course, the aim of this session is that we might be more aware of our own role in family life, and better equipped to act in God's strength when difficulties come along.



Icebreaker:

You may want to use this activity to help illustrate the theme of the session. It is also fun and gets your group moving and thinking creatively. You will need a large clear space in the middle of the room to do this, so think about the size of your group and whether or not you need to rearrange furniture to facilitate the icebreaker. If your group includes any frail and elderly members, it may be better to either miss this activity out or to allow them to sit it out and watch.

Tangled up

Ask the group to stand in a circle in the centre of the room. Ask the group to imagine that they represent a family, made up of people with different experiences, needs and expectations.

Ask each person to reach into the circle and to take hold of one hand of two other people in the circle. It is important that the shape of the circle is maintained while this is done. When everybody has done this, each person should be holding hands with two other people in the circle.

Take a moment to point out that each member of the 'family' is now tangled up with some of the others. It is not easy to see whose hands are whose, and it may be uncomfortable to stand like this for much longer. Family life is sometimes like this: tangled, uncomfortable, disordered. However, with God's help, it is possible to change and to bring order back into the life of the family.

Now ask the group to achieve the following task: without letting go (very important!) of the hands they are holding, the group need to untangle themselves. This is best done slowly and carefully. Some members of the group may find that they need to turn round, kneel down etc. to make the untangling possible.

When the group have untangled themselves, they should find that they are standing in a circle, still holding the hands they originally took hold of. It seems amazing, but it does work. It is very rare for groups to form a knot that cannot be untangled.

Before ending the activity, you may want to invite people to comment on their feelings about it, and what it made them think about the 'family' aspect of the activity. You may also want to reflect back to the group the fact that the members are now standing in a different place to where they began. This is a helpful thought, because engaging with struggles can often take us to a different place in our lives. Also, observe that the process of untangling was tricky, uncertain and sometimes difficult. It involved each member thinking about their own position in relation to the position of those they were connected to.

Group Study Sections

Now that you have introduced your group to the theme of the session, the following sections will help your group to explore the themes more fully, using the film clips, Bible passages and questions in the following sections.

Depending on the size of your group, the time available and the particular needs of your group, feel free to select whichever of the following sections you think will be most useful. Use as many or as few sections as you want, or even spread the material over more than one meeting.



Section 1: Hopes, dreams and disappointments; Genesis 25:24-34

Explain to the group that we are going to begin by thinking about our hopes and ideals for family life. Although we know that things can go wrong in families, we all have a picture of how we want things to be. Part of the struggle of family life is the distance between our hopes for family life and the reality.

Tell the group that they are going to see a scene from *Creation*. It shows Charles Darwin with his children on a beach, explaining rock formations and delighting in his daughter Annie's ability to remember the Latin name for a starfish.

Play *Clip G: Look What I Found*

Download from www.damaris.org/creationfilmclips

1. What does this scene tell us about Charles as a father?
2. What do you think Charles' hopes for his family might have been?

Ask a member of the group to read Genesis 25:24-34.

The birth of Jacob and Esau was an answer to prayer for Isaac and Rebekah, and should have been a source of joy for them. However, verse 26 hints that life for the family would not, perhaps, be as peaceful as the parents were hoping.

3. What are/were our hopes and dreams for our own families?
4. What disappointments have we experienced along the way?
5. How does Christian faith help us to deal with disappointments in family life?

Section 2: Some are more equal than others; Genesis 25:27-28

Explain to the group that it wasn't long before strain started to show in Isaac's and Rebekah's family.

Ask a member of the group to read **Genesis 25:27-28**.

Any good parent learns to recognise and appreciate the differences between their children, and to value each child as an individual. However, Jacob's and Esau's parents took this to extremes and each had a favourite son.

1. What effect might Isaac's and Rebekah's favouritism have on the family?
2. If you were a friend of theirs, what advice might you give to Isaac and Rebekah?



The following short scene from the film comes after the death of Charles' and Emma's daughter Annie. In it we begin to see hints of the ways in which Annie's death has affected the members of the family, particularly Charles.

Play *Clip E: Bedtime Story*

Download from www.damaris.org/creationfilmclips

3. Look at the first quote from this scene on the handout (*quote 1*). What prevents us from spending time with our families? How big a priority do we give family time compared to other areas of our lives?
4. Why do you think the other children feel that Annie was Charles' favourite? What impact might this feeling have on them? How might parents respond to a situation like this?
5. What does the Christian faith have to say about how each individual is loved equally?

Section 3: A family divided; Genesis 24:29-34, 27:1-41

Explain to the group that, as Jacob and Esau grew up, they became more and more divided against each other. Sometimes this happens in our own families too. We are going to think about this idea of separation as we look at the next stage of the Jacob story.

Ask a member of the group to read **Genesis 24:29-34**.

Jacob's desire to be ahead of his brother leads him to bribe Esau to sell him his birthright. Not only is Jacob greedy for greater influence, but Esau seems not to care about his own privileged position in the family (verse 34).

1. What experiences do we have of competition with other members of our family?
2. Has our Christian faith changed our attitude towards the idea of being 'number one'? If so, in what ways?

The following scene from the film shows how Charles and his wife, Emma, are divided by the implications of his work. Charles fears that his discoveries will reveal that God does not have authority over the world; Emma worries that Charles does not care about the consequences this may have for his soul.

Play *Clip H: A Battle You Cannot Win*

Download from www.damaris.org/creationfilmclips

3. Look at the quote from this scene on the handout (quote 2). In this scene, do you feel more sympathy for Charles or for Emma? Can you say why?

The following scene continues this theme of division. Charles is undertaking hydrotherapy treatment. Here we see him talking to Cully, his hydrotherapist about his grief and its effects on his relationship with Emma.

Play *Clip J: A Great Consolation*

Download from www.damaris.org/creationfilmclips

4. What do you think God would say to Charles and Emma in their situation?

Jacob and Esau were also divided from each other by an event in their lives.

Ask a member of the group to read **Genesis 27:1-29**.

Jacob and Rebekah conspire to trick Isaac into giving his blessing to Jacob. This act of disloyalty will lead to even greater division.

Ask a member of the group to read **Genesis 27:30-41**.

Esau and Jacob are now set against one another in a deadly division. It seems that Jacob's desire to be greater than his brother has divided the family for ever.

5. Who in the story in chapter 27 is most at fault? Is anyone? Or is the situation the fault of the whole family?

Section 4: An unexpected new beginning; Genesis 28:10-22

Explain to the group that, although it seems that the situation between Jacob and Esau is beyond redemption, God does not see it that way and has a future for Jacob which he has not yet imagined. Out of a seemingly hopeless situation, good will yet come.

Ask a member of the group to read **Genesis 28:10-22**.

Although Jacob has deceived his father and betrayed his brother, God has not given up on him. Perhaps it is only when Jacob has got to this desperate point that he is open to God speaking to him.

1. Can you identify with Jacob's situation? Has God ever spoken to you at the point when hope seemed to have all but disappeared? If so, what did he seem to be saying?

Our last clip from the film shows that Charles has finally completed his work, but he still seeks Emma's approval of his actions.

Play *Clip K: You Decide*

Download from www.damaris.org/creationfilmclips



2. What commitment do Charles and Emma each show to one another in this clip? What sacrifices are each of them willing to make for the other's sake?
3. What do you think convinces Emma that Charles should publish his work? What part do you think her faith has played in her decision? (*Quote 3* on the handout may help here).
4. This change of heart for Emma seems to open up the future for Charles. What experiences do we have of new beginnings in our lives, either for ourselves or for others? What sacrifices might have been made so that these could happen?

Additional notes for leaders

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Section 1

1. This question picks up on several things happening in this scene. Charles shows concern for Annie's physical wellbeing when he sees that she is getting cold. He is also patient in explaining scientific processes of rock formation to the other children, and takes genuine delight in Annie's ability to recall the Latin name for a starfish. Annie's reaction shows that she is just as pleased to have pleased him.
2. This question prepares the group for talking about their own experiences in a few moments' time (question 3 in this section). Of course, there is no right or wrong answer to this question - the scene does not tell us what Charles' hopes were for his family - but you might encourage the group to offer some ideas based on their thoughts from question 1.
3. Encourage each member of the group to say something here (but do not force anyone to speak who clearly does not wish to). Also be aware that there may be a range of ages in your group: some may have children who are now parents themselves, others may have young children, others no children at all. Therefore it may be necessary to widen the word 'families' to include those who do not have children.
4. For some, this may be a sensitive issue. Don't worry if few people (or none) offer contributions.
5. This is an opportunity to see how faith makes a difference to our real, everyday lives. However, some people may need help in making such connections. If your group is struggling with this question, you might offer an additional question or two such as, 'Has anyone found that praying about X or Y has helped them?', or 'Has being part of a church community helped in dealing with X or Y?'

Section 2

1. Be aware that for some people, this issue may have affected them at some point in their lives.
2. This question is an opportunity to identify things which get in the way of our spending the time with our families we would like to, e.g. over-work, meetings (including church meetings!). If you think it helpful, you may like to encourage the group to share ways of addressing these things.
3. The film suggests that Charles has not stopped loving his other children, but that his grief at Annie's death is so great that it has the effect of distancing him from them.
4. The Christian faith shows us that God's love for each person is unconditional, and is not dependent on our having earned or deserved his love. For example, the story of the Lost Son in Luke 15 shows a picture of God (the father) who loves his children despite what they might have done to separate themselves from him. Also, the words of Psalm 139 paint a picture of the way in which God has created each one of us individually and understands us completely.

Section 3

1. This question may well prompt a variety of different responses, some amusing and trivial, some deeply felt and painful for the person sharing them. It needs sensitive leading, and a willingness to affirm group members where necessary.
2. You may want to encourage the group to reflect on the example of Jesus: particularly his teaching about taking up our cross and following him (Matthew 16:24-25) and Jesus washing his disciples' feet and then encouraging them to do the same for others (John 13).
3. Encourage the group members to be honest about this: they should not feel that they 'ought to' side with Emma because she is 'on God's side' in this scene. You could broaden the discussion to talk about divisive issues that any members of the group have experienced with close family members, but do so with the utmost sensitivity.
4. If you feel the group would respond better, you might encourage them either to write down their response to this question, or to talk with a partner about it. This may give them more freedom to respond imaginatively and honestly.
5. It may seem at first that the fault is mainly Jacob's and Rebekah's. However, Isaac's favouring of Esau (Genesis 25:28) may have played a part in leading to this situation, as may Esau's disregard for his birthright in the first place (see Genesis 25:34). A similar 'joint responsibility' is often the case with our own families: divisions are not always the fault of just one family member.

Section 4

1. This question is asking the group to reflect on what could be very deep and personal matters. If members of the group do share their experiences, it is best to listen attentively and not to challenge what is said. Also, be aware that there may be individuals who – for whatever reason – have not heard God speaking at times of need; this also needs to be heard respectfully without any feelings of inadequacy on the group member's part.
2. Both Charles and Emma show a deliberate willingness to submit their needs and wishes to those of the other. Charles, having devoted twenty years of his life to his research is willing to have it all come to nothing if Emma so chooses. Emma, despite her strongly held reservations about the consequences of Charles' work, devotes time to reading it and agrees that it should be published. Arguably, this is a fine, practical embodiment of the principles of Ephesians 5:21-33.
3. In this scene from the film, it seems that Emma's love for Charles helps her to make her decision that he should publish his work. However, her words (quote 3 on the handout) suggest that she feels that, even if she has made the wrong decision, God will be merciful to them. (Emma may even feel that her faith might save them both; 1 Corinthians 7:13-15 suggests that the faith of a Christian husband or wife will make the other partner holy by e.g. showing the love of God to them in their relationship.)
4. It would be appropriate to encourage group members to reflect on how their faith has brought new beginnings into their lives. Encourage members to share things, even if they seem very 'ordinary' or everyday matters – the important thing is to help the group to connect faith in Christ with new beginnings in life, as Jacob was given a new beginning in Genesis 28. Also, if appropriate, help group members to reflect on how their new beginnings in the Christian life involve a sacrifice of some sort, e.g. giving up an old way of life, putting the needs and concerns of others before their own (see Mark 8:34-35). If appropriate, this question could lead into a time of prayer for the needs of members of the group or for family life in general.

It's All Relative

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Quote 1:

Is Papa not coming to kiss us goodnight?

He is a little unwell from working - maybe tomorrow.

You said that last night.

I think when Annie died, he stopped loving us.



Quote 2:

Do you really care so little for your mortal soul, Charles? Do you not care that you may never pass through the gates of heaven, and that you and I may be separated for all eternity?

Of course I care, of course I do. What do you think has kept me in limbo all these years?

Quote 3:

Do I have it right?

Yes.

And so, you have finally made an accomplice of me. May God forgive us both.





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