

The Legacy Exercise: Reflecting on Your Family

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As you think about your family as both a source of both conflict and strength, it may help to contemplate the positive influences that have shaped your life and provided you with the foundations for whatever success you will achieve. To do this, we turn to the private diary of the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius as a source of inspiration. He titled his diary *To Myself*. It was a journal he kept between 170 and 180 A.D. while he was fighting against barbarian tribes along the northern borders of the Roman Empire. After the fall of Rome, the diary was lost for more than one thousand years, but was rediscovered and published in Zurich in 1558. It is now known as *The Meditations* and is considered a masterpiece of Stoic philosophy.

On the day Marcus Aurelius sat down in his tent near the Danube River to make his first notes about what was important in his life and how best to live it, he began by listing what he had learned from the people who cared most about him. *The Meditations* thus begins: “From my grandfather Verus, I learned good morals and the government of my temper.” He goes on to thank his biological father (who died when he was three) for leaving a reputation for “modesty and manly character,” and his adoptive father for teaching him “mildness of temper . . . , how to resist “vanity for public honors,” and “a love of labor and perseverance.” From his mother, he took his taste for “simplicity in my way of living, far removed from the habits of the rich.”

To get you started, here are some possible legacies from four areas of your life that you might want to consider. You should, of course, add your own life categories. If you like, write a short paragraph about the most important people in your life to help you remember their legacies to you.

Start with your family members, but feel free to radiate out to other important people who have influenced you – coaches, teachers, mentors, etc. Most researchers agree that your social and cultural environment *outside the family* can influence you as much or more than the one inside a home.

POSSIBLE LEGACY

FROM (name the person)

My Emotional Well-Being

- ___ How to love and be loved
- ___ The importance of family
- ___ The love of learning
- ___ How to relax or have fun
- ___ The value of community
- ___ Maintaining my physical health
- ___ Learning to be aware of my own and others' feelings

Achievement

- ___ The importance of hard work
- ___ How to think clearly and carefully
- ___ How to stay positive in the face of obstacles
- ___ Taking responsibility for my actions
- ___ How to set and reach challenging goals
- ___ The importance of careful planning
- ___ How to deal with or envision change

Dealing With Other People

- ___ How to forgive or seek forgiveness
- ___ How to listen
- ___ The importance of valuing and praising others
- ___ How to lead
- ___ Being an effective member of a team
- ___ How to assert myself effectively
- ___ How to be tactful

My Spiritual Life

- ___ The importance of faith in a higher power
- ___ Love of art, music, or literature
- ___ Living a moral life
- ___ The value of imagination
- ___ How to pray or meditate
- ___ The role of organized religion in my life
- ___ Appreciation of the natural world
