

# AMENDMENT

*Faith-based Discussion Guide: A Journey Toward Peace and Purpose*



*By Julea Douglass, Ph.D.  
with Brooks Douglass & Richard B. Douglass*

Faith-based Discussion Guide to Accompany *The Amendment* Movie

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## An 11-session group Bible Study to accompany *The Amendment* movie

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Many people who see *The Amendment* movie are struck in a deep and meaningful way. Possibly it's the message of forgiveness, or maybe it is grief and loss of a loved one through death, divorce, or conflict. Maybe it is a traumatic event of their past that won't let go.

The *Amendment Faith-based Discussion Guide* can be a powerful and important way for churches to connect with members in need of emotional and Biblical support. Using clips from the movie, participants are able to recognize shared emotions around grief, loss, and anger in Brooks' and Leslie's lives while also learning more about how Jesus' disciples experienced many of those same emotions and injustices in their time. Just as Jesus walked with His disciples through their challenges and grief, this guide covers similar topics in the context of a supportive group Bible study. The conversations and insights that emerge from this study can be a real breakthrough for members who have felt alone and unsteady in the suffering or unresolved issues.

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## SESSION 2: FINDING COMMONALITIES

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*How are your life experiences similar to the love and/or loss of the Douglass Family? How are your life experiences similar to your groupmates'?*



*The Amendment* is based on the true story of Brooks and Leslie Douglass (left). Brooks co-authored the movie with director Paul Brown. Leslie worked with them and actress Taryn Manning to share her perspective of their story.

### SHARE A PRAYER

Each class we will start with a prayer to center our thoughts and invite God to join us the discussion. *[Lead the group in prayer or ask for a volunteer.]*

### INTRODUCTIONS

Welcome to the Amendment Faith-Based Discussion Group. This class is dedicated to people touched by *The Amendment* movie and who are experiencing a sense of grief or loss in their lives. Maybe you related to losing a loved one or have experienced a trauma in your life that has stayed with you and won't let go. Maybe the message of forgiveness spoke to you or maybe there is a relationship in your life you miss and want to mend.

Whatever spoke to your heart in the movie, we hope this group experience will bring you to a greater sense of peace and purpose. Throughout the Bible, God speaks to and hears peoples' hearts. He knows our true hurts, motives, and needs. He intercedes when necessary through answered prayers—or allows a completely different path to emerge never prayed for or expected. Whatever the path... God is with you in that journey (Isaiah 41:10) and now your groupmates in this class will walk that path with you as well.

Let's find out more about each other and what we have in common:

- **Please tell us more about yourself. What is your name and occupation (if applicable)?**
- **What is something you most enjoy doing (could be a hobby, profession, talent)?**
- **What inspired you to join this class?**

## BEHIND THE SCENES

Each class will start with a clip from the movie that relates to the lesson theme and additional “behind the scenes” info not included in the movie.

Before watching this session’s movie clip, take a minute to look at the butterfly on the cover of this guide (also on the first PowerPoint slide).

- **What do you notice about the pictures? How are the pictures on the left wing different than the pictures on the right wing? What do you see in the centerpiece?**
- **What do you remember of the butterfly in the movie?**



This glass butterfly symbolizes the “before” and “after” a painful event. The centerpiece is the event that changed the structure of the butterfly. Mathematician Edward Lorenz originally coined the phrase “butterfly effect” to describe the phenomenon when one small change sets off a chain of events that result in a significantly different outcome.

As you watch this clip, think about how many different ways Brooks’ and Leslie’s lives changed from loss they experienced.

**FUN FACT:** The blonde girl in the right wing is our [Julea’s and Brooks’] real daughter. She and our son played Leslie’s young kids in one scene. Though the right wing of this butterfly shows sad scenes of the Douglass Family’s life—there have been many happy scenes since, many of which include Richard and Marilyn’s grandchildren ☺. Their love lives on in many ways.

**MOVIE CLIP** – *Play Session 2: Finding Commonalities*

## 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) What was your overall impression of *The Amendment* movie? Which scenes stayed with you the most?

2) Which character could you relate to the most and why? [Richard (the father), Marilyn (the mother), Brooks (the son—as a child and an adult), Leslie (the daughter—as a child and an adult), Heather (Brooks' wife), Nicole (the reporter) or someone else?]

3) Which emotions/sensations could you relate to most in the movie? Check all that apply:

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family Love              | <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Pleasant memories       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grief                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Loneliness                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Missing Someone         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loss                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Stress                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Considering Forgiveness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anger                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Accomplishments | <input type="checkbox"/> Unresolved Issues       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Strained Relationship(s) |   | <input type="checkbox"/> Other:_____             |

4) What are your main goal(s) for this class experience?

Goal 1:

Goal 2:

Goal 3:

## FAITH WALK

Within the true story of *The Amendment* the murder of Richard and Marilyn Douglass and the attack on their daughter seems unfathomable. *How could a loving and Godly family experience such tragedy and loss?* To ask the age-old question: *Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people?*

This is a question we will continue to grapple with throughout these sessions. It is not an easy answer, but we will find over time—there are answers to this question that will have more meaning for you as the sessions progresses.

To help with that answer, we will look to the Bible, the greatest source of divine wisdom and guidance. There are many examples of love, loss, tragedy, and injustice throughout the Bible but none stands out more definitively than the life and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The sinless Son of God experienced intense persecution, pain, and suffering. Yet, he foresaw and accepted this fate. He willfully said: *"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."* (Luke 22:42) He knew throughout his life, that his death and suffering were imminent. This Bible study will focus mainly on Christ's life and death from the perspective of his disciples; those who loved him dearly and were left broken-hearted to make sense of his senseless death then courageously carry on.

Each of the disciples was called from his ordinary life to experience extraordinary events, companionship, challenges, and unconditional love. Each represented different strengths, weaknesses, backgrounds, and perspectives. Together they were a balanced and effective team. To study life from the perspective of the 12 disciples, we need to get to know them better. We'll continue to refer to their life experiences in future sessions.

- **Which disciple do you relate to the most and why?** (Check one then discuss.)

**Andrew** - the responsible oldest child, level-headed leadership skills but cautious about taking risks

**Simon Peter** - inspiring speaker but also quick to get in trouble for speaking or acting before thinking through possible consequences

**James** - also an oldest sibling; a parent of four children; often quiet but brave when his convictions were challenged.

**John** - the youngest of the disciples, known for his love Jesus and others. Courageously stayed with Jesus during the crucifixion

**Philip** - a provider for the group, always planned for their meals and provisions; spouse and daughter also supported his efforts

**Nathaniel (also known as Bartholomew)** - a business person and well educated; known to be honest, sincere, and without guile; took care of his aging parents

**Matthew** - a money collector; gave much of his own money to support their ministry; preferred to work anonymously w/o credit

**Thomas** - known for "doubting" Christ without further evidence; Grew up w/ quarrelling parents and known to be quarrelsome himself but still liked by others

**James and Judas Alpheus** - twin brothers who did most things together; Good natured helpers

**Simon the Zealot** - an enthusiastic supporter but was broken-hearted and depressed after Christ's death. He initially fell away from the ministry then regained his strength and stayed committed

**Judas Iscariot** - Grew up the only son of wealthy parents; disowned by his parents when he chose to follow John the Baptist; In charge of finances; Preferred isolation over community

## APPLICATION & REFLECTION

The disciples were real people with real emotions. Like you, they experienced joy and pain, accomplishments and setbacks, friendships and conflicts, love and loss.

Read aloud John 16:17-24.

- What does Jesus try to prepare his disciples for in these verses?
- What promises does he make them in these verses?

## CLASS GUIDELINES

Just a reminder, group discussions are most meaningful when blanketed in mutual respect and trustworthiness. Confidentiality is an important component of a supportive group experience. You are welcome to share your personal insights and experiences outside of class, but not your groupmates'. Those are only their stories to tell.

## HOMEWORK

For homework, **bring a picture** to the next session of your “before”—like the ones in the left wing of the butterfly. It could be a picture of a pleasant memory, a special person, or you enjoying a moment. Bring something meaningful you want to share with the class. It'll be the first “show and tell” you might have had since elementary school ☺

## FROM BROOKS

*How do you think God prepared you for the loss of your parents and the trauma you experienced?*

*From my earliest memories, my parents were teaching me to be independent. We moved to Brazil as missionaries when I was five, and I think that is where God really prepared me for the things I would have to survive later. I learned, by watching my mother and father, that their lives were not truly their own. They had sold out to do the work God wanted them to do whatever and wherever that meant. Their entire lives belonged to Him and I believe they found true joy in that. Their lives were spent serving others. In doing so, we traveled into dangerous and pretty unforgiving places where our lives could have ended any time in a variety of ways. That never seemed to bother them as they immersed themselves in the work and the people they were serving. We always felt safe. But we always tried to be aware of our surroundings and have a plan in mind for things that might go wrong.*

*But one of the things I remember sensing and feeling, perhaps because it was said to me or because it was being taught to me without being spoken was, “If God wants me to live, there is nothing that can harm me, no matter what someone may do to me. But if God is ready take me to be with Him, it's going to happen, no matter what plans I may have to protect myself.”*

*I'm not sure there's anything we can do to prepare ahead of time for trauma and loss, other than dealing with prior trauma and loss. There were instances where I learned that keeping a cool head in a time of danger worked best. And perhaps that is the only lesson that mattered the night we were shot. After that, dealing with the aftermath was a much more difficult process. I think the idea of never giving up, was something that had been taught to me by my parents. So many times in the years that followed, it would have been easy to just give up and check out. But somehow I kept*

*believing that God must have a plan, or he wouldn't have kept me alive that night. So I kept trying, believing, and putting one foot in front of the other. Each year, I would see a little progress. Then each month. And eventually, each day. It went from feeling like I was trying to swim across a river of mud that was too deep to reach bottom to feeling like each stroke brought me closer to the other side, and eventually I felt like I could reach the bottom without my head going under. Then I quit feeling it any more. The one thought that sustained me was that as long as God was keeping me alive, He must have a plan. And if he had a plan, it was all going to be worth it.*

## FROM RICHARD – GOD PREPARES MESSENGERS

*By Richard B. Douglass, January 1978*



Whenever a big job needs to be done, the first thing that is necessary is to find the person who can do it. Then that person needs to be prepared to do the job. Often this is the more difficult task. Skills must be sharpened. Confidence must be built. Then proper attitudes must be constructed. An outstanding football coach once declared that “building a team requires three things. These are: emotional and physical conditioning, technical skills, and a heart to win.”

When God wants an important mission accomplished He first seeks a man. Then He equips the man with what He needs to do the job. A basic rule of the spiritual world is: whatever God demands, He enables. The tiny Book of Jonah is a classical illustration of this truth. The prophet was called by God to become a missionary to the ancient city of Nineveh. The city was the center of a vast pagan empire. The people had made a world-wide reputation for their cruelty. They magnified their terrorism as a tool for frightening their enemies into quick submission. Jonah had a natural hatred for these dreaded enemies. It is only natural that Jonah was reluctant to become a missionary to these people.

The prophet fooled himself into believing that he could run from God. He fled in the opposite direction. God's reason for calling Jonah was so he could declare that the God of Israel was also the God of the whole world. How strange that the prophet should feel it possible to run from him. The running became a tool in his preparation for the job. God sent a storm at sea.

Finally, the prophet was thrown from the ship he had taken passage on. God prepared a great fish to take him to shore. It is this incident that has caused many to miss the primary message of this book. The great missionary message is missed because people take up the fruitless task of measuring the size of the mouth of a fish.

After the experience of being swallowed by a fish, the prophet willingly went to the city to preach. The people listened and the entire population repented of their sins and turned to God. Such a spiritual awakening should have thrilled Jonah. Instead, he sorrowed. He really wanted God to destroy his enemies. That would have been much easier to explain to the people back home. In his anger he camped on a hillside to watch, just in case God decided to go ahead and destroy these pagan people. He dozed off and was awakened by the hot sun of his bald head. A cutworm had destroyed a castor bean plant he was using for shade. He lamented the loss of his shade. Then God reminded him that he was more concerned about a plant that shaded him from the sun than a city of people who had turned to God. This was a lesson in compassion for the final course in his preparation for becoming a missionary to the world. The account of Jonah's ministry to Nineveh illustrates God's great concern for the world and the important fact that He does everything necessary to prepare people who will make that love known to the world.