

The Promised Family of God



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The Promised Family

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The Promise - Day 1

Introduction

- Take a few moments to write out what your definition of “salvation” is. When you think of salvation, what does it mean to you?
- How do you define the concept of “family”?
- What family of families would you consider yourself to be part of?

Ephesians 2:19

- How often do you think of being part of God’s household?
- What does it mean to be part of someone’s household?
- In your definition of “salvation” did you include anything about being part of God’s family or his household?
- As we go through this quiet time series, we will seek to understand the role of covenant family in God’s salvation plan and what that means for us as disciples of Jesus

- In general, do you think positively or negatively about the concept of family? What was your “family” experience growing up?

Genesis 3:15

- If you’re not familiar with this passage you might want to read the entire chapter to put it into context
- Immediately following the choice of Adam and Eve to sin by doing their own will rather than God’s, God was already making a promise to reconcile with humanity
- He promises a “zera,” which can be translated as “seed,” “offspring,” or “descendants” as in a family
- God was promising to fix the problem of sin through a specific descendant and family

- Are you surprised that God promised, from the very beginning, that he would reconcile with humans through the promise of a family?
- Why do you think that God might have chosen to work through human descendants?

Genesis 12:1-3

- The first thing that God did when he came to Abraham was to call him to leave his family
- To put this into full perspective, keep in mind that Abraham was 75 years old when this took place

- He promised to make Abraham into a great nation, but the word literally means “people”. In those times this very much carried the idea of a family or tribe much more than what we think of when we hear the word “nation”
- God was promising Abraham a new and mighty family to replace the one that he was calling Abraham to leave
- To call him to leave his family was huge because one’s family was the source of their inheritance, their future prosperity, their protection, and their identity
- God makes a pretty big promise to Abraham. He promises that the whole world would be blessed through the family that he would give to Abraham. This was the promise that God had given in the Garden of Eden.
- To really challenge Abraham’s faith in God was the fact that he had no sons and so could seemingly have no descendants

- What is your response when you feel that God is calling you to follow him in a challenging way?
- Take some time to imagine yourself in Abraham’s shoes. What would you be thinking and feeling as God asked him to leave his family and land?
- How hard is it for you to trust God even when you cannot see how things could possibly work out?

Genesis 17:3-8

- God adds further detail to the promise that he had made to Abraham. Not only has he promised a family to Abraham through whom the whole world will be blessed, and so sin will be dealt with, but he also promises that it will be a family of many nations (many have simply reduced God’s promise to meaning that many nations would come from Abraham but, as we will see, Paul taught that this promise meant that Abraham would have one family of many nations)
- How long does God say that his promise will last will Abraham’s family?

Conclusion

- As we have seen, from the very beginning, God promised that the manner in which he would deal with sin was through a family. How does that begin to change the way in which you have traditionally thought about your salvation?
- What can we learn about God’s character to remember that he had a plan to reconcile with humanity from the very beginning and that he has been working out that plan throughout all of history?

The One - Day 2

Exodus 4:22-23

- The language of “firstborn son” was important in the ancient world
- The firstborn son was the one through whom the inheritance and the primary identity of the family would pass
- Why is it notable that God would identify Israel as his firstborn son?

- What are the things in your life that give you the sense of identity, of who you are?
- Does your status as part of God’s family truly serve as your primary source of identity?

Isaiah 11:1-5

- In this passage, which is a promise of the Messiah, it is clear that the Messiah would be specifically a descendant of Israel. He would be one of Abraham’s descendants
- Why would this be important detail when we consider it in light of God’s original promises to Abraham?

- There was a strong connection between God’s promises to give Abraham a family through whom the world would be blessed and then subsequent promises that the Messiah would be a descendant of that family and the Jewish attention to their lines of descendency.
- Isaiah says that the Messiah would not judge based on his senses and feelings but on the righteousness of God. As members of his family, does that describe you? Do you act more in terms of God’s righteousness rather than what you feel?

Isaiah 2:2-4

- This is not a promise that all nations would become peaceful when the Messiah came but that he would have a people of all nations that would live in peace with one another

Isaiah 53

- Isaiah 53:4 clearly alluded to the fact that God would have a servant who would act as a representative for his people
- This will become an important concept as we consider the covenant family and the role of the Messiah within that family and the promises of God to Abraham

- The role of God’s family was always that they would take suffering onto themselves (based on the ultimate act of doing so by the Messiah).
- What do the following passages remind us about that call for God’s people today: Colossians 1:24; Philippians 1:29, 3:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:5; 2 Timothy 1:8; 2:3; 1 Peter 2:19-25; 3:8-18; 4:12-19

Romans 1:16-17

- What is the gospel to which Paul refers according to Romans 1:1-6?
- What does Paul say is the power of the gospel?
- “Righteousness,” when referring to God, carries the connotations of the fullness of his character but that which is most often demonstrated in his being faithful to his covenant promises
- The point of this passage then, is that Paul is saying in the fact that Jesus was the Messiah who was descended from David and raised from the dead, that God has shown himself to be faithful to the covenant promises that he made going back to Abraham and even in the Garden of Eden
- A major question that Paul would be answering throughout the book of Romans was whether or not God had been faithful to his covenant promises to Abraham if people had to come to the Messiah in order to be reconciled to God

- Paul says that he was not ashamed of declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ anywhere, anytime. How does that challenge and convict you? Have you ever found yourself in a position where you felt ashamed to declare the gospel?
- Paul was very concerned with demonstrating that God was faithful to his promises? Why was that so important to him? Why should that be so important to Christians today?

Conclusion

- God had given some monumental promises to Abraham to give him one family of many nations through whom the whole world would be blessed. It seems difficult to understand how God could fulfill those promises.
- It was an important aspect of those promises to see that God had also revealed that his Messiah would serve as the lone representative of his people

Sons or Slaves - Day 3

John 8:31-38

- Jesus challenged the Jews who had a surface belief in him to hold onto to his teachings with a death grip
- He knew that he was going to challenge the very core of their beliefs and identity by his teaching about what it would take for them to be part of the family of God
- He was teaching a truth that all his hearers, Jews included, needed in order to move from slavery to the status as sons in the promised family of God
- This was incredibly offensive to Jews who already assumed such a status based on their descent with Abraham as their ancestor
- Jesus challenged them by declaring that they were not part of God's family but that he was the true son of the family
- Only in coming to him could they be part of God's family which meant that they had to embrace the idea that they were not already
- The issue at hand was whose family were they a part of
- Were they part of God's family or another family?
- Why do you think they were so upset at the implication that they were slaves rather than sons?

- What was Jesus' response despite knowing the violent reaction to his teaching that the Jews were not part of God's family yet?
- Are you as bold as Jesus was in declaring to people that they must be in Christ in order to be part of God's family or do you tend to back down from that bold position around friends or co-workers?

John 8:39-47

- As Jesus challenged the Jews on their identity and faith, telling them that they were not part of God's true promised family, why were they so adamant about asserting that Abraham was their father?
- For the Jews of the day, demonstrating that they were the descendants of Abraham was all they needed. In their mind, the covenant promises of the one, true family had been made to Abraham and his descendants and that settled
- This is why Jesus' assertion to be the Son of God was so vital
- His claim was that he was the true Son and heir to the promises and that the people of Israel were not the family of God. They needed to come to Jesus in order to be part of that family

- Rather than being part of God's family, Jesus says that they were not acting like Abraham but like the Devil, thereby showing that he was their father and that they belonged to the family of fallen humanity just like everyone else rather than God's family

- If someone were to look at your actions what family would they think you belonged to?
- Is the entirety of your life consistent with the family of the Messiah or does your behavior look, far too often, like the family of fallen humanity?

John 8:48-59

- The charge against Jesus was that he thought he was greater than Abraham which, in their, eyes would mean that he thought he was outside of the promised family
- Jesus makes it clear that the family was promised to Abraham, but ultimately, it was God's family not Abraham's and God was the Father of this family
- Abraham rejoiced at the coming of Jesus' day because he knew that the Messiah was the ultimate fulfillment of the promised family
- Jesus' claim was that Israel as a nation was never the final shape of the promised family
- It would always be a Messiah shaped family
 - What does Ephesians 1:1-14 say about the fact that God's predestined plan was always to have a Messiah-shaped people?
- In verse 58 Jesus went beyond what he had been saying about being the fulfillment of the family to implying that he was somehow the "I am" (see Exodus 3:14) himself

- Are you as committed to the idea of needing to be part of God's true family as Jesus was?
- How does understanding that salvation has to do with being part of God's family rather than just some individual decision change how we share the gospel with others?

Conclusion

- The Jews that were listening to Jesus knew the implications of Jesus' claims that they were not automatically part of the family of God but needed to be in the Messiah to be part of the promise
- Do you have a true commitment to consistently living like you are part of God's family? What does that mean for the way that you think about other Christians?

God's Household - Day 4

Ephesians 2:11-22

- The issue here is all about the promised Messiah-shaped family
- Before Christ, Gentiles were excluded completely from God's family but through Christ we have the opportunity to enter into the Messiah's family
- The law served a purpose but could never really bring about the promised family because it quarantined Israel from fallen humanity until the Messiah could come (see Galatians 3:19 which shows that the law came until the promised family would come about through the Messiah). Thus, the purpose of the law was to divide humanity into two, so it could never be the permanent path to God
- God's purpose all along was to create one family out of the two humanities which were Israel and all other Gentiles
- Through Christ we are part of God's household

- What does it mean to you that you can join God's family?
- Do you hold the church at the level of esteem of being God's promised family?
- How does it change the way you feel and act towards your church when we understand that a major part of salvation is to become part of God's family rather than just seeing salvation as merely an individual happenstance?

Luke 3:7-8

- Jesus predicted that God could raise up anyone (even stones) to fulfill the role of Abraham's family (see 1 Pet. 2:5)

John 14:2-4

- It seems quite likely that Jesus borrowed familiar language from a Jewish wedding in which the groom would get engaged or betrothed to the bride and then would go to his father's house and add on a room for them when they became fully wed
- When the room was finished, the groom would return for his bride and they would go and live in the father's house and she would officially become part of the family
- Jesus' primary point here was that he was going to the Cross so that everyone who came to him would be part of God's family

- Jesus was encouraging his disciples to not have fear about his impending death. How would this passage encourage them? How does it encourage you even today?

Ephesians 3:1-13

- To what does Paul refer when he talks of God's grace that was given through his preaching of the gospel?
- What is the mystery (or revelation of something that was previously concealed) that Paul speaks of here?
- Paul basically uses terms such as family, household, body, and even church interchangeably
- The one family of many nations that was promised to Abraham could only be fulfilled in Christ
- It is a major aspect of the gospel that the family of God constantly demonstrate the many nations aspect of the one family

- What do you normally do when you find out some amazing piece of information that you hadn't previously known before?
- Paul says that the mystery of the one family had finally been revealed in the gospel and needed to be announced to everyone?
- How active are you in declaring the exciting truth of God's one family of many nations?

Ephesians 3:14-21

- Paul makes the point that all families come from God anyway and that his plan has always been to bring people back to that one family
- As Paul reaches a climax of his discussion of the promised covenant family, he says that he prays that the believers would be rooted in love and grasp the incredible depth of that love
- It is not only in our relationship with God but in our relationship with our family that we do that
- It is when we act like the family that God wants us to be that we bring glory to God

- Spend some time searching to grasp the depth of God's love for his people through the love that you can give and receive as part of God's household through your interactions with other family members

Conclusion

- Have you truly made the decision to commit yourself to God's family?
- Take some time to consider the truth found in 1 John 4:20-21 as it relates to our commitment to God's people

Messiah-shaped - Day 5

1 John 3:1-2

- This is not just soaring and inspiring language but is one of the main themes of the entire New Testament
- In the ancient world, children were expected to act like their father and bring him glory and honor in so doing (see John 5:19-20, 15:8)

➤ How does it challenge you to think of being like and bringing glory to our father in everything that you do?

Galatians 3:5-7

- The basis of Abraham's family never had to do with merely physical descent. It was always a family that pointed to the fact that one day it would be based on faith
- Paul's declaration was that the time for that family had now come

Romans 3:9

- Paul makes it clear that both Jew and Gentiles were part of the fallen humanity and separated from God's true family that had been promised. Despite their very real differences, they were both in equal need of reconciliation

Romans 3:21-24

- All are in equal need for a covenant solution from God to be a part of his promised family and Christ is the solution
- "Justified" basically referred to the declaration by God that one was in the right covenant family (In that sense, justified would be like a preacher saying "I now pronounce you man and wife." It was the declaration. Righteousness, then, is our new status based on our justification. Righteousness would be a status like a couple's new status after the preacher's declaration that they are now "married".)

➤ When someone is declared to be married and then assumes the status of a married person, do they perfectly understand how to live as a married person? Of course they don't. In the same way, we are declared to be in God's family but have to work out over time how to live out that reality.

Galatians 3:19, 23-29

- The law served the purpose of quarantining Israel until the Messiah came but with Christ that time had come and the law was no longer needed

- Just as a boat is vital to cross water but not needed once you reach land, so the law was vital but was no longer needed now that Christ had come
- We enter into God's family when we die to ourselves and our status as members of the family of fallen humanity and are baptized into Christ Jesus
- All other identities pale in comparison to our status in Christ as children of God, members of his new family
- In Christ Jesus we are one family
- In Christ Jesus we are the promised family; We are Abraham's descendants; we are heirs of the promise
- Salvation cannot be reduced to some private spiritual experience
- We join a family, a body (see 1 Corinthians 12:13). That is salvation

➤ Have you really dropped all other claims of identity and status and have faith solely on being in Christ and your status as a child of God in his promised family?

➤ What areas of your life do you still struggle with and tend to cling to when it comes to finding your identity and source of comfort and status?

Romans 3:28-31

- Being justified, or declared to be in God's family, has always been about faith
- To enter into the Messiah-shaped family we have to have faith in his life alone
- If God's family was based on the law, which separates by its nature, then there would always be two families
- Only through faith in the Messiah can there be the one family that God promised

Conclusion

- Do you have faith in the life of Christ alone as your claim to the inheritance as a child of God's family?
- There are many things that can compete for our attention and faith but it is vital that we always remember that we were baptized into Christ and the family of God and we must rely in faith that God has justified on that basis alone and nothing else

Resurrection Faith - Day 6

Romans 4:13-17

- Verse 13 states it quite clearly that the promise of God's family through whom the whole world would be blessed and sin would be dealt with was not based on the law which divides nor on biological descent but on us obtaining the status of being righteous, or part of the covenant family, through faith in Jesus alone
- The law could only bring God's wrath because it had no power to bring life or change someone's status from the family of fallen humanity
- Abraham's faith in God was the prototype of a family that was always intended to be built through faith. This faith always pointed to a Messiah-shaped family
- Only through faith and through Jesus could all of the promises to Abraham be fulfilled
- How could there possibly be one family that was descended from Abraham that consisted of many nations? Only in Christ (see Galatians 3:26-29)

Acts 10:34-35; Revelation 5:9-10; Matthew 28:19

- A key element of the true Gospel embracing family is that it would consist of all nations and peoples. This is indispensable to God's family at every level and of every size

- How important is it to you that your church reflects the concept of being the family of many nations?
- Do you intentionally work towards your family of faith reflecting God's manifold wisdom by being a family of all nations?
- Is there any quiet racism within you that you need to expose and deal with?

Galatians 4:1-7

- At one time, says Paul, Jews were under the guardianship of the law while Gentiles were under the yoke of the principles of the world, and both are separated from the Messiah's family which means both are separated from God's family
- It was only through Jesus, the true Son of God that we can be adopted into the one, true family
- It is only through Jesus that we can have the Spirit which is the identifying mark of God's sons
- It is only through Jesus that we can call God our father, Abba
- It is when we act like the family that God wants us to be that we bring glory to God

- What do verses 6 and 7 mean to you personally?
- Take some time to meditate on those verses and let the full force of them sink in

Romans 4:18-25

- The Messiah's family is built on resurrection faith and, says Paul, so was Abraham's true family from the beginning
- His family, the promised family, always pointed to having resurrection faith
- Abraham's body was dead in its ability to produce children yet God had promised him a family so he had to believe that his body would be resurrected
- Similarly, when God asked him to sacrifice Isaac he was willing, believing that God would simply resurrect him (see Hebrews 11:11-12; 17-19)
- Faith is the simple act of believing in God's promises and acting as though they will be fulfilled

- Do you put your faith in the things that God has truly promised or do you make your faith contingent on things that you desire but which God has not promised?

Conclusion

- The one, true family promised to Abraham was always about resurrection faith rather than the law or anything else
- Do you truly have resurrection faith?
- Do you believe that you are part of God's family solely based on God's power to raise you to a new life through baptism into the life of Jesus Christ?
- Do you truly show faith? Do you live and act as though God's promises are true?

Two Families - Day 7

Romans 5:12-21

- One family consists of all descendants of Abraham, the family of fallen humanity
- The future of all people in that family is death because that family is enslaved in sin
- Death reigned in that family whether it was Jews who had the law or Gentiles who did not; Jews and Gentiles alike are part of this fallen family
- But through Christ a new family was finally made available
- The future of this new family is life, both in the eternal age of the resurrection as well as spiritual life now as children of God
- All in Adam's family will sin and will face eternal death but those in the Messiah's family will have eternal life, the life of the age to come

- Why is it so important to understand that when all is said and done, there are only two families in the world?
- How does this concept of the two families or the two humanities assist us in explaining the need of the gospel to those that are still in the family of fallen humanity?

Romans 6:1-14

- Entering the family of the Messiah is simple although not easy
- We must die to ourselves and our identity in the fallen humanity and trust in the life of Christ alone
- We must be baptized into Christ and into his life
- This life gives us the inheritance of the new family; We have not only the promise of a future resurrection but we have the life of that reality now
- Through baptism into Christ we are brought from death to life, from the family of fallen humanity to the family of the Messiah

- Do you truly consider yourself dead to sin?
- What does Paul mean in verse 14 when he says "you are not under the law, but under grace"?

Romans 7:21-25

- Paul describes the state of a Jew that is still trying to live according to the direction of the law rather than living in the new family by using a symbolically representative "I"

- The law has no power to change our status or allow us to be free from the slavery of sin
- Only by entering into the life of Christ can we be freed from the body of death and from the slavery of sin

Romans 8:1, 12-17

- According to verse 1, those in Christ no longer live in the realm of condemnation and have been freed from the problem of chapter 7
- Those in Christ have died to the family of fallen humanity and have entered into the promised family
- We are not obligated to live by the rules and patterns of the family of fallen humanity but we have an obligation to live according to the pattern of our new family
- Just as God's firstborn Israel (Exodus 4:22) was led by his Spirit in the desert which showed them to be God's people, so God's people now are led by the Spirit
- It is the presence of the Spirit in our lives which enables us to choose God's will and allows us to be adopted into the family and call God our father, our Abba
- In Christ, we are heirs of the promised family and the life of that family both in the present and in the age to come

- Do you truly live as though your obligation is to your new family and to live according to its standards or do you too often act as though you are still obligated to your old family of fallen humanity?
- What does it mean to you to walk according to the Spirit (Romans 8:1-11)? Is that a topic that you need to study more and understand better?

Conclusion

- There are two families, that of fallen humanity and that of the Messiah
- Those in Christ are led by the Spirit to live according to the life of the Messiah's family and be free from the realm of death and sin
- Does your life really reflect your entrance into a completely new family a new reality?

“Yes” - Day 8

Galatians 3:7-9

- The promised family of God has always been about faith
- Those who have faith are the true children of Abraham
- Paul says that when God promised Abraham that he would have one family of many nations through whom the whole world would be blessed, he was declaring the gospel ahead of time
- The gospel, then, is not just the resurrection of Jesus Christ and his defeat of death (although that is certainly the heart of the gospel) but it also includes the message that Jesus has formed the family of many nations that was promised to Abraham so long ago

- When you proclaim the gospel to people you know do you consider it important to talk about the one family that God promised, especially the aspect that it would consist of all nations?
- Do you intentionally share your faith with people of all nations so that the gospel will continue to be reflected?

Romans 9:1-13

- Paul was heartbroken that his fellow Jews were rejecting entrance into God’s promised family by rejecting Jesus Christ
- He knew that they were cutting themselves off from the family of Abraham in so doing
- The point of verse 6 is that just because “Israel” was rejecting God’s family that did not mean that God’s plan had failed
- The argument of the Jews against Paul’s gospel was that if the promised family had been given to Jesus then God’s promises to bring the family through Abraham’s descendants had failed
- What they failed to understand was that the Messiah was a descendant of Abraham
- He was the true Israel (we will look at that concept more thoroughly in a future study)
- Not all the descendants of Abraham were automatically part of the family of the promise. This was the Jew’s misunderstanding. They thought that they were part of God’s family simply because they were Jews
- The covenant promise passed to Abraham’s son Isaac, but not Abraham’s son Ishmael
- The covenant promise then passed to Isaac’s son Jacob, but not his son Esau

- The promised family, says Paul, always passed to part of Abraham’s descendants but not all of them
- In the same way, the promised family had now passed to the Messiah but not all of “Israel”
- He was the true Israel, the true family of God and all those in Christ are part of that family

- When God’s actions seem unjust do you question God’s faithfulness or do you realize that there must be an error in your thinking?

Galatians 3:26-29

- This is the family that God has given to us
- In Christ we are Abraham’s family; we are the true Israel (see 1 Corinthians 10:1 where Paul is addressing a primarily Gentile church but refers to the Exodus generation as “our ancestors”)

2 Corinthians 1:18-20

- The message of the gospel was not “well God has been faithful to some promises but he’s changed a few promises as well”
- The message of the gospel was that all of God’s promises have been answered with a definitive “yes”

Conclusion

- God has truly been faithful to all of his promises in the Messiah
- When God promises something, you can be sure that he will be faithful to that promise
- Do you truly live in faith in God’s promises?

The True Son - Day 9

Galatians 3:16-18

- The promises of the covenant family through whom the whole world would be blessed and reconciled to God did not automatically include the whole nation of Israel
- The promise was given that Abraham would have a family of nations but that promise would pass, says Paul, to just one of his descendants who would be a representative for the whole nation

John 15:1

- One of the major themes of the gospels was that Jesus was not just a descendant of Israel but that he was the fulfillment of the true Israel
- The imagery of the vine and the vineyard was common Old Testament imagery used for Israel (see Isaiah 27:2-6; Psalms 80:8-16; Jeremiah 2:21; 6:9; 12:10-13; Ezekiel 15:1-8; 17:5-10; 19:10-14; Hosea 10:1-2; 14:7)
- In claiming that he was the true vine, Jesus was claiming the status as the true Israel

- John 13-17 is a section in which Jesus comforted his disciples before his death. How does his telling them that he was the true vine, the true Israel, work towards the overall goal of that section?

Luke 4:1-2

- Israel began its journey as a nation by being led by the Spirit of God into the wilderness for 40 years where it would face temptation and would ultimately fail in doing the will of God
- Jesus intentionally began his ministry as he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness for 40 days where he would face temptation and would ultimately succeed in doing the will of God
- Jesus was the new Israel

Luke 6:12-16

- Jesus intentionally chose twelve disciples to symbolically represent the new people of God and to tie together with the concept of the twelve tribes of Israel (see Genesis 49:28, etc.)
- Jesus and his followers were the new Israel

Luke 3:21; 9:34-35

- The Father declared to Jesus at his baptism that he was truly the Son of God (which among other things was a term for Israel—see Exodus 4:22); he also declared at the transfiguration, so that the disciples could also be witnesses later, that Jesus was God's Son
- See also Matthew 2:15 where Jesus was called the son that was called out of Egypt which clearly demonstrated that Israel being called out of Egypt was simply a sign that pointed to the true Son being called out of Egypt
- Jesus would take the title as God's Son as the true Israel

Isaiah 49:6; John 8:12; 9:5

- Israel's ultimate vocation was always to be a light to the world, to be that family that brought the whole world together
- But the nation of Israel could never fulfill that under the law
- Only Jesus and his new family could take the role of Israel and be the light of the world

Conclusion

- These are only a few of the many examples that show that Jesus was the fulfillment of which Israel as a nation was simply a pointer to what was to come
- Jesus was the true Israel, the true Son of God
- Jesus' vocation and that of his people was to be the light of the world (see Matthew 5:14). What does it mean for you and your church family to be a light of the world? How can you personally improve on that calling?

The New Family - Day 10

Mark 3:31-35

- In the Jewish culture, the commitment to family meant everything
- Family was the means through which one found their identity as God's people (this is why genealogies were so important in the Jewish culture); family was also a practical source of your comfort, your protection, and your economic viability
- To honor one's family was to honor God and to dishonor family was to dishonor God
- Jesus would have been expected immediately to go out and greet his mother
- He doesn't biblically dishonor but what he did would have been deeply shocking and controversial in that culture
- Rather than greeting her, Jesus took the opportunity to redefine family as those who do the will of God
- Jesus came to create a new family, those who did God's will by following him would be the promised family

- Have you embraced the same definition of family as Jesus did?
- Do you really think of your fellow disciples as your true family and give them the priority as such as Jesus did?
- If not, whose idea of family do you think needs to change, yours or Jesus'?

Luke 11:27-28

- This was a standard Jewish greeting that honored the place of one's earthly family and their status as God's people
- Jesus again took the opportunity to redefine family
- People were not blessed simply on the basis of their biological familial ties but on the basis of their new family that was based on hearing and obeying the word of God

- Do you take advantage of all opportunities to declare that your real family is the covenant family of God which consists of those who do the will of God by entering into the life of Christ?

Luke 14:25-27

- Jesus stated quite plainly that we must hate father, mother, sister, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and even our own lives to truly be his disciple
- The word he uses, *miseo*, does not mean "love less"
- It was a common Jewish figure of speech which came from the world of inheritances
- To "hate" someone meant to reject them as part of your inheritance; to "love" someone meant to embrace them as part of your inheritance
- This can be seen in Malachi 1:2-5
 - God says that he hated Esau but loved Jacob
 - "Esau" is being used figuratively for the nation of Edom who were descendants of Esau
 - "Jacob" was being used figuratively for the nation of Judah who were descendants of Jacob
 - God had chosen the descendants of Jacob as the people of his inheritance and had rejected the Edomites
- Jesus' point, then, was that in order to be his disciple we must reject everything else as identifying us as the people of God
- Nothing can define our status as the people of God except for the willingness to die to self and trust in the life of Jesus
- We must have faith in his life alone

- When seen in the light of the figure of speech that Jesus was using, how does this passage challenge you?
- Have you truly given up everything else as the source of your identity, comfort, and avenue to God, including your own will and life and embraced nothing but the life of Christ?

Revelation 5:9-10

- God's new family consists of people from every tribe, language, nation, and people

Conclusion

- Part of Jesus consistent ministry purposes was to constantly redefine the covenant family
- It would not be based on physical descent but on coming to Jesus as his disciple and being part of the family that did God's will
- Have you truly embraced Jesus' family as your family?
- Does Jesus' family really take the priority in your life?

Our Family - Day 11

Mark 10:28-31

- To follow Jesus as his disciple means to give up everything else that can serve as our identity, comfort, security, or status as the people of God
- Peter knew that to follow Jesus and his call to be part of the new family of God meant to give up the idea of their Jewishness being the marker of their status as God's people
- For a Jew to do all that and join Jesus' new family could very well mean that they would be cut off from their physical families who could even go as far as having a funeral for the convert to Christianity because they considered them dead to the family
- Jesus promised his disciples that if they were willing to give up everything for the new family that they would be not just repaid in the age to come but that they would have a hundred homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, and everything else in their new family
- Jesus never called his followers to physically leave, disown, or dishonor their families but to reject them as their badge or marker as the people of God and to be ready to recognize their primary loyalty to the family of God if there was ever a choice between the two

- What do you do on an ongoing basis to help foster the family dynamic within your church family?
- Do you really make an effort to see your church family in the way that Jesus defined it?
- In what areas do you need to change your thinking in order to more fully embrace the view of the new covenant family that Jesus had?

Luke 9:23-26

- We tend to read this passage from our Western individualized point of view as though it is simply calling us to deny our own desires and wants
- That's certainly part of it but when we understand it from the viewpoint of the culture in which it was written, which was more communal minded, it becomes far more challenging
- In calling his disciples to deny themselves, he was calling them to give up the totality of their identity which included their status in their family, in their community, and everything else
- He was calling them to deny their very existence and life which is why he immediately talks of losing their life
- He was calling them to an entirely new identity, a new family, and a new life

- When viewed in this light, how does this passage challenge you right now?

John 19:25-27

- The normal expectation when the eldest son died would be for the next eldest to take care of their widowed mother
- Jesus had four other brothers and it would have been their responsibility to care for her after Jesus' death
- Jesus was evidently continuing to send a powerful and ongoing message about his redefinition of the family
- This was the new covenant family that was defined by those who were in Christ and committed to doing the will of God
- The old way of thinking of family was being transformed and having John, the beloved disciple, take care of Jesus' mother as his own would powerfully preach that message
- Early church tradition tells us that Mary did indeed go with John and died in Ephesus with him many years later even though her other sons became disciples of Jesus, and James even led the church in Jerusalem
- What a powerful message to the early church about who their real family was

- Are you willing to make such strong and ongoing statements to declare to the world and your fellow members of God's family that his family means everything to you?

John 20:17

- Jesus sent a strong message to his brothers and sisters that the Father wasn't just his Father and God but that all who came to Jesus could be adopted into God's family and have him as our Father

- Do you see your relationship with God in the intimate father-like relationship that Jesus envisioned for his people?
- If not, what stands in your way? How can you change that?

Conclusion

- Jesus constantly redefined the meaning of family to be based around the promised covenant family of God not just through words but also through actions, entrusting his own mother to the new family that he had created around him
- He calls us to view his family in the same way and with the level of priority that he has for the people of God

Family Loyalty - Day 12

Luke 9:59-60

- Burying family was one of the most sacred and important aspects of family loyalty in that society that there was
- Jesus is not prohibiting ever burying one's relatives but he is laying out a principle of heart similar to that for the rich young man in Luke 18:22
- The principle is that the person that wants to be Jesus' disciple has a new family and loyalty to that family takes priority and precedence over loyalty to physical family
- There are also important allusions to 1 Kings 19:19-21
 - Elisha was allowed to go back and tend to his family responsibilities before following Elijah
 - But the call to follow Jesus was more demanding and of a different nature
 - Following Jesus meant to transfer family loyalty completely

- For most of us, the challenge is to transfer the type of loyalty that Jesus was referring to from one group, particularly our family, to the new group, our family in Christ. Our challenge is to transfer loyalty from ourselves and our rampant individualism to supreme loyalty to Jesus' family.
- When we put it in those terms, what becomes most challenging for you concerning Jesus' call of loyalty to his family?

Mark 15:42-27

- As we looked at above, it was the solemn duty of family members to bury their kin
- Jesus had family in Jerusalem and the surrounding area at the time, yet Joseph of Arimathea took up the role of family member and was not challenged by anyone
- Jesus had made it clear that his disciples, those who did the will of God, were his true family so it made sense that one of his disciples would take up the responsibility of burying him

Mark 1:14-20

- Notice that the ideal call to discipleship is immediately followed by the response of leaving one's family and means of support and relying solely on following Jesus
- Again, this is a principle rather than Jesus trying to indicate that following him meant to abandon one's physical family and job – it was a call to radically shift priorities which for them meant to physically leave their families and family business

- Why would the need to leave one's family group (see Gen. 12:1-3) be so closely connected with the idea of following Jesus and being part of God's family?

Galatians 4:4-7

- Because of Jesus we have receive adoption to sonship (this was a technical legal phrase that referred to having complete status as an inheritor)
- We truly are heirs and members of God's family and now it us up to us to follow the example of men like Joseph of Arimathea and to act like members of God's family in every areas of our life

- If someone were to simply observe your life for a year, whose family would they think you were primarily loyal to? Would they see you being more loyal to God's family, to another family, or just to your own life?

Hebrews 12:5-7

- When God disciplines us it is a sign that we really are his children

- Do you see God's discipline in your life as a positive thing or a negative thing?
- What are some ways that God has disciplined you in the past?

Galatians 6:10

- We are to love all people and treat them with generosity and respect but our first loyalties lie with God's family

- In what ways do your first loyalties lie with God's family?
- In what ways in your life do you see that your loyalties lie elsewhere as a matter of primary importance?

Conclusion

- Why do you think that Jesus was so adamant about the loyalty to his new family that was absolutely necessary in order to follow him?
- How do some of these passages change and intensify the challenge for us when we apply them not just to our physical families or some other group that demands our time and loyalty but also to our own sense of individualism and putting self first?

Family Picture - Day 13

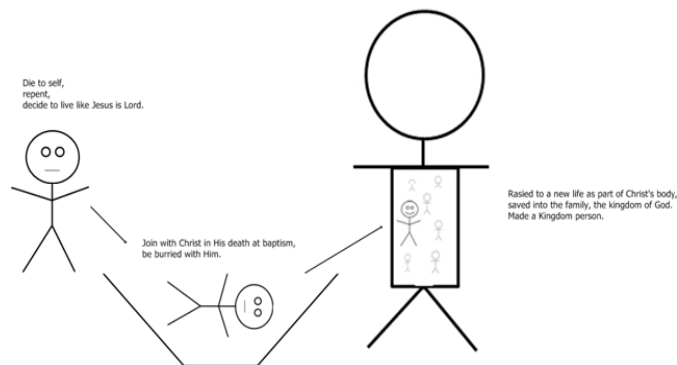
John 14:2-3

- Jesus described his coming death on the Cross in terms of the common customs of a Jewish wedding
- A couple would become betrothed but would not yet live together for up to a year as the groom would go back and prepare a room in his father's house for them to move into
- The bride was to prepare for her new married life but did not know exactly when the groom's father would deem the room finished and send him back to get the bride and officially bring her into the family
- Moving into the room in the father's house was a sign that this was now her new family forever
- This is what Jesus was telling his disciples; he was going to his death so that they could go to where Christ was going. They could, so to speak, go with Christ into God's house and become members of God's family

- When people get married they still enter a new family, although not quite as dramatically as in Jesus' culture. Do you view your baptism into Christ as entering into a new family on that same magnitude as a marriage?
- What does it mean for you to know that you actually entered into God's new family when you were saved?

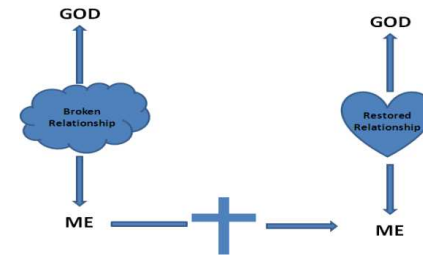
1 Corinthians 12:12-14

- We tend to view our salvation as an individual event between God and us but this passage clearly reminds us that we are baptized into a body
- The very definition of salvation is that we are placed into God's Christ-shaped family

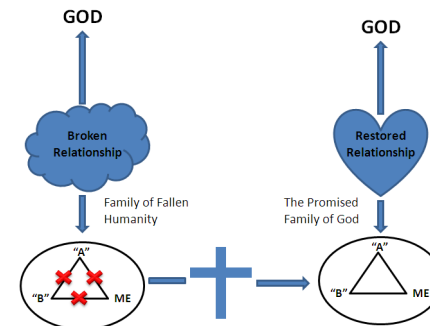


- It is important to understand our baptism as a community creating event not just an individual event

The Modern view of salvation (emphasis on the Individual)



The Biblical view of salvation (emphasis on the Community)



1 Corinthians 1:10-12

- Divisions within this family are absolutely unacceptable

1 Corinthians 6:1-9

- In the first century culture, you would not let someone rip you off without taking them to court except family. It was culturally looked down upon to take family to court
- When the Christians took each other to court they weren't acting like family and if they didn't act like family they would find themselves outside of the inheritance of the family

Conclusion

- Jesus sacrificed so that we could be part of his family. Why is it so important to understand that our salvation is not a solely individual event but is the act of us entering into God's family? How does that change how we approach our salvation?



Key # 1

Living Like Family - Day 14

Acts 2:42-47

- The early church absolutely saw themselves as the promised family and they acted like family
- The language of calling God their father and referring to one another as brother and sister was deeply significant
- The behavior described here was less that of a religious community and more like that of a family
- They were deeply devoted to one another and to thinking and acting like a family, particularly in four aspects that are listed in this passage:
 - Teaching
 - They devoted themselves as a family to the learning and passing down of the teaching of the apostles
 - Learning in the Jewish culture was first a function of the family so it made sense to have this be a major part of their community (although learning wasn't solely the realm of family in the Jewish culture, the family was the primary source of early learning)
 - Fellowship
 - They were devoted to being together and to encouraging one another to live as God's people
 - The breaking of bread
 - The breaking of bread could refer both to taking the Lord's Supper and to the regular practice of eating together
 - Eating together was one of the primary activities of the early church as a family
 - Prayer
 - They were devoted to praying with one another and for one another
 - Families pray together and they were no different

- Rate each of the four areas on a scale of 1-10 when it comes to your personal commitment to each of those areas
- Rate your church in each of the four areas
- How can you help, in a positive manner, your church grow in the areas in which it is not as strong?

Acts 4:34; 5:1

- Read Psalm 135:12
- Jewish inheritance land was passed down through families and was a major part of their identity as God's people
- They were the people of the land that God had given them and their family land was their portion of that inheritance from God
- To sell their inheritance land and use the proceeds to share with one another would have been a powerful statement about the Christian community and their redefinition of family that had been passed to them by Jesus' teaching
- It showed clearly that they no longer saw their ownership of the land as an identifier that they were the people of God
- They were God's family based solely on being in Christ
- Too many of us still find our security, comfort, identity, and joy in our physical families, but also in things like our jobs, our friends, our culture, our race, or any number of things other than the family of God
- We still tend to approach church from an individualistic point of view and treat the church like a department store where we take what we want and leave the rest rather than truly approaching things as though we are members of God's family that are called to be devoted to one another as such
- Being part of God's family brings a great deal of rewards but also comes with the responsibilities that accompany being part of a family

- Are you willing to sacrifice or give up certain things that you hold dear in order to take God's view of the body of Christ as his family?
- List out what you think are the five to ten most important responsibilities of being part of God's family?

Conclusion

- The early church just didn't view themselves as family in some theoretical way or just limit themselves to using family language
- They acted like family in sacrificial and meaningful ways
- What would it look like for a church in the 21st century where you live to truly act and look like a family in every sense of the word?



Key # 2

Loving Like Family - Day 15

John 3:3-5

- We have become so familiar with this passage that we tend to miss the obvious point about the new family of God here
- Just as we die to our identity in the old fallen family of humanity and our physical families as our means to God, we are born into the new family of God
- The birth language makes complete sense in the context of entering a new family

- How is one born into the new family of God?
- What are the different implications between salvation being a private spiritual experience or being born into a new family?

John 13:34-35

- This passage is as significant for what it does not say as for what it does say
- We might expect Jesus to say that the identifying mark of his people would be the way they love God or how much they pray or serve the poor but he doesn't
- Jesus says that all men will know his family by the way they love one another
- Read 1 John 4:19-21 and consider the gravity of the thought there that our love for God is demonstrated by our love for his people
- If you really want to know how much you love God and how committed you are to his people, then look at how you treat your fellow family members in God's kingdom

- Are non-family members able to tell that you are part of God's family based on your uncommon relationship with other disciples?
- When you look at how much you love God's people, is it comforting or disturbing to know that that is the visible marker of how devoted you truly are to God?

Acts 9:26-28

- This passage shows the amazing love that God's family had for one another

- Saul/ Paul had overseen the murder of the dear and loved brother Stephen of the Jerusalem church
- Now, about three years later, Saul/ Paul had come and wanted to be one of the very family that he had been hunting down and trying to kill
- They were afraid at first, but the amazing thing is that they accepted him into their family
- This family would have likely included Stephen's friends, his Christian brothers and sisters, and perhaps even his wife and children
- They all accepted and loved Saul/ Paul as a member of their family—that is the love of the family of God in full color

- How does this example of Christian love most challenge you?
- Is there anyone that has hurt you or someone you love in the past that you have not or would not accept in this fashion?
- Why would the early church accept and love Paul in this way?
- What do you need to do to get to that level of love in your own life?

Proverbs 18:24

- This passage is only so powerful when we understand that the brother relationship was the closest relationship in that culture that demanded the most loyalty (even more than that of a spouse).
- To hear this passage in our own culture the way they heard it we might say that God sticks closer than a spouse
- This means, though, that when Christians called each other brother and sister they were demanding the highest level of loyalty possible in their culture

1 John 3:10-17

- This was a powerful example because there was nothing worse in that culture than sibling treachery

1 John 4:19-21

- We show our love for our father in the way that we love our brothers
- If you want to know how you truly feel about God then look at the love, loyalty, and commitment you show to your brothers and sisters

Conclusion

- What is demanding about truly embracing the fact that the primary means of measuring a Christian community is not numerical growth but in the way that we love one another?
- Why would God tie our love for him to the way we love our brothers in the family? Why is this more demanding than if we were simply called to love God?



Key # 3

Sharing Like Family - Day 16

Acts 2:42-47

- We have looked at this passage before, but let's look at it again
- Notice that the first disciples immediately understood from Jesus' teaching that not only should they begin to act like a surrogate family but that a central feature of that would be to share with one another everything that they had
- They understood that one of the primary ways that they would love and show loyalty to each other was to share their goods and possessions and make sure that everyone had their needs provided for

Acts 4:32

- Notice again, that Acts makes the point that one of the central features of this family of disciples was that they no longer saw themselves as solely individuals that had a passing loyalty and concern for one another
- Their primary loyalty was to one another
- They wanted nothing more than to provide for one another
- Note that Acts 5:1-4 make clear that this was the genuine heart and choice of the disciples. They were not forced or commanded to share with one another but that became one of the key markers of the way the early Christians loved one another

Lucian of Samosata

- Lucian of Samosata was a critic of the early church that wrote the following quote around 165 AD. Notice that one of his main criticisms of the early church was that they saw themselves as a family and that they saw that family as more worthy of their loyalty and support than their own individualism

“The poor wretches have convinced themselves, first and foremost, that they are going to be immortal and live for all time [so] they despise death and even willingly give themselves into custody, most of them. Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws. Therefore they despise all things indiscriminately and consider them common property, receiving such doctrines traditionally without any definite evidence.”

- Why do you think that sharing their possessions and not viewing themselves as autonomous individuals any longer was such a key component of the early church?
- If a critic of Christianity came to your church and observed things for a while would his criticisms be similar to those of Lucian of Samosata? Would he say that you despised death? Would he charge that you truly viewed yourselves as brothers and sisters and didn't just call each other that? Would the critic see a people that indiscriminately despised the idea of individual possessions and truly made sure that each member of the family was taken care of?
- Be honest. As you read the descriptions of the early church on this matter does it frighten you, challenge you, or anger you? What is your response to this Scriptural idea?

Luke 18:18-22

- What was the one thing that Jesus charged the rich young man with lacking?
- He was too concerned with his individual wealth and was not willing to embrace the kind of family ethic that Jesus was calling his disciples to embrace
- Jesus challenged him to have a heart that valued the idea of being willing to share all of his possessions with those in need
- The early Christian communities certainly believed in caring for the poor and needy around them, but they believed that Jesus' call was to first and foremost take care of those within their own community first (Gal. 6:10)

- What do you think it would look like in the context of our culture and time to embrace this kind of family ethic? What would this principle look like in a healthy church in 21st century America?

Conclusion

- Why was it so important to the early Christian family to view their possessions in a more communal fashion?
- Living this kind of sharing and concerned attitude constantly spoke volumes to the world around the early Christian church. What do you think the world around us would say if we began to live like the early Christians did in this area?



Key # 4

Building Like Family- Day 17

Philippians 1:3-11

- What feelings does Paul express here to the Philippian church?
- What does the fact that Paul prayed for them accomplish in their ongoing relationship with one another?
- Why does Paul say that it is right that he had the deep affection of Jesus Christ for them?

- Do you have a specific church or churches, or a group of believers for whom you pray regularly?
- What does it accomplish when our love abounds for one another within the Christian family?

Philippians 4:1

- When Paul was not with believers he had developed his heart to the point where he genuinely felt affection for them and missed them deeply
- If our hearts are not at that point then it is up to us to work to get them there

1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

- When Paul was separated from other Christians it drove him nuts because he so valued the relationship in Christ that he had developed
- The only way to truly have these kinds of genuine feelings for other Christians is to realize that these bonds are built by choice and because of our common devotion to Christ rather than building friendships on worldly things like having things in common or just “clicking” with the other person

- Are you willing to tireless work towards developing genuine love, loyalty, and affection with other believers within the body of Christ, especially in areas where you find yourself falling short?
- Do you make an effort to build deep relationship in Christ with other Christians that you don't share much in common with or don't “click” with right away?

1 Timothy 2:2-4

- Paul not only had deep relationship with churches but also with individuals
- Each Christian should seek to build many deep relationships but should also have those special relationships that are especially close and where loyalty, trust, and love can develop at even deeper levels

2 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; Romans 13:8; Ephesians 4:1-3

- Love in the Christian community is something to be cherished, valued, and worked towards constantly
- It does not come easy
- What in these passages particularly challenges and convicts you?

Conclusion

- What can you do right now to have a more biblical view of sharing your heart with other believers?
- Do you truly build your friendships and relationships within God's family based on your common bond in Christ and your loyalty to the Messiah and his people or do you still build relationships on mostly worldly criterion? It is easy, even within the church, to still build most friendships on worldly reasons (although that does not necessarily mean that those friendships are worldly just that they are based on worldly reasons)
- We must constantly strive for the kind of love and loyalty to which we are called as God's people



Key # 5

Caring Like Family - Day 18

Romans 12:1-5

- In the first 11 chapters of Romans Paul works out the theology of being the one promised family of God and who exactly that family is
- Starting in chapter 12 he begins to deal with the practical applications of how that family is to function with one another in the real world
- We are called to be continually sacrificing ourselves to God as our act of worship
- Much of this is to understand that we are a family that belongs to one another

- Do you find the call to belong to each other as challenging or encouraging
- Do you truly spend your time, make decisions, give your resources, etc., with your family of God in mind?

Romans 14:1-9

- We will have differences in the way that we worship God but more important than that is that we accept one another as our family
- These differences were very significant (although they were not differences in salvation issues) but Paul never tries to work out who is right and who is wrong
- Each one serves God but we live in a family of unity not uniformity
 - Unity is being of one heart and mind despite differences
 - Uniformity is taking steps to make everyone exactly alike
 - God wants a family of unity not uniformity

- Are you willing to work towards unity in the family of God or do you spend more time trying to get everyone else to think and act as you do?

Romans 14:10-18

- The vitally important principle here is that our love for one another supersedes our individual "rights"

- Which do you value more: your brothers and sisters in Christ or your own "rights" and "freedoms"?
- What are some ways that Christians today can act individually and actually hurt others in the body, sometimes without knowing it (for instance, someone might show up to small group meetings sporadically and never stop to think that this harms others in the group)?

Romans 14:19-23

- Make every effort to work towards peace and building up our brothers and sisters
- We can destroy God's work in building his family by our own selfish desires to exercise our own freedoms and put our own interests above that of others
- Everything we do should come from faith

- What are you actively doing right now to do what leads to peace and mutual edification within your church family?
- What are some of the things that you have seen that can tear down the work of God in your church family?

Romans 15:1-13

- The model for our behavior in putting the interests of others ahead of themselves is Jesus himself who always put the interests of others as his top priority
- May we have the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had
- Jesus laid down his life for the benefit of others and we are to be a family that does at every opportunity
- We are to care for and accept one another so that all nations can truly give glory to God and come to his family

Conclusion

- What can you do in your home church right now to help foster the atmosphere of family and the reality of being a family that we are called to be?
- Are you as committed to the family of God as the Bible calls us to be or have you watered down the call to be family to a comfortable level?
- Jesus' call to be the new family of God is just as radical and demanding today as it was in his lifetime. We must constantly examine ourselves to make sure that we are operating with his definition of family rather than that of our own culture and upbringing

Key # 6

Deciding Like Family - Day 19

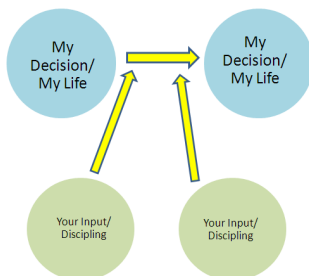
Philippians 1:21-27

- Paul says that his personal choice would be to finish his time in this present age and go to be with God and await the resurrection
- He won't, though, because he was convinced that this would not be the best thing at the moment for the whole church family
- Paul gives us an important principle here of making decisions within the group for the betterment of the group
- Paul didn't make decisions just based on what he wanted or what was personally best for him

- When you make decisions about your life like where you will live, work, go to school, etc., do you seek God's will by considering what will be best for you or do you consider what is best for the entire church family of which you are a part?

Proverbs 11:14; 15:22; 24:6

- When we make decisions, the more advisors the better
- Truly seeking many advisors, though, doesn't mean just getting a bunch of individual decisions and then still deciding what you want to do based on what's best for you
- Having many advisors means gathering together a council of wise people and working together to make the best decision for you as part of larger church family
- It is extremely important to get the insight of others to help us balance our desires and what is good for us personally with the needs and what is best for our entire family of believers
- The illustration below shows how we often make decisions



- We tend to approach things as though we have an individual decision to make about our lives and then we get input from others to help us make the best decision we can about what is best for us
- But a more biblical approach to decision making is to view ourselves as part of God's family and to recognize that our decisions affect everyone else in the family so our decisions are their decisions as well
- This means that I'm not getting outside input on "my" decision, I'm getting insider input on "our" decision



1 Corinthians 10:23-24: 31

- Paul lays out three important principles for making any decision
 1. **Is it beneficial**
 2. **Does it seek the good for the whole church family**
 3. **Does it glorify God**
- If we make decisions in our lives with these principles in mind, it will bring a different but much more biblical flavor to our decision making

- Does the biblical idea of making decisions in your life with the benefit of the entire church family in mind rather than just yourself or your household sound encouraging or challenging?
- If it sounds challenging, what about it challenges you?

Conclusion

- Are you really committed to God's family when it comes to making decisions for your "personal" life?
- If we are to truly embrace the life of the church family to which God has called us then we must embrace all aspects of it
- If we say that we consider God first in our decision making and then only give a passing thought to the needs of his family, then we are not really thinking of and putting God first (see 1 John 4:19-21)



Key # 7

Growing Like Family - Day 20

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

- As we have seen already, when we were baptized we weren't saved as an individual before God. We were individuals who were placed into God's family, his body of those in Christ
- We were born into this family (Jn. 3:3-5) and like any child in a family, we have to grow and develop as part of the family

Ephesians 4:2-3, 16

- The reaction of most people, the natural reaction, to getting hurt is to pull away from that hurt
- When we become members of God's family, many people think that they will never or should never get let down or hurt
- Not only is that not realistic in the present age, the Bible says quite the opposite
- We are to be people who embrace the values of the age to come and try to point to their coming reality, but we only point to it, not perfectly attain it
- The call to bear with one another and forgive each other serve as promises that we will hurt each other and let each other down
- But we are called to be committed to unity through those difficult times not to leave or pull away every time we don't like something
- We are called to be a family that grows together even through the growing pains

- Are you as committed to staying together as God's family and working through very difficult issues as the Bible calls us to be?

Colossians 3:13-14

- Again we are promised that we will fall short of each other's expectations and will hurt each other
- But we are to put our love and loyalty to one another in Christ far ahead of our own personal desire to have things go our way or even to not be hurt by others

- Jesus called his people to be people who are willing to suffer for the benefit of others. Are you truly willing to do the difficult work of forgiving and bearing with others in order to grow into the kind of family that Jesus wants us to be?

Luke 6:27-37; Romans 12:9-21

- As God's family, we are called to be people who constantly step forward and never back
- If you hate me, I step forward and love
- If you curse me, I step forward and hate
- If you pull back from me, I step forward and embrace
- If you do something worthy of being condemned, I make the conscience choice to not condemn
- It takes work and practice to do this in the context of close relationships
- In fact, the closer the relationship, the more difficult this can be

- What is your reaction when someone treats you poorly or lets you down?
- Are you willing to be obedient in this area of your life and work towards being a person that always moves forward whether it be an enemy or someone who just feels like an enemy at the moment?

Conclusion

- God's family constantly moves towards one another
- Many of the reasons that we tend to want to pull away from one another are quite unbiblical
- It takes much work, prayer, and practice to become someone who can get to the point where they move towards those who hurt them as part of their "second nature"



Key # 8

Trusting Like Family - Day 21

Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6

- Because we have entered into God's family through Christ we are now part of a family that has the almighty God as our father
- We often refer to God as "father" but do we really spend all that much time considering what that really means

- What does it mean for your relationship with God to have him as our father
- What does it mean for our relationships with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ to have God as our common father?
- What does it mean for our relationships with those that are not part of God's family?

Matt. 6:9; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 2 Thes. 1:1; 2:16; Philemon 1:3; James 1:27

- One of the identifying themes of the early church was that God was the father of our family

Mark 10:28-30

- Jesus said that those who were willing to give up their family identity and possessions would receive back a hundred times over in their new family of Christ
- Notice that in the list of things that would be received back in the new family of God, there is not mention of a father
- No human being was to take on the role of father in the family of God
- That position was reserved for God alone

- What is significant about the fact that no human being should take on the role of the patriarch in the family of God?
- How does it change the biblical view of the family when that happens?

Luke 12:13-34

- If God is really our father, then the question here is do we act like it?
- When I was growing up I never spent time during the day worrying if we would have food that night or a place to live or if my dad would come home from work that night
- The reason I didn't worry about those things is because I truly knew who my father was and I believed that he would continue to act like the father that I had always known
- When we go after other things as though we have to provide them for ourselves or we worry about providing for ourselves we are acting like God is not our father
- Do we really believe that God is our father?
- Do we really act like that?
- Do we really trust him to provide for his family?

- In what ways do you fail to trust God as your father who lovingly provides for his family?

Conclusion

- If we really embrace the fact that God is the father of this family then we are called to trust him as our father and live like it
- To worry about the things that he promises to provide would be to offend our father

Family Devotional : Week 1

Introduction

- Begin your devotional by singing a couple of fun songs that your family all enjoys. Make sure that the last song you sing is “Father Abraham”
- Have one member of your family begin the devotional by praying

Activity

- Ask everyone who is old enough to work by themselves to draw a picture of their family – don’t give any other instructions than that
- Once everyone is done let everyone share their picture and show what they have drawn

Read Mark 3:31-35

- Ask who Jesus says is our true family?
- Ask why would Jesus say that those who do God’s will is our family. Give your kids a chance to answer and then help them fill out their answers if they don’t quite fully understand this concept
- Explain that this doesn’t mean that our physical families are less important or that we love them less, but that our church family is every bit as much our real family as our physical family
- Ask what are some ways that we can show our church family that really love them like our family
- Explain that this is the one family of many nations that God promised to Abraham in Genesis 17

Read Ephesians 2:19

- Ask your kids what they think it means to act like members of God’s household
- What does that mean for how we think about other disciples?

Activity

- Take a poster board and work together as a family to create a family tree
- Be creative in somehow showing that this is God’s family through Jesus Christ and then depict the family of God of which you are a physical part of
- If you are in a very small church it might be fun to put everyone in it; if you are in a bigger church you might want to stick to your small group or something similar and somehow represent everyone else in your church
- The more work that put into this poster, the more fun it can be; be creative and have a lot of fun

Conclusion

- Summarize the points that have been made through your devotional, especially the idea of our primary family being those who do the will of God
- Give each member of your family a moment to pray
- Conclude your devotional with an enjoyable treat or snack

Family Devotional : Week 2

Introduction

- Begin your devotional by singing a couple of fun songs that your family all enjoys. Make sure that the last song you sing is “Love, love, love”
- Have one member of your family begin the devotional by praying

Activity

- Play a game of charades as a family
- Decide how you want to split into teams and give out the topics to be acted out but make sure that the game is long enough so that everyone can have a turn and have a good time

Read John 13:34-35

- Ask what Jesus says will be the most important thing to telling who his family really is?
- Ask your kids why they think that Jesus wouldn't have said that everyone would know his disciples by the way they love God?
- Ask them how we go about loving God
- Explain to them that most of the ways that we love God aren't visible to other people or they can just do those things without really feeling them in their heart
- Loving other Christians as our true family shows how much we love God
- Have your kids brainstorm some ways that we can show that we love the other disciples in our lives
- Ask them to think of not just the normal ways that we love other Christians but to think of some fun and creative ways that you as a family can show the other disciples closest to you that you love them as your true family

Read 1 John 4:19-21

- Ask your kids how we can tell about how much we really love God
- We show God that we love him by the way we treat other Christians
- Just like the game of charades no one could tell what we were thinking unless we acted it out, explain that concept making sure that your kids, at whatever age level they are, understand the concept that we have to act on our beliefs or we don't really believe them

Conclusion

- Summarize the points that have been made through your devotional, especially the idea of loving God and showing ourselves to be Jesus' true disciples by the way we love one another
- Have each family member choose one thing that they can do this week to show a Christian in your church family that you love them
- Give each member of your family a moment to pray
- Conclude your devotional with an enjoyable treat or snack