

SERMON TITLE: Family / By Design

PURSUE RELATIONSHIP: Opportunities to connect as a group

1. Pastor Henry commented that God intended the family (nuclear, adoptive, spiritual) to be a 'care and treatment' centre. Tell of a time when you needed or experienced that kind of love.
2. 'Public health experts tell us that loneliness is killing as many people as obesity and smoking.' What surprises or dismays you about this statement?
3. What comes to your mind when you hear the words loneliness, community and family?

PURSUE GOD: Time that is devoted to the Word of God

4. Read Matthew 12:46-50 and Mark 3:20-21.
Scripture does not say what the reactions of the crowd, the disciples and Jesus' family were to what Jesus said. All would have had an Old Testament covenant understanding of family. How do you think they reacted? What was Jesus introducing? Why? What would your reaction have been?
5. The healthy spiritual family (a Biblical Community) is a place in which knowing and loving God is our highest pursuit. What specifically does a believer need to do to live out 2 Chronicles 16:9; Luke 10:27(a) and John 15:5?
6. The healthy spiritual family (a Biblical Community) is a place in which authentic and loving friendships are pursued. Read Proverbs 18:24, 1 Samuel 18:1 and Luke 6:12 -13. In what ways do these verses speak against the 'sex-centric' culture in which we live?
7. How do the stories in John 8:1-11 and Luke 10: 29-37 illustrate loving and accepting our neighbours (enemies, different and struggling)?

PURSUE MISSION: Seek to be the community of God's people in your community

8. Pastor Henry commented that the Spiritual Family (the Church which Christ has established) often fails to be the community that He intended it to be. What are several causes for this? What new behaviour will you initiate to help restore the Community?
9. Pray for Pastor Henry and his family as they deal with his recent cancer diagnosis of Follicular lymphoma.

For Personal Prayer/Reflection

1. What comes to your mind when you hear the words loneliness, community and family?
2. Pray for Pastor Henry and his family as they deal with his recent cancer diagnosis of Follicular lymphoma.

* Link to other By Design sermons:

<https://www.cschurch.ca/bydesign/#sermon2>

This week's writers: Gene Gibbs, Karen Gibbs, Jan Varner, Edi Dygert, Jemimah Ong, Georgia Harrison

THE WORD (NIV)

1 Samuel 18:1

After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself.

2 Chronicles 16:9

For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war."

Proverbs 18:24

One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Matthew 12:46-50

Mark 3:20-21

²⁰ Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. ²¹ When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

Luke 6:12-13

Luke 10:27-37

John 11:1-11

John 15:5

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

/ by design series study summary

As a man Jesus faced the same challenges and longings that we do. That included the need for affirmation from His Father. At Jesus' baptism we see God the Father affirm His Son at the beginning of His earthly ministry. This is a life-giving message that we all long to hear – that we are loved, accepted and wanted by others. God designed the family to be the context where this affirmation is to be found. It was to serve as the initial care and treatment centre in times of discouragement, hardship and trouble. Some have received this gift of affirmation. Unfortunately because our world and our lives are broken, not everyone can say this, and the reasons for this are many – favouritism, cruel words spoken, unemployment or estrangement from the family, etc. This can lead to discouragement or feelings of defeat, or of relations growing distant or breaking down resulting in profound loneliness. Where do you turn to when your confidence collapses or you receive bad news? Research suggests that in North America only half the people have meaningful, daily face-to-face interactions. Loneliness kills as many as obesity and smoking through relocating away from family, being elderly and forgotten, or just struggling to establish healthy relationships.

Jesus came to restore our relationship with, and be a friend of, God. He is the only one who can love us as much as we need to be loved. Nothing else will suffice – marriage, sex, other people (Ps 62:1). God fills this ache as we abide in Him and walk daily with Him. He also does it through the church, the spiritual family. Jesus points to this in Matthew 12. Here Jesus was not rejecting his nuclear family but was pointing to the spiritual family that all of his followers are a part of with Christ at the head. It is a family which will continue into eternity and include everyone who comes to Him. In the Old Testament the solution for loneliness was marriage and family. Their mission was to be part of a physical family and to have physical children. In the New Testament the solution for loneliness is the church and its mission is to produce disciples (spiritual children). When we embrace Christ as our Lord and Saviour our identity is based now on who we are in Christ- children of God in whom the Father delights. God is our Father and those in His family are our spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ through whom God wants to express His love and acceptance to all people.

However, many are not really living as a spiritual family and fail to be the community Christ intended it to be. Many in the church walk a lonely road. What does Christ intend for His spiritual family, the church, to look like?

1. **It is a Biblical community where knowing and loving God is our highest pursuit (Luke 10:25-27).** Nothing in this life is more important than loving God and loving people. Our ability to love others requires that we first passionately pursue knowing and loving God. This means we worship Him alone. Only then can He strengthen, empower and bless us and accomplish His Kingdom purposes including loving others through us. It means we abide in Him (John 15:5). This is humble dependence on Him and by practicing the presence of Jesus on a moment by moment basis as we draw on Him for direction, wisdom, power and peace. Jesus is the Living Word. The Bible is the written Word. We must read, study and meditate on His Word. Only then can we know how to love by learning how in the Bible and seeing His examples to us. This is critical. God's truth cannot be watered down or ignored. We love because He first loved us.
2. **It is a Biblical community where authentic and loving friendships are pursued (Prov 18:24).** The Bible gives us a picture of the close friendship of David and Jonathan who shared a deep admiration, loyalty and non-sexual affection for each other. Jesus demonstrated friendship (Luke 6:12) in gathering a small group of men for companionship and encouragement by prayerfully selecting them. Research tells us that we're not very good at close friendships. 9/10 men do not have a true friend. One possible reason is that our culture assumes that a close same-gender friendship is suggestive of a homosexual relationship (Christopher Yuan). Christians need to counter that deception and pursue authentic, loving and Christ-centered friendships in the spiritual family without the fear of being labeled. As well, we have elevated romantic/sexual relationships as the most fulfilling relationship possible (Todd Wilson). It thus assumes that inside marriage all one's needs will be met and thereby leave little room for any other friendships. The friendship culture that Christ intended must be restored where within the spiritual family of the church deep, intimate, non-sexual relationships can thrive. Both married couples and singles need to form long lasting friendships.
3. **It is a Biblical community where neighbours are loved and accepted (Luke 10 – Good Samaritan).** In Jesus' day the Israelites despised the Samaritans and had a long grocery list of reasons why and when they traveled they would go around, rather than through, Samaritan territory. Jesus says we are to love neighbours who feel like enemies (Luke 6:27,32). Do you have a neighbour who feels like an enemy because of their politics, religion, or lifestyle? Jesus calls us to love and respect such neighbours – though we do not have to agree with them. All people are made in the image of Christ and we seek to lovingly point them to Christ.
4. **It is a Biblical community where neighbours who are different are loved and accepted (Gal 3:26).** A healthy spiritual family/church celebrates diversity (Rev 7:9 and which leans in with love, upholds truth and offers hope to those in our lives seeking answers and direction. All are welcome (James 2), respected and shown God's love. We must all be engaged in God's Kingdom work in the church by investing the gifts that God has given to each person.
5. **It is a Biblical community where neighbours who are struggling are loved, accepted and treated with dignity (John 8:1-11).** Jesus showed the woman caught in adultery dignity while engaging the crowd to search their hearts and exposing their hypocrisy. We see how Jesus loved and accepted her first before challenging her to leave her life of sin. So often the church does it the opposite way – expecting people to repent and change before they are accepted. None of us are without sin (Rom 3:23). A healthy spiritual family does not create a hierarchy of sin but recognizes that gossip is as lethal as adultery and gluttony as harmful as lying. We are not defined by our temptations but a healthy spiritual family is a safe place where people can share their burdens and know that their dignity will be respected and their struggle kept confidential (James 5:16).

Practically, how can we love our neighbours who have struggles and are seeking spiritual answers, or hope and healing?

1. **Welcome those who attend a weekend worship service.** This can be done by caring for their children, investing in their youth, serving them that they may hear about the hope we have in Jesus. Pray and ask God to direct us to someone who needs encouragement, a listening ear, or a friend. Listen to their story.
2. **Cultivate hospitality.** Invite people over for 'potluck with a purpose' and have conversations with people who are different from us in an informal atmosphere. Show them the love of Christ through our interaction with them. By doing so we can push back against the loneliness prevalent in our culture. God delights in you and is pleased with you. You are blessed by God. Now go and bless others with His love.