

Who is the Family of God Outline:

Introduction to Series:

This Sunday is the start of a three week series “The Family of God on Mission.” We will be exploring what it means as the Family of God to balance and integrate mission into our lives together and discover what it is that God is calling us to do. This coming year, as we continue to learn what it means to be missional in our community, meaning how to be the hands and feet of Jesus to the people around us in the places that we live, work, and play, I want to remind us challenge us to dig deeper and discover the richness that comes in doing mission together with the people in our congregation who are our spiritual brothers and sisters.

Introduction to Message:

This morning we are going to talk about family, and specifically, we are going to look at the idea of the “Family of God” and discover that God re-orders the idea of family into something that is deeper than just blood. Let’s start by answering the question, what is family? Google dictionary defines family as “a group consisting of parents and children living together in a household” or “all the descendants of a common ancestor.” That’s a basic and clinical definition of family. But what really is family and why does it matter?

On the one hand, the family can be an amazing and blessed experience. Archbishop Desmond Tutu said, “You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them.” And Pope John 23 states that “The family is the first essential

cell of human society.”

On the other hand, family can be an immense source of pain and grief. Comedian George Carlin said famously “The other night I ate at a real nice family restaurant. Every table had an argument going.”

Anyone who has ever sat in counseling either as the counselor or counselee knows that family will eventually get discussed, and even the healthiest person has some challenges related to their family of origin.

There is a popular sentiment that “blood is thicker than water,” meaning that family ties are stronger than any other ties and that only the most extreme circumstances can merit cutoff of our family or from our family. Of course we know, even in our own families, that there are cases where this is true and cases where this is not true. I wonder, though, as we think about our own views of and biases about family, how does this affect the way that we look at and understand the “family of God.”

According to Paul in **Romans 8:14-17**, anyone who is led by the Spirit becomes an adopted Child of God and is therefore a part of the Spirit-Family.

¹⁴ For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵ The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are

God's children. ¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs— heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Oikos: There was an important ancient Greek idea that would have existed during the time of Jesus and the early church called “Oikos” which was the Greek word for ‘household’ not ‘yogurt’ and a stand-in for the concept of family. Ancient understanding of “family” was extended further beyond the concept of nuclear or even extended family. Mike Breen writes in his book “Oikonomics”: “In the ancient world, oikos didn’t necessarily refer to the physical structures that people lived in, but the network of relationships that constituted the “household,” including parents and children, aunts and uncles, sisters, and brothers, servants, business partners, and others who functioned together with a common purpose.”

Example of Oikos in Scripture:

- Luke 19:9, Zacchaeus was told salvation was on his household
- John 4:53, The centurion’s entire household was saved following the healing of his son.
- Luke 15, In the three parables about a lost coin, a lost sheep, and a lost son, all tell of the rejoicing from friends and family when the lost was found. The message of hope was passed on through the “Oikos.”

When we look at the make-up of “Family of God” as found in Scripture, we are going to find that it looks more like the Greek “Oikos” household than it does the “blood is thicker than

water” nuclear family. And when we consider the church today as the “Family of God” and God’s adoption policy as written by Paul, we come to this big truth:

Big Idea: *The family of God is made up of any person who calls Jesus Lord and is committed to God’s mission of salvation to the world. This can include blood-family but will include spirit-family.*

Transition:

We are going to dive in deeper to the understanding of the Family of God as *any person who calls Jesus Lord and is committed to God’s mission of salvation to the world* and why we are called to be a part of this family by looking at four propositions.

Propositions:

1) God made humankind to be in relationship with one another.

Genesis 1:26-27

²⁶Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” ²⁷So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

-According to the Genesis 1 creation account, male and female were created in the image of God, made at the same time, given rule over the world, and called “good.”

-In Genesis 2, God created Adam first, recognized that it wasn't good for him to be alone, and created Eve out of Adam's own body to be his partner and companion.

Genesis 2:18

¹⁸The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

2) God gave family (parents, siblings, spouses, and children) as a fulfillment for that relational need.

a. When God sent Jesus to earth, He was sent into a family, with a human mother, a human father, and human siblings. He also had at least one aunt and uncle and cousin. By putting Jesus into this position, God was showing that there is value in familial relationships.

b. Sometimes these relationships are healthy and fulfilling.

c. Sometimes these relationships are toxic.

i. Cain and Abel (murder), Jacob and Esau (sibling rivalry), Isaac and Rebekah (deception)

d. Always, family relationships offer challenges.

i. Abraham and Sarah (deception)

3) God blesses Marriage and Singleness

a. Teachings on Singleness: Both Jesus and Paul teach that singleness has its advantages, especially when it comes to serving God because single people don't have to split their attention between a spouse and God.

Matthew 19:1-12

¹⁰ The disciples said to him, “If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.”¹¹ Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. ¹² For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—*and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.* The one who can accept this should accept it.”

-The disciples realize the challenge of marriage as a relationship that was intended to be forever, and that divorce, although permissible in certain circumstances, is not a part of God’s plan for relationships. Because of that they make the observation that it might be easier not to be married at all, to which Jesus points out that unmarried persons are more able to serve God because their attention isn’t divided, although this is not a teaching that many could follow.

Paul echoes these same ideas in 1 Corinthians 7:32-34:

³² I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs—how he can please the Lord. ³³ But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife— ³⁴ and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. ³⁵ I am saying

this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.

Singleness is not just about being alone and unable to find a spouse. It has benefits that cannot be found in marriage and can be a position blessed by God and should be honored as a legitimate part of the family of God.

b. Teachings on Marriage:

At the same time, God gave us marriage as a gift for those who want to find fulfilment in a relationship with another person. It was established from the very beginning in Genesis as a commitment of unity of body and spirit.

Genesis 2:23-24

²³ The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” ²⁴ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.”

****Both singleness and marriage are sacred and legitimate ways to live, and although one leads to creating and extending blood-family, neither includes nor excludes somebody from participating in the spirit-family of God.***

4) God re-orders the definition of Family

So, humankind was made to be in community and relationship with one another. And God gave us parents, siblings, children, aunts, uncles, etc. as a way to live out that relational need. But we know that not all families are healthy and some situations

can be even toxic. We also know that God blesses marriage and singleness both. But we are all called to ultimately be a part of the Family of God, a family bound by spirit, not by blood. So what does it mean/take to be a part of this family and how do we order this new family in relation to our blood-families?

In order to answer that question, let's turn to our Scripture for today and see how Jesus responds to and prioritizes his blood-family and his spirit-family.

Mark 31-34: ³¹ Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. ³² A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you." ³³ "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. ³⁴ Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ *Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.*"

In this passage, Jesus addresses a direct confrontation between who the people acknowledge as his blood-family and his disciples, his spirit family. And he conclusively makes the statement that *true 'family' is family that is bonded in the Spirit of God*. That being said, this doesn't mean that he disregards blood-family, or that blood-family cannot also be a part of that same spirit family.

For as harsh and difficult to hear as Jesus' words may have been in Mark, he clearly still cares for his mother, as evidenced to his words to her and John in **John 19:25-27**:

²⁵ Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," ²⁷ and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

In spite of Jesus' apparent dismissal of Mary in the last scene, Jesus ensures that after his death she will be taken care of. We also know that James, brother of Jesus, was a critical leader in the early church and wrote the practical and inspirational letter that we call "James."

Jesus was not saying that blood-family was unimportant or that they could not also be a part of our spirit-family, or family of God. But he was saying that our first family is the Family of God, made up of all of those who would follow after Jesus, and that *if blood is thicker than water, then Spirit is thicker than blood.*

Big Idea: The family of God is made up of any person who calls Jesus Lord and is committed to God's mission of salvation to the world. This can include blood-family but will include spirit-family.

Response/Questions to Consider:

All of that being said, how then do we respond to Jesus' teaching about the Family of God?

i. Well, first consider your experience with your own blood family. Is it something that you would say has been mostly healthy and life-giving, or are there parts of it that have been difficult and damaging? What history and patterns from your family of origin do you bring into your understanding of and participation in to the Family of God?

ii. If your blood-family has been extremely healthy and has deep roots, how do you use the best of that experience in the way that you live with your church family? And although we want to be present for our families, how do we avoid making them such an idol that we become exclusive, so that others around us who could benefit from a spirit-relationship with us and whom we could benefit from a spirit-relationship with aren't shut out?

iii. If our experiences with our family of origin have been toxic, how do we heal from those? Have we sought forgiveness or to forgive? Have we looked into counseling to work through our hurts or mediation to deal with conflict? What negative experiences do we bring into the Family of God and how does that affect the ways in which we open ourselves up to others?

iv. How do we at Oak Grove invite others to join the family of God? I think this has to first involve us reframing the way we look at family from "***nuclear family***" to "***oikos family***" so that we can genuinely include others who aren't related to us by

blood or last name. We are made up from many different people from many different backgrounds. How can we as a church better celebrate singleness as an ordained choice under God and make sure that single people and married couples without children are just as much a part of our “Family of God?”

There are opportunities to experience and invite others into community within the church: Sunday School, small groups, missional discipleship groups, and home gatherings. If we are involved in any of those groups, are we making sure that they are open to receiving others?

v. I think it’s safe to say that although Oak Grove may feel like family for some, there are others who do not have this same kind of experience. Are we looking to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to be included in this family, or are we comfortable the way things are? Are we doing everything that we can to make sure that this family of God is bound by spirit and not separated by last name, age, town we are from, or any other thing?

As we continue on in this series, looking at doing mission together as the Family of God, let’s first start with a commitment to one another; that because of the Spirit of God that is living within each one of you, you are my brothers and sisters, and I care for you just as I would my own blood-relatives, and I am committed to doing life-together with you to the best of my ability.

How can we live together as the Family of God, knowing that we are bringing all of our flaws together and that there will be dysfunction, just like there is dysfunction in blood-families? Paul offers some ideas and encouragement for this in

Colossians 3:12-14:

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.