

INTRODUCTION

Families have always mattered to God. Before He created the nation or the church, He created a family. Someone said families are like fudge candy—mostly sweet, but with a few nuts! We're going to talk about being a part of God's forever family today.

Today is Mother's Day. We love our mothers because they taught us so much. I came across a funny list of "Things my Mother taught me."

1. My Mother taught me about RELIGION: "You'd better pray that stain comes out of the carpet!"
2. My Mother taught me about TIME TRAVEL: "If you don't behave I'm going to knock you into the middle of next week."
3. My Mother taught me about LOGIC: "Why? Because I said so, that's why!"
4. My Mother taught me about STAMINA: "You're going to sit there until all that spinach is gone."
5. My Mother taught me about WEATHER: "It looks like a tornado swept through your room!"
6. My Mother taught me about appreciating a JOB WELL DONE: "If you kids are going to kill each other, do it outside, I just cleaned the house!"
7. My Mother taught me about IRONY: "If you don't stop crying, I'll give you something to really cry about!"
8. My Mother taught me about ANTICIPATION: "You're going to get it when we get home!"
9. My Mother taught me about HUMOR: "If that lawn mower cuts off your foot, don't come running to me!"
10. My Mother taught me about JUSTICE: "One day you'll have kids, and I hope they turn out just like you!"

Those are funny, but seriously, the main thing our mothers taught us is unconditional love; they love us even when we don't act very lovely. That's the reason we love them so much. I have a scar on my chin I received when I was about five years old. I picked some flowers for my mother and as I ran up the concrete steps of our house I slipped and started to fall. In that split second of decision, I decided NOT to let go of her flowers, and so I landed on my chin. Six stitches later I realized I probably should have let go of the flowers, but whenever I shave and see that scar it's a reminder of how much I loved my mom. I can't tell her that in person today, because she's in heaven. So I want to encourage all of you to tell the mothers in your life that you love them today!

Jesus talks about His mother in this passage, but I didn't plan this passage for Mother's Day. I don't plan my messages by dates, I just preach on the next passage of scripture, so it's wonderful that it worked out this way. Let's see what Jesus had to say about His family recorded in Matthew 12:46-50:

"While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, 'Your mother and brothers are standing

outside, wanting to speak to you.' He replied to him, 'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?' Pointing to his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers.' For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.'"

In this series about Parables and Miracles, I'm highlighting every occasion where Jesus used an analogy like a parable. A parable is when a natural truth is laid down next to a spiritual truth. In this passage Jesus uses the example of His biological family to teach that we can be a part of another family, a spiritual family. I want to share with you four lessons that teach us about how we can be a part of God's forever family.

(1) IN ADDITION TO YOUR BIOLOGICAL FAMILY, YOU CAN BE PART OF GOD'S FAMILY

We sometimes forget Jesus had a biological family. His mother was named Mary, but He also had brothers and sisters. These were actually half-brothers and sisters, because they had the same mother, but a different father. Joseph was the father of Jesus' siblings; of course Jesus had another Father—the Living God. Since Joseph is never mentioned in scripture after Jesus was 12 years old, most scholars assume he died before Jesus' ministry began.

When His biological family came asking for Him, it almost seems that Jesus was being rude to them by not granting their request. But in the beginning of His ministry, His family members didn't understand what He was doing. They even thought He was a little crazy. Mark describes their attitude in Mark 3:20-21. "Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind.'" Let's face it, what if your 30-year-old son or brother left his good job as a carpenter and went about claiming to be the Messiah? You'd probably think he was one enchilada short of a combination platter, too!

Eventually, His biological family believed He really was the Son of God. His half-brother James became the leader of the church in Jerusalem and wrote the book of James. Another half brother, Jude, wrote the short book nestled just before Revelation. Jesus always loved and honored His mother. She was at the cross where Jesus asked John to take care of her. After the resurrection, Mary is mentioned being with the disciples who were praying in the upper room on the day of Pentecost; then she is never mentioned again in the New Testament.

If you read this passage and only hear Jesus gently rebuffing His biological family, you miss the point. Jesus used the presence of His natural family to teach us that there is another family, a much larger family in which you and I can find acceptance: the Family of God.

There are many references in the New Testament alluding to the church as a family, but I love the passage in Ephesians 2 where we read, "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household." (Ephesians 2:19) The word "household" describes an intimate family gathering. We sometimes use the word "family" to include all our aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. But this word "household" communicates the idea of the people who sit around your table for dinner. That's the kind of intimacy we can have in God's Forever Family.

But, is everyone a member of God's family?

(2) ONLY PEOPLE WHO ARE BORN AGAIN ARE MEMBERS OF GOD'S FAMILY

There is a popular heresy going around that teaches everyone on the planet is part of the family of God. Some people claim, "We're all God's children." If that sounds familiar, Gene Autrey even taught it in his famous Christmas song, "Here Comes Santa Claus." The third verse says: "Here comes Santa Claus, here comes Santa Claus; right down Santa Claus lane; He doesn't care if you're rich or poor: He loves you just the same; Santa knows we're all God's children; And that makes everything right; So fill your heart with Christmas cheer; 'Cause Santa Claus comes tonight." Sorry, Santa, you're a jolly old elf, but you're a poor theologian. The Bible never teaches that we're all God's children.

A few years ago, that great theologian, country singer, Alan Jackson, recorded a song that promoted this false belief. His song said: "Here comes a Baptist, here comes a Jew; There goes a Mormon and Muslim too; I see a Buddhist and a Hindu; I see a Catholic and I see you. We're all God's children; We're all God's children; We're all God's children; why can't we be; One big happy family?" Let me answer that question for you, Alan. We not one big happy family because we're NOT all God's children!

Jesus said there are two Fathers and two families. He said these words to the Pharisees, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire." (John 8:44) The fact that those who are not saved are not children of God is also seen in 1 John 3:10. The Bible says, "This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother." To say we're all God's children is an attractive, tolerant way to speak about people today, but it's not in the Bible. The New Age gurus, like Oprah, and Scientology teach this, but it's not in the Bible.

A few weeks ago I listened as President Obama gave his Easter address. Some people criticized him, but I want to point out that he made a theologically correct statement. He said clearly, "On Sunday, my family will join other Christians all over the world in marking the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Then he mentioned other world religions and said, "On this Easter weekend, let us hold fast to those aspirations we hold in common as brothers and sisters, (and I thought, "oh no, *please* don't say we're all part of the family of God.")... as members of the same family—the family of man." Thank you, Mr. President for getting it right. He didn't promote the false belief that everyone is part of the family of God.

We are all part of the family of mankind, but we aren't all part of the family of God. We are all God's creatures (created by God), and God loves everyone and wants them to be saved, but *only* those who put their faith in Jesus Christ become His children. The Bible makes this abundantly clear in verses like John 1:12-13: "To all who received him, [Jesus] to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." When we place our faith in Christ, God becomes our Father, we become his children, other believers become our brothers and sisters,

and the church becomes our spiritual family. The family of God includes all believers in the past, in the present, and all who will believe in the future. So it is true we are all God's creatures, but only those who are born again are God's children.

(3) AS GOD'S CHILD ALL THE FAMILY BLESSINGS ARE YOURS TO ENJOY!

When you receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you are born again into God's Forever Family. And when you are a part of His family there are certain privileges, benefits and blessings that are ours. My earthly father died in 1982 and my earthly mother died in 1984. When they passed away, my sister, my brother and I were their only heirs. My parents weren't wealthy, but after we paid all the outstanding medical bills there was a little bit of money left for us to divide three ways. I didn't work for that money; it came a gift to me because I was an heir.

Here's what God's Word says about us as family members: "So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir." (Galatians 4:7) Our Heavenly Father isn't poor. He owns all the riches of the universe. But the riches we enjoy as heirs of God aren't material blessings, they are spiritual. The Bible says that our Father has "blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ...in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding." (Ephesians 1:3, 7)

What are some of the blessings you receive? First you receive an intimate relationship with your Creator. Romans 8:15 says we "have received the Spirit of sonship whereby we cry, 'Abba, Father.'" The typical Greek word for "father" is *pater*. We get our words paternal and patriarch from that word. But Jesus taught us that when we talk to God we don't have to use that formal word "Father." Instead He told us we could call God, "Abba." That was Aramaic "baby talk." It's like our words "Daddy" or "Papa." In other words, as part of God's family we get to enjoy intimacy with our Heavenly Father. If you're a member of God's family you don't think of Him as some harsh, unapproachable Being who is always looking to punish you. Instead you think of Him as a loving Father who is willing to pick you up when you fall and tenderly kiss your scratched knee.

Second, you receive the blessing of thousands of brothers and sisters. Wouldn't it be nice if every biological family were a "big happy family?" But we know sometimes just the opposite is true. Take Mother's Day for instance. For many of you today is a happy day, because you'll be able to express to your mom how much you love her. For others of us, our mothers are in heaven, and today is a sad reminder of those days when we could call her or hug her. Still for others, it's a tough day, because you may be estranged from your mother. Today might be a good time to call your mom and mend some relational fences. We all know our biological families can cause us heartache and pain.

Jesus pointed to His disciples and said, "This is my mother and my brothers and sisters. He was teaching that we are part of a huge family of believers. His family is called the church. This is where you can find love and acceptance. And for many people, they feel a closer bond with their spiritual family than they do with their natural family members.

Have you heard the phrase "Blood is thicker than water?" That means family ties are usually

stronger than any other relationship. I've got a new one for you to consider: Jesus' blood is thicker than family bloodlines. It is only through Jesus' blood, shed on the cross, that we can be accepted into the Family of God. The Bible says, "Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded...without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ." (Ephesians 2:12-13)

Jesus is teaching us the family of God can be everything for you your biological family should be—and much more. Even for people who live in families there is the problem of isolation and loneliness. People in our culture are trying desperately to connect. That's why they carry mobile phones and pagers. They spend hours online trying to fill the emptiness of loneliness. Social networking is no substitute for a handshake or a hug!

I read a recent article about how people in Japan are so busy that older people can now rent a family. Here's the quote: "In Japan, you can rent a family. Elderly Japanese who are isolated from their children by the frantic pace of modern life can rent a 'family' for lunch and a few hours. Just call Nippon Kokasei Honbu and ask for a son, daughter, grandchild, whatever relative you want, and that type will show up at your door and greet you as if they haven't seen you in years. Of course the service isn't cheap: three hours with your family cost \$1,130, plus transportation. Satsuki Ohiwa founded the business in 1990 when, as a businesswoman, she was too busy to visit her mother. Company staff visited her instead, and Ohiwa deemed it a success. Ohiwa's observation of her customers is not surprising. She said, 'What is common about our clients is that they are thirsty for human love.'" I wonder when someone in the U.S. will start offering that! But you can save yourself the cost of renting someone who acts like they love you. You can be a part of a local church family like Green Acres where people will love you for free!

(4) ALL GOD'S CHILDREN SHARE THE SAME DNA: OBEDIENCE

Sometimes you can identify biological family members because they share a common physical trait. For instance, some families share a tendency toward fair skin, red hair, or freckles. Others may have black hair, or olive skin. The reason I have this cleft between my eyes is because my dad had one, just like his dad. It's in my DNA. Jesus said there is an identifiable trait of every member of His family: Obedience. He said, "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (Matthew 12:50) The DNA of a Christian is obedience to God.

That may scare you a little because you are worried about all the hundreds of commandments in the Bible. Relax. Jesus said all of the commandments can be summarized into two simple ones: (1) Love God with all of your being; and (2) Love your neighbor as yourself. To obey God doesn't mean you're perfect, but it means you have a desire and disposition toward growing obedience. Philippians 2:13 promises that God will give you both the will and the power to obey Him.

Your desire to obey God means you'll act differently when you're part of God's Forever Family. Craig Barnes, Pastor of the National Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. tells a story from his boyhood to illustrate this. He writes: "When I was a child, my father, who was a pastor,

brought home a 12-year-old boy named Roger, whose parents had died from a drug overdose. There was no one to care for Roger, so my folks decided they would just raise him as if he were one of their sons. At first it was quite difficult for Roger to adjust to his new home—an environment of love that was free of heroine-addicted adults. Every day, several times a day, I heard my parents saying to Roger: 'No, No. That's not how we behave in this family.' 'No no. You don't have to scream or fight or hurt other people to get what you want.' And in time Roger began to change. Did Roger have to make all those changes in order to become a part of the family? No. He was made a part of the family simply by the grace of my father. Did he have to submit, obey and yield to the values of his new family? You bet he did. It was tough for Roger to change, but he was motivated by gratitude for the incredible love he had received. Every time Roger was tempted to revert back into old behaviors, he remained mindful of the grace and the love that delivered him from a family of dysfunction, spiritual darkness and desperation."

What a great lesson for us! When we become a part of God's family we have to learn "that's not how we behave in this family." And it takes us a while to learn what it means to live like a member of God's family. But we should all thank God for His amazing grace that accepted us into His family without demanding that we act perfect before we could be a part of His family.

Examine your life for a moment. Do you display the DNA of obedience? Do you love God and do you love your brothers and sisters?

I love my biological family (even if there are few strange aunts and uncles and cousins). I love my church family, too; even though there are a few folks here who aren't yet perfect.

When Dale Pond and I were flying to China in March we witnessed an interesting exchange that took place on the flight. We were in the bulkhead row in the Coach section and in the center section there was a mother with three little children. The father hadn't been able to secure a seat next to his wife and children. His assigned seat was on the row behind them. There was a man seated next to his wife and children so the father politely asked the man if he would be willing to switch seats with him so he could sit with his family. To our surprise the man hardly replied, but he just stared ahead and shook his head. No way. It was as if he was saying, "I paid for this space, this is MY space and I'm not giving it up for anybody." The flight attendant even came and asked him to switch seats and he refused. Of course, as a result of his stubbornness he got to sit next to three crying children for the 14-hour flight!

As Dale and I talked about that guy's attitude I said, "It reminds me of some people in church who refuse to give up their pew!" We got a laugh out of that. There are church family members who sometimes display a selfish attitude like the man on the flight, but we love them anyway because they're a part of the family of God. We have all kinds of people who are part of our church family. Some of them are even fairly normal!

Don't expect a perfect church. Just as there aren't any perfect families, neither are churches perfect. I like the little poem by Mavis Williams: If you should find the perfect church; Without one fault or smear; For goodness sake, don't join that church; You'd spoil the atmosphere! But since no perfect church exists; (we're all imperfect men); Then please stop looking for that church And love the church you're in! So keep on serving in your church; Until the resurrection;

And then we all will form the church Without an imperfection!

CONCLUSION

Everybody needs a family. Whether you're young, old, single or married, you need a family. Loneliness is the reason why many people are desperate. Consider all the popular songs about loneliness. Roy Orbison sang, "Only the lonely know the way I feel tonight." Elvis crooned, "Are you lonesome tonight?" Hank Williams sang, "I'm so lonesome I could cry." And the Beatles sang, "Ah, look at all the lonely people." Someone said cities are just places where thousands of people can be lonely together.

If you're lonely and looking for a family, God will take care of you. The Bible says, "His name is the Lord...a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows...God sets the lonely in families." (Psalm 68:4-6)

A recent Associated Press story reported the story of Tammy Harris who lived in Roanoke, Virginia. Tammy knew she was adopted and when she turned 21 she decided she would like to meet her birth mother. After a year of trying, she failed to locate her biological mother. What she didn't know was that her birth mother, Joyce Shultz, had also been looking for her daughter for 20 years. There was something else Tammy didn't know. Her mother was one of her co-workers at the convenience store where she worked. One day Joyce heard Tammy talking with another coworker about trying to find her mother. Soon Joyce and Tammy were comparing birth certificates. When Tammy realized the woman she had been working with was her mother, she fell into her arms. Tammy said, "We held each other for the longest time. It was the best day of my life."

Maybe you've been looking for a family who can love you and support you. For some of you, don't look any further. You've found your family. One the best places to find companionship, friendship, and love today is in the church. When I talk about our church I never call it an organization. Instead I call us a family. We have the same Father and that makes us brothers and sisters in Christ.

I can remember as a child walking into the local post office and seeing a poster of Uncle Sam. He was looking right me, pointing his finger at me. The caption said, "Uncle Sam wants you." I didn't have a clue who Uncle Sam was, but I felt good just knowing that someone wanted me! Imagine Jesus Christ is looking into your eyes. He's pointing His nail pierced hand at you saying, "I want you. I love you. I died for you." I want YOU to be a part of my forever family!

OUTLINE

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes