

Family Life: 4. Someone to Love
Genesis 5:1-2; Mark 3:31-35
May 27, 2012
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Are you looking for someone to love? Because we were made for relationships. We all need relationships but relationships are hard. When we began this series three weeks ago, we saw how authentic relationships must begin with a vertical dimension. When my primary focus is on my relationship with God and I keep building that relationship, every other relationship – the horizontal dimension – will be stronger and healthier. The cross is the symbol of authentic relationships. Vertical with Christ; Horizontal with others. Vertical first, always at the center and then the horizontal, always guided and connected to the vertical. Then two weeks ago, we looked at the role of mothers and last week, Dick helped us consider our relationship with the world - even those people who are hard to love. This morning, let's look at the family.

What does your family look like? None of us chose to be born. We came into this world and into a family, and you didn't pick that family. We've heard the saying – you can pick your friends, but you can't pick your family. Whoever said that the first time had someone in the family who was hard to love. Is there anyone in your family like that? Last week, I heard someone say, "you can't pick your family but you can unfriend them on Facebook." Relationships are hard.

This morning, we've heard from Genesis chapter 5. It's genealogy, a listing of one generation after another. If you read through Genesis, one of the things you discover is that it is a story of families – and not the story you might expect. Not one of the families is the perfect family. They are deeply dysfunctional families. There's Adam and Eve get in trouble almost from the beginning and they have two sons, Cain and Abel who don't get along. They don't just fight with each other - Cain kills Abel. There's a murderer named Lamech who comes along and introduces polygamy. A man named Noah has a drinking problem. Abraham lies and says his wife is really his sister in order to save his own skin – not once but twice. Then his son Isaac marries Rebekah and they spend their lives playing favorites with their two sons. Jacob with the help of his mom deceives dad, cheats his brother and his brother spends years trying to kill Jacob. Then Jacob favors one son, Joseph so much that Joseph's older brothers want to kill him. They end up selling him into slavery, lying about it, and covering it up for years. Are you starting to feel better about your family? These families are like Jerry Springer material – and that's just the first book of the Bible.

One reason I find the Bible so believable is that this stuff wasn't taken out. Think about it – if we were putting the Bible together, we'd take this stuff out and include only the perfect people, the perfect families – and instead of a Bible, we'd have a pamphlet, a brochure maybe. The Bible is filled with broken people. It is filled with broken families. Relationships are hard. But then through these dysfunctional, messed up families, God is somehow present and working to keep the dream of redemption alive. Stay close to the vertical dimension – there's healing and wholeness.

This church is not the place where successful families, families that have-it-all-together come and congratulate each other for how well they are doing. That's what some people think – because I often come across people who stay away because in their brokenness they no longer feel like they belong. As I've said before, we clean up well – perhaps too well – and it can be hard for someone to walk in here and see there is not a perfect family among us. This is the place for people in broken families, families marred by sin to come and find love and forgiveness and discover what God can do.

The family is important. God created us to be in families. We cannot survive on our own. Family has always been very important to Amanda and me, but now our two children live far from home. It is no longer unusual to be part of a family scattered across the country and even around the world. I remember being on a mission trip to West Virginia in the 1990s. For a week, we worked on the home of an older woman who lived on a hillside. She had several children who also had children of their own and every member of her extended family lived within walking distance. As we drove to her home, we discovered that she was related to every family that lived in that hollow. At the time, I lived in Edina, my parents and two of my sisters lived in St. Paul and a third sister lived in St. Peter. That seemed reasonably close to me, but she remarked that she could not imagine living that far from her family. One of the reasons unemployment was so high was that no one would move to find employment because the bond of family was that important.

That was the situation in Jesus' world. Often an extended family was living in the same house. The family would work together and live together, sharing everything. It was part of the God-given fabric of life. But suddenly in Mark chapter three, Jesus challenges what had been the heart of Jewish family identity. Jesus' mother clearly did not understand what her son was up to. Jesus was living in Capernaum and she and the rest of the family was back in Nazareth, thirty miles away. So one day, she brought her family from Nazareth up to Capernaum to find Jesus and take him home. Living so far was scandalous – just imagine what people must be saying about her dysfunctional family. Turn to chapter 3, verse 21: **they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind"**. In this family, they thought Jesus was the crazy one – he's the one that's hard to love! And when they got to Capernaum, Jesus confirmed their worst fear. He slammed the door on their whole understanding of what it meant to be the perfect family.

A mom and a dad and 2.4 children with a dog and a cat? Is that what makes a family? When I was doing children's ministry, every year an elementary school in Richfield asked me to come and talk to all the second grade classes about family. And I would begin by showing pictures of families – all kinds of configurations of families, some with moms and dads and some single parent families, multigenerational families, different ethnicities within the same family and if I didn't hold up a picture of their family, I would ask the child to describe his or her own family and together we decided that if all it took was people living at the same address maybe that was not enough to define family. And so we did several activities to look at certain virtues that seemed essential to being family.

Jesus had gone to Capernaum with a mission that involved breaking traditional understandings and starting a new kind of family. So when Jesus is told, **"Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."** What he say? Verse 33: **"Who are my mother and brothers?" Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said,** "It's you! You are my family." Relationships are hard. This isn't meant to be easy. Who is welcome here? Is it only those who agree on politics? Is it only those who agree on the Bible? Is it only those who are fine upstanding citizens? Those who look like me, act like me, talk like me, dress like me, drive cars like me, and behave like me? Who is the last person you would want to spend time with? And what if that person walked in and sat down next to you? Who are my mother and brothers? It's you – and they thought Jesus was out of his mind, filled with demonic spirits. But Jesus has the mind of God. Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit. And he invites us to be of the same mind and the same Spirit.

God is determined to have a family, but to join a new family, you must detach from your old understanding. Remember how he called to Simon and Andrew who were fishermen casting a net into the lake. Jesus said, “follow me.” Then he called to James and John who were also fishing and without delay they left their family. Then there was another time when a man said, “I’ll follow you, only first let me go give my recently deceased father a decent burial” – and remember what Jesus said? “Let the dead bury the dead. Let someone else do the funeral. You follow me. It’s not that Jesus devalues family, I think he is saying your family is too small.

This morning we baptize a child, and in effect here’s what I am saying to the parents of that child: “You are wonderful people, but you don’t know enough and you are not skilled enough to raise a Christian. Therefore, we will adopt your child. We’ll take responsibility. We will help you raise a Christian, but we are your family!”

Are you with me, this morning? You need a bigger family. And here in this place, you are born again into a new family as large as the love of God in Jesus Christ. What’s it mean to be part of this family? There’s somebody to love – always, always somebody to love. Today, we send Carol Erickson all the way to Kenya where our family will get bigger to include young women – children really, who have children of their own – and through the power of the Holy Spirit moving in this family, they will find family – our family – and we say “thank God.” And for those of us not traveling to Kenya this week, we’re not off the hook. This week, there’s somebody to love – may be the one who is hard to love, the one you’ve been ignoring or maybe the stranger who walks walk into your life because God wants a bigger family.

Prayer

Lord God, you created each of us and placed us within families. Sometimes it is the people in our families who are the hardest for us to love and respect. Unite us, Lord, in spite of our differences. Help us to be persons of love and encouragement, ever mindful of each person's special place in the kingdom. As we look to you, help us to see in each person's face a reflection of your glory. Draw us ever closer to you in this great Christian family, through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Study Guide

Monday Read Genesis 5:1-2 and 1 Timothy 5:8

Genesis is a book about families, and what is clear there as well as in your own family is that family life can be hard. But God created family to be the cradle of life and love. God takes your relationships in your family very seriously. The problem is that it’s easy to both take family members for granted as well as neglect to nurture and care for those relationships. And when they fall apart it is devastating. Family makes a huge difference in who you are, for better or worse. The goal is to make sure you are doing everything you can to make family relationships healthy and whole. Family matters to God.

- Is your extended family an integral part of your life or just distant relatives? Why do you think that is?
- How do you think your own family background has influenced who you are and how you have lived including raising your own family?

Tuesday Read Proverbs 22:6 and Deuteronomy 6:4-9

As a part of family, there is nothing more important than parenting. And even when children become adults, parents never stop being an influence in their lives. According to Scripture, nothing is more important or a calling higher than being a parent. The seeds of faith that you plant and impress on your children are vital to their spiritual lives both now and in the future. The good news is that you are not alone. God created you to do this and will help you succeed. The legacy you will leave will influence not only the next generation but also many generations to come. And for all the dads, no matter how old your children are or get, they will look for Jesus in you which will shape their picture of who God is. The strongest and manliest thing you can do is to model Jesus for your kids. **Read Joshua 24:15**

- When have you taken your family for granted? How often do you neglect a family member when they have a need?
- Name some of the ways you have and are currently imprinting your faith and relationship with Jesus into your children or grandchildren? What kind of legacy are you leaving for the generations that follow you?

Wednesday Read Mark 3:31-35

Don't forget about your "extended family" which according to Scripture is all brothers and sisters around you. There is a desperate need for better pictures of what family should be and were created to be by God. And you can be a part of a surrogate family who comes alongside to help them see what family is supposed to be. You could invite someone into your Faith Group who is away from family and in need of that kind of support. Regardless there are whole communities of people who desperately need somebody to love and for somebody to love them.

- Is there a broken relationship with a family member that God is prompting you to begin reaching out and repairing? What will be your first step?
- Who has been a surrogate family to you in your life and what did they do? How can you reach out with both your family and your Faith Group?

Thursday Read Mark 2:1-12

This incident so awed Jesus' followers that the first three gospels all tell the story nearly word for word. The man in the story badly needed healing. By himself, however, he wasn't going to be able to get near Jesus. With effort and ingenuity, his friends brought him into Jesus' presence. Jesus healed him inwardly even before he restored his ability to walk.

- Jesus saw the paralyzed man's deepest need differently than many would have. Jesus told him, "Son, your sins are forgiven." In what ways can Christian friends be like Jesus' physical presence to heal and encourage one another? In what ways can Christian friends show God's forgiveness and grace?
- Have you ever been mentally, emotionally or physically paralyzed, and had people who cared about you carry you through the situation? Have you ever been part of carrying someone you cared about through a crisis? In either case, what did it take to "dig through the roof" to meet the other person's need?

Friday Read Romans 12:9-21

Today's Scripture twice uses a term that sounds so ordinary we might miss the fact that it's a key New Testament idea: "one another." God did not call Christians to a solo journey through the hostile Roman world. They were a community, strengthened in their power to "overcome evil with good" by their steady, loving commitment to one another.

- How have other people treated you? What differences have you seen in the way non-Christians relate to each other and to you, and the way Christians do? Which group has come closer to living up to the ideals in today's reading? What wounds do you have from the past? How can God and God's people help to heal those wounds?
- "Hurt people hurt people" is sadly true. Jesus came to offer a new way of "being" with one another, which Paul summed up as "Do not repay anyone evil for evil." Jesus "overcame evil with good." What is your experience of living this way?

Saturday Read Colossians 3:12-17

Being a group or church "member" can feel like "paper work." My name goes on a list. I agree to certain things and receive news and notices. Colossians didn't say we are "members of an organization," but "members of one body." The image suggests that Jesus connects us to each other organically, as a leg or arm is joined to our body.

- Today's verses are about what it means to be "holy." What kind of person does the word "holy" bring to your mind? How do "compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" enrich your sense of what it means for you to be holy? In what ways is the close connection of Christians to each other vital for living truly holy lives?
- Christian music didn't start with TobyMac, Amy Grant, Fanny Crosby or even Charles Wesley and J. S. Bach. The first Christians shared "psalms [Israel's traditional music], hymns, and songs from the Spirit [probably newly written]." When has music drawn you closer to others who share your faith, and filled your heart with gratitude to God?