

IDENTITY: WE ARE A FAMILY

family . missionaries . servants . learners

Questions for Personal Study

Read John 1.10-13, Romans 8.12-17, & Galatians 4.1-7. What do they say?

Do you understand what is meant by our Identity as God's Family?

What is the difference between Identity and Activity as a Family?

Now read Romans 12.9-21 for the *implications* of being God's Family.

Do you see these implications in your life in significant ways? How?

If not, why not? What do you not believe about this Identity of Family?

Questions for Study in Community

Read 1 John 3.1-3 together. What does this say about our Identity?

Now read 1 John 3.11-18. How do we define what love is?

What does this passage tell us about how we ought to love one another?

Do you all as a Missional Community believe that you are a Family?

What activities are implied by your Identity of being a Family?

What would it look like for us to "Family" one another this week? (Gal 6.10)

Questions for Staying on Mission

As a Missional Community, how do we embody a "Family on a Mission?"

What Kingdom work could we be about together? Pray about it!

Begin to plan for the weekend of Oct. 4-5: "A Weekend on Mission."

Thoughts for Parents

As you think about this Identity of Family, you'll quickly realize that there are implications for you in terms of being a parent. Above all, your job as parent is to introduce your kids to their Father. How you parent them will impact how they come to view God as their Father! That ought to drive fear into you! But it also gives you hope to know that your Father is intimately concerned with the details of your day and wants you to learn to trust him and rest in his love for you. As you learn to do that, you'll be free to give that kind of love - gracious, patient, caring, and yet firm - to your own kids!

Do your kids know that God is your Daddy? Do they see that kind of love in you? Do you regularly remind them how much you love them, both in word and in deed? Do you seek to serve and bless them? Do you rejoice over them?

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Who Are You?

Tonight we begin a new teaching series exploring what it means to be a part of the Church and our particular expression of the church, the Vintage Faith Communities. Above all, I want us to remember who we are as a people created by God and now - in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ - created anew and restored to relationship with God. **We need to remember The Story of God and what He has done in history for us, come to a firm conviction about who we are because of what He has done, and then dialogue about how we should live in light of what He has done.** This series is about our Identity as God's people and how we embody that Identity together.

Tonight we are talking about the Identity of Family: *We are God's Children who are fully accepted and adopted, and who love one another as His family.* God has always desired a people - a human family - who would live together in such a way that the world would know what He was like. We believe that in Jesus, God has come to the world that he created in order to finally and completely create this people. To better understand our Identity as a Family, we need to start at the beginning.

Creation

In the beginning - no, before the beginning - God existed in unbroken fellowship within Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At the center of all reality is the Eternal Community of the Triune God, forever existing to honor, glorify, and love one another within Himself. In the abundance of this great, self-giving love, God chooses to create a people that he can bless by inviting them into that eternal fellowship. God desires to pour Himself out on a people who reflect this love back to him and then live as His earthly family reflecting Him to all of creation. We see this in His creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis 1.26-28.

God's first action after forming Adam and Eve is to "bless" them: God gives himself full and freely to this human family and invites them to understand themselves in relationship to Him. They are then given the task of going out into the world to form a human community and culture that reflects His Fatherly

love and care for them. They are to reproduce as family and to cultivate the earth in such a way that God's creation flourishes. In the beginning, God was intimately connected to this Human Family as Father.

Fall

Unfortunately, Creation does not tell the whole story. At the end of Genesis 2, Adam and Eve are in perfect relationship with their Father, with each other, with themselves, and with the creation. The Biblical word that describes this situation is "Shalom," the perfect weaving together of all that is made in harmony and universal flourishing.

Genesis 3 tells the story of Adam and Eve's fall from grace, their deliberate decision to remove themselves from the Fatherly care of God. Thinking they would be more free and glorious without God, they inadvertently choose death and slavery, and in so doing make themselves into orphans. As our first parents, Adam and Eve have chosen this as our representatives, and we now are born into this rebellion and the slavery that it entails. We are glorious as God's greatest creation, the only created entity made in his image, and yet we are all aware of a deep darkness that colors our greatness. We are beautiful but deeply flawed. We are glorious ruins.

As a result of our estrangement from God, we've become estranged from one another and from all of creation. We don't honor and love one another as brothers and sisters. We hate and rage and kill. We self-protect and self-promote. We hide and lie and run from anyone who gets too close. All of our problems in life stem from the fact that we live as orphans in the world, fending for ourselves and trying to find our identity in how well we perform as solitary individuals, measuring ourselves against one another and finding joy in how we outdo one another.

Redemption

The hope for humanity cannot lie within itself. If the root of our problem is self-reliance, rebellion against our Father, and the resulting estrangement as orphans and slaves, we can't simply start acting differently. Our only hope is that our Father would take pity on us, come to us, rescue us from ourselves, and heal us from the inside out. The gospel - the good news about Jesus and his work on our behalf - is that God has come to us as a Father pursuing his wayward children in order to bring them back into his family. God has given his Son in order that we who have made ourselves orphans and slaves might be-

come sons once again. By faith in Jesus, we are made right with God and adopted as His beloved children, and in so doing we are brought together under Jesus as a family.

We Are A Family

Family, then, is not something we *do*, as if it is a role we play or a certain set of activities we perform. Rather, Family is what we *are*, regardless of whether or not we act like it! It is a *fact* that God has loved us and accepted us because of Jesus and so adopted us as his children and created us as His Family. That is who we are: "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3.1).

The fundamental question we need to wrestle with together is this: Do we believe this is true? Before we do anything about it - that is, before we start acting like a family - we have to see that we are talking about an Identity issue. In that sense, it is an issue of the heart. Do we love one another deeply, from the heart, as brothers and sisters through Jesus? Do we view one another as family members to whom we are now related whether we like it or not?

Only once we have wrestled with the heart issue - that this is one of our fundamental Identities - can we begin to talk about the implications. And the implications are huge! You are no longer an autonomous individual who makes private decisions but an interconnected and interdependent member of a family! You can't live in hiding and seclusion! You can't live like an orphan!

It implies that our decisions about resources like money, time, and energy are done in community. It implies that we can't live secluded and uninterrupted lives any longer. It implies that our day to day decisions impact and effect the Family, both our decisions for obedience and our decisions for sin. It implies that we are intimately connected to the Church down the block and around the world. And it implies we can rest in the sovereign care of Heavenly Father!

What might happen if we began to define "church" first and foremost as a Family? We all know that church isn't a building, a preacher, or a bunch of programs; but do we believe that church is a community of people connected by Jesus and living together as a city within a city? Do we believe we are God's people, the ones of whom Christ says, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13.35)?

Imagine our city blanketed with communities of people who love one another as Family, joyfully caring for one another's physical and spiritual needs!