

**“The Family We Were Made For”
The Family of God
Downtown
January 10, 2021**

Does anybody remember the MasterCard priceless ads from the 90s? I think they still make them every now and then. The first one ever was a dad taking his son to a baseball game:

“2 tickets? \$28. 2 hotdogs, 2 popcorns and 2 sodas? \$18. 1 autographed baseball? \$45. Real conversation with your 11-year-old son? Priceless. There are some things money can’t buy. For everything else, there’s Mastercard.”

The heart of the ads is showing how their credit card can help you buy things that can help you get things that are actually unpurchasable. Priceless things like family and real connection.

When I was 14, I saw one of these ads - essentially a remake of the first baseball one. Except this one had a dad, a son, and the dad’s dad, grandpa. It ended, “Having 3 generations of men in your family together for the big game? Priceless.”

And as a 14-year old, I just got mad. It was like seeing a vision of something that I missed terribly, even though I’d never had it. In part because I never knew my grandfathers. My mom’s dad died when she was 2. My dad’s when I was 6 months. But even then, my family never lived near any of our extended family... And growing up and still some today if I’m totally honest when I see friends with big extended warm, multi-generational families, awesome grandfathers... I have to fight sinful jealousy as I look at the beauty of it all.

So it was fascinating to me a few years ago when I ran into an article by an African- American mother named Bunmi Laditan, she’s an author who has written a few books including the *Honest Toddler*, and her article was called “**I Miss the Village**” I’ll read you an excerpt:

Bunmi Laditan

I miss the village I never had. The one with mothers doing the washing side by side, clucking and laughing hysterically, tired in body but quick in spirit. We’d know each other so well: annoying one another from time to time, but never staying mad long because the truth is, we need each other. The children would wake up early, as they tend to, and run outside... They’d disappear into the field and forest for a day of play as we’d start our sacred work. We’d knead bread side by side, the littles at our feet... It would be impossible to tell whose children belonged to whom -- we’d all attend to the group of toddling wee ones, ...The days would be full of conversation as we expertly flexed a muscle that has since gone weak: the art of listening. Quiet empathy in lieu of passive judgment, and when called for, gentle, sincere advice. In our village, our members are our estate and we build them up.

Any moms with little ones out there feel this? A certain kind of loneliness and exhaustion at trying to be all things to your kids at all times throughout the day with almost no adult interaction?

Here’s our question for today: What is it about this sense of an extended family village - a multi-generational community sharing life that can make a 14-year-old white boy in South Carolina and a mid-30s African American mother in Quebec feel the same sense of longing? Could it be possible that the way we’ve thought about family and deeply committed friendship is flawed? The answer ... Biblically speaking is yes. Something is profoundly flawed. Let me show you what I mean:

Genesis records the first command God ever gave to humans:

Genesis 1:27-28

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, (*here's the command*) "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it".

Translation: Go fill the world with a big extended family village. A multi-generational interwoven family walking in the kind of Trinitarian, self-giving, others-exalting, love-based relationships we talked about last week. God's desire, His mission is to fill the earth with a family of people that love and worship Him...

Unfortunately, this beautiful design of a warm, self-giving, others-exalting, loving family doesn't last long. In Gen. 3, Adam and Eve reject submission to God's reign and they reject His mission of filling the world with a family of people who love and worship God, choosing instead to follow the serpent's temptation to make life all about them. The descent goes quickly from there.

In the next chapter Genesis 4, one of Adam and Eve's kids murders his brother.

Over the next few chapters, evil and chaos grow rampantly until God decides to flood the world and start over with a new family. Enter Noah. Interesting that God doesn't pick a focus group of the smartest and most talented people on earth. He picks another family. Even more interesting... Do you know the first thing God told Noah's family after the flood?

Genesis 9:1

And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth."

Sound familiar? Direct echo of God's first command Genesis 1:28. God's still on a mission to fill the world with a beautiful, multi-generational, interwoven, self-giving, kid-loving, elder-honoring, warm, rich, joyful, laughter-filled, family village of His image-bearing worshipers.

And like Adam and Eve, it doesn't take long before it goes bad for Noah's family. In the same ch., Noah ends up passed out drunk and naked in his tent. A few chapters later it's all gone bad again and God is starting over with a new family in Abraham. Now I want to show you something fascinating that happens when God establishes His covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12:

Genesis 12:1-3

"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you..."

God calls Abraham to leave his homeland and family of origin.

...And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing...

God promises to grow Abraham's family into a huge nation

...I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

God's purpose in establishing Abraham's family as His set apart, covenant people? Not just about their biological family. It's bigger than that. It's about them blessing all the families of the earth. That's an interesting phrase, isn't it? In one way, you can think about all humanity as a collective of families,

weaving through time. That seems to be how God thinks about it. And His desire has to do with all of them.

Let me recap and make sure we're catching the thread: **God has always been working to fill the earth with a big extended family village of people who love and worship Him.** Always. From the jump. And all the way through. **And, this family isn't just about our small biological family. It's about something bigger than that.**

It's not about biological families.

But it goes beyond that. God intends to sweep our biological families up into His bigger family that will bless and change the whole world. All nations. All races. All tribes. All families.

This is foreshadowed in the Old Testament and becomes even more clear in the new testament.

1 Peter 2:9-10

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession...

Peter talking to young early churches full of both Jews and Gentiles and he uses descriptions that specifically described God's chosen family nation in the Old Testament - Israel. And he says now it applies to us. The church is God fulfilling His mission to fill the world with a global extended family village of people who love and worship Him.

...that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light...

See it? Same mission as Genesis 1. A people for God's own possession to proclaim His excellencies. A big extended family village of people loving and worshipping God

...Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

I love that phrasing. Once you were not a people. But now you are God's people.

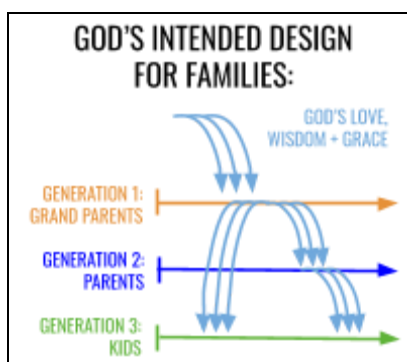
We've talked about this so many times throughout the years... That when Jesus saves people, when He shows us our sin and our need for Him; our need for God's perfect Son to die as a sacrifice in our place... He saves us into God's adopted family. He makes us a people.

He invites us to come to have a seat at His dinner table.

He invites us to be at His family meals and gatherings forever.

He invites us to come to play spades and to listen and tell the old family stories and to laugh deeply as we sit around the warmth of the fire in God's hearth.

I'm a real visual learner so a few years ago I came up with this chart to display simply God's design for families and church families. Nothing super profound. I've shared the family chart before back in the Life of David series.



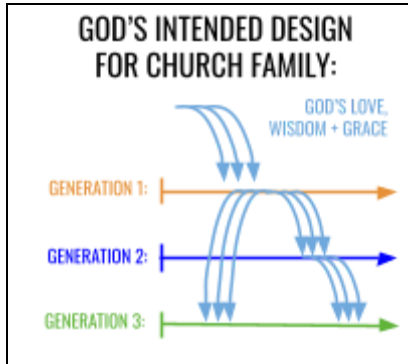
This is God's design for families. That His wisdom and love and grace, His trinitarian, self-giving, others-exalting love would flow down from one generation to the next in this incredible cascading waterfall.

When healthy families operate like this, there's this incredible stability and joy and confidence that comes from it.

- Parents can be a little less overwhelmed because they have great support as they pour themselves out into their kids.

- Single people know they are loved and have a place and a role whether they ever have a spouse or any kids.
- Kids tend to flourish with this kind of stability and warmth. Their energy and mischief add joy and laughter to it all.

And the exact same thing is God's design for His big extended family village in the church.

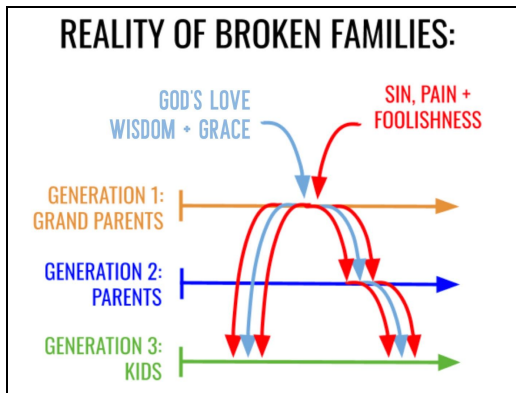


This is how it's supposed to work: the elders in the big extended church family village pour down wisdom and loving support. The old family stories of God's faithfulness are passed down from one generation to the next and the kids provide laughter and energy and innocent mischief.

The parents and married couples in the middle generation are buoyed with all this warm loving support from above as they go about the hard work of raising the next generation.

Single people in the church family know, they just know they are loved and have a place and role whether marriage or children is ever part of their story or not.

That's how it's supposed to be. And it's beautiful, right? That's what we all long for. That's what we were all made for. So what's the problem?



The problem is that reality is a sinful broken world. Instead of a beautiful blue cascading waterfall of love, wisdom, and grace, we inherit a whole bunch of red sin and pain and foolishness.

Just like all the families we talked about in the OT, Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham... God made us to be part of a multi-generational, self-giving, others-exalting, multi and inter-generational family village that lasts forever.

But sin keeps breaking down what God designed.

And in one way, that sounds like a simple problem; SIN.

But in reality, it's complicated because sin is more complicated than we tend to think.

Three aspects to why we aren't all joyfully living in the cascading waterfall of God's beautiful design for a big loving extended family village:

1.) The Historical aspect: There's a historical aspect to the problem because we all inherit stuff: baggage, wounds. Call it what you want. We love to act in the West like we are autonomous individuals, charting our own course, and captaining our own ships. The problem is you aren't just you. You are also who you come from. Pastor and author Pete Scazzero says it like this: "Jesus may be in your heart, but grandpa is in your bones."

So our biological families are supposed to be our greatest source of warmth and support. And instead, they often become the source of our greatest pain. Wounds instead of warmth.

- For some of us, those wounds are obvious emotional or physical scars. Your family did terrible things to hurt you. Or your family did not do really important things that you were designed for and that you needed.
- For others, it's more circumstantial. Your family went through deep loss and suffering and struggled to handle it well. Your wounds are collateral damage of living in a broken world.

Either way, we all inherit wounds. From our parents, from our siblings, from extended family members, from painful experiences at churches. This is the historical aspect of the problem. But there's a second and sometimes even hardest to see aspect to the problem:

2.) The Cultural aspect: Culturally speaking we live in one of the most individualistic cultures the world has ever known. COVID quarantine didn't invent the problem of American isolation and loneliness, in many ways it just put a spotlight on what was already there.

You could summarize the problem like this - Our dinner tables are shrinking. Fewer and fewer people live near their extended family. Parents are having fewer kids over time. Hospitality is at an all-time low. Which could be wise in quarantine, but not outside of it.

Our normal pattern is to go home to our small number of people, eat dinner at our small dinner table. Watch Netflix with our small number of people. Go to sleep. Rinse, cycle, and repeat.

Writer and reporter **David Brooks** talks about this aspect of our culture in a powerful, poignant article called **The Nuclear Family was a Mistake:**

David Brooks

This is the story of our times—the story of the family, once a dense cluster of many siblings and extended kin, fragmenting into ever smaller and more fragile forms. The initial result of that fragmentation, the nuclear family, didn't seem so bad. But then, because the nuclear family is so brittle, the fragmentation continued. In many sectors of society, nuclear families fragmented into single-parent families, single-parent families into chaotic families or no families. If you want to summarize the changes in family structure over the past century, the truest thing to say is this: We've made life freer for individuals and more unstable for families. We've made life better for adults but worse for children.

How our churches are impacted by all this?? I don't have time. We'll talk about it on the podcast.

There's a historical aspect to the problem in terms of the baggage and wounds we inherit. There's a cultural aspect in the normalized patterns of shrinking dinner tables and individual screens for all. And there's a sneaky 3rd aspect that may actually be the worst:

3.) Personal aspect: The problem is not just historical or cultural. The problem is you.

God's beautiful waterfall design can't flow blue because of the sinful people in it. Sinful people like you and me... And all of us. The red can't stop because it's in us. And we keep putting more in.

The cultural aspects of the problem are easy to sit back and go "Ohhh that sad isolated, lonely culture. Tsk tsk." But when Monday rolls around and it's time for LifeGroup, you are the one who goes, "I mean I could go... but, the bachelor's on." or "I could go, but Monday Night Football." And then you text the group chat... "Sorry guys... bit of a cough... Might be COVID. _(ツ)_/"

The cultural movement toward smaller and more fragile families and communities has moved that direction because it appeals to something in our self-centered, sinful nature. We value our freedom and comfort and entertainment more than real-life flesh blood other people made in God's image. To push back on the cultural tide, we're going to have to repent... A lot. And often.

And the same thing is true with the historical aspect of the wounds and baggage we've inherited. Then, we end up becoming hurt people who hurt people.

- So your mom wasn't trustworthy and she abandoned you... and so now you're the person who doesn't really trust anyone and you can read minds and so if anyone hurts you or even just starts to think about hurting you, you're like "no thanks to that" so you go ahead and leave the relationship before you can get hurt again... Which feels so logical and justifiable down in your bones except the problem is now you are her, abandoning people...
- Or the opposite, your dad was really passive and never spoke up for himself or said much of anything that needed to be said so you said "Well I'm not gonna be that" so you've overreacted

and you always speak the truth except often in rude and hurtful ways but it's not your fault because you're just telling it like it is... And the problem is that in your woundedness you stay immature and never realize that while your dad wasn't healthy, neither are you! Healthy communication requires balance where sometimes we speak ... boldly ... and sometimes we use tact and grace and wisdom out of love.

- And for some of you, it's not that extreme... It's just that your parents modeled that the nuclear family was supposed to be a self-contained unit. So they didn't ever ask for help, didn't have others frequently at your dinner table, had no serious attachment to anyone other than spouse and kids...and now you're drowning in responsibilities with little kids and work and you feel guilty about it and like something is wrong if you need help.

And I know how bad family wounds can hurt. I know how hard they can be to see and discern and deal with.

- And at some point, we've gotta deal with the reality that these are the wounds and baggage and unhealthy norms that we have received and we can't go through the rest of our lives hurting people and saying, "It's not my fault." What we have received isn't our fault, but it is our responsibility to face our past, to heal, and to join God in building His beautiful extended family village.
- It is our responsibility to say, "I don't care that this was normal in my family... It's not what Jesus calls us to in the Bible." Jesus has to get a louder voice in setting our norms than our family or our culture.

So I don't know what you've inherited, but you know... And you better know. Because if you don't know, you can't deal with it. So how do we do that? How do we face our past and deal with our wounds? How do we fight back on the cultural pressure to isolate? How do we learn to walk in repentance together? Well, that's part two of the sermon, and we'll save that for next week.

Let's pray.