

We are Family

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Of all the word pictures and metaphors used to describe the church, the one that stands out above the rest is “family”. In fact, it is so much integrated into church life that I don’t think it is just a metaphor.

A metaphor describes a thing regarded as representative or symbolic of something else. For Example, people could say the church is like or similar to light, a group of sheep, a field, a building. However, “church is like a family” is not metaphorical, it is a literal description of the identity we know as the church.

The church is not like family; the church is family.

Why Is the Church A Family?

Jesus identified His relationship with God as Father and Son. Matthew 3 “This is my beloved son.” This emphasizes the revelation of God as family. What the revelation of Jesus Christ introduced into the world is that God is more than what we think, namely that God is family.

Matthew 12:49-50 (NIV)

⁴⁸ He replied to him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” ⁴⁹ Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

Jesus conveyed a powerful teaching that His disciples are a family. The familial bond of believers goes beyond blood relation. Jesus taught that anyone who does the will of the Father is His family.

Galatians 3:29 (ESV)

“And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”

The Apostle Paul continued teaching the same concept that Christians are all offspring of Abraham and part of God’s household, and therefore, are part of the family of God. We are connected to one another not physically, but through God’s fulfilled promise to Abraham.

The same is true of believers today. Christians are family through Jesus. God established believers to be connected in a powerful way as a family. To say that we are a church family implies the significant spiritual bond between believers, and the way we walk with one another through life, encouraging, supporting, and loving each other.

Galatians 4:4–5 (NIV)

⁴ But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

Here it says that God sent His Son to become one of us, living life without any disobedience to the law so that we, who are not able to live according to the law, can be freed from God's judgement, and become one of God's sons or daughters. (The Greek word for *adoption to sonship* is a legal term referring to the full legal standing of an adopted male heir in Roman culture.)

Hebrews 2:11 (NIV)

¹¹ Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.

"Who is the one who makes people holy"? Jesus. "Those who are made holy"? Us, we are of the same family.

God is our Father, Jesus is our elder brother, and we are brothers and sisters in Christ. The family is the primary way the early church identified itself.

This can be seen by the fact that the word 'disciple'; this word was very common in the early part of the New Testament, but it subsequently disappeared after the book of Acts. And it disappeared because it was replaced by the term 'brother' in the rest of the Bible. The concept of Christians as a family became the identity of the early church.

The apostle Paul often used family terms when he wrote to churches and individuals about being the body of Christ.

Ephesians 2:19 (NIV)

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household,

Strangers and foreigners don't feel at home in the other country, they are alienated from the land they are in, they don't feel part of the place.

Illustration of Immigrating to NZ

Because you became a child of God when you gave your life to the Lord Jesus, you are now no longer foreigners and strangers who are lost and outside the family but you are fellow citizens with the saints and you are members of the household of God.

Christians no longer need to feel outside of the Lord's family, no longer feel second rate, but all the rights of a family.

The phrase "church family" shows the depth of life that people share when they attend the same church. Believers who go to the same church do not just sit in the same building on Sunday mornings; church members go through life together much like a family. We

experience joys and sorrows together, we have the same desire to live as Jesus lived, and through the ups and downs of it all, become a family.

We say “church family” because it shows how important our relationships are with other believers, and that a congregation is supposed to provide support and connection similar to that of a family.

A church family shares in the fullness of faith and life together.

A church family provides support during the hardships of life, like when someone faces the loss of a loved one or losses their job. Our hearts went out to Warren, who was once an elder of this church when we heard of the loss of his wife Dorean. Similarly, our hearts went out to Ming and Christina when we heard of the death of their grandson, Charlie. When someone goes through health or financial difficulties, family or relationship challenges, we want to find a way to help them. Their pain is our pain, and their struggle is our struggle.

As a church family we celebrate together life’s greatest milestones, too, such as the arrival of a new baby, when members get marriage, or are baptised, and in other situations like graduation, the securing of the first job, visa approvals and the reunion of families. Their joy is our joy, their achievement is our achievement.

A church family also disciples and shepherds one another, inviting deeper faith and closeness to God.

Hebrews 10:24 (ESV)

²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,

The word “consider”, means to think about carefully about something; “stir up” means we are to “encourage, stimulate” each other to love one another and to demonstrate love in action.

This unique and special community helps encourage each other toward becoming like Christ, through their love and good deeds that reflect the work of the Spirit in a believer’s life. Church family shows the compassion, kindness, and love that followers of Jesus are called to demonstrate.

The people in the early church spent a lot of time dwelling together and living out their faith like a family. They ate together, they worshipped together, and they spent time with one another in fellowship. This is something we should do as well.

Scripture Provides Guidance On How To Treat Other Believers.

1 Timothy 5:1-2 NIV

Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, ² older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.

We should treat them like our family, showing love and honour, doing good toward one another, and inspiring each other in faith. These verses about church family are just a few of the references which tells us that believers are more than just friends or people who go to the same church. There is a deep bond and connection between Christians. We are united by Christ as a family. We are to consider and treat one another like mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters, because we are all part of the family of God.

What Should We Do When our Church Feels Like a Dysfunctional Family?

At one point or another, most Christians will feel let down by their church family. They may be hurt, disappointed, or confused about situations that happen. Sometimes, churches can be dysfunctional. One's church may not seem much like a family at all. The reason churches face these issues is because people are sinful and broken, but God has given us wisdom on how to navigate difficult situations within the church family.

Scripture gives guidance on how these common problems can be solved.

Be open to one another

Ephesians 4:15 (NIV)

¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

When issues arise, Christians can speak the truth in love. What does speaking in love mean? It means bringing the issue out, not to hurt the other party but in gentleness, not judgementally, for the purpose is to restore the person back to the truth or to restore the relationship.

Forgive one another

Colossians 3:13 (ESV)

“Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive”.

Bearing with one another means, not to pick on every wrong the other people make but say, “That’s ok, or don’t worry” with the understanding that we are not perfect either. Let us create a space, an environment where people can feel safe to make mistakes to learn and grow.

If there is any hurt, forgive, because God has forgiven you. The enemy tries to divide the body of Christ, but with forgiveness and love, Christians can begin to feel like a family and get rid of any dysfunction within.

Like any family we must learn to say “sorry” and, “that’s ok”.

Since we have hurt someone, we need to admit our wrongs because the feeling of their hurt need to be acknowledged. Our sincere and open-hearted apology should show that we are determined it will not happen again. Also, the people who opened their heart acknowledging their wrongs by saying “sorry”, well, they too want to be accepted. Then the healing between the two can start.

Encourage one another

1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV)

¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

To create a healthy church family, believers are to encourage each other, build each other up and not tear each other down, and be there for each other, similar to what should happen in a family. Scripture gives helpful direction on how to treat fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

2 Corinthians 13:11 (ESV)

“Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you”.

Ultimately, when a church family does not feel quite like a family, or is struggling through difficult circumstances and seasons, Christians can aim for restoration among themselves. Believers can seek peace with each other through the power of the Holy Spirit. Through prayer, loving steps of reconciliation, and God’s help, a church family can find their way to healthy functioning and peace.

How Can I Help My Church Body Feel More Like a Family?

When it comes to helping a congregation feel more like a family, we can look to the command that Jesus gave as an important foundation, which is to love one another just as Jesus loves.

John 13:34-35 (NIV)

³⁴ “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

In the Old Testament we are to love others as we love ourselves. Jesus also mentioned this commandment. People may say, “I don’t know how to love, because I don’t know how to love myself.” Now your standard is not yourself but how Jesus loves you by sacrificing His life for you. This is the standard of love we should have for one another.

With love for one another comes mutual respect, giving one another the benefit of the doubt, trust, and seeing one another as God sees us. The power of love binds the body of Christ together.

A church family will feel more like a church family when they keep God at the centre of it all. Christians are to help one another love better and to do good works for the kingdom of God.

Galatians 6:10 (NIV)

¹⁰Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

As family we can ask, what can I do to help make this place a better place? What responsibility do I have? What can I contribute when my church family is in need? What can I do to please God, to extend his kingdom?

When those values are kept at the centre, the church family will feel closer to each other as we would all be on a mission for the extension of God's kingdom.

A wonderful advantage of being a Christian is that we get to be part of a church family when we commit to a congregation. The body of Christ is there to show love, compassion, and support to one another through the ups and downs of life. Together, we can encourage righteousness, love, and the furtherance of God's kingdom as a church family.

This principle can apply to your own family as well.

Happy Father's Day!!