

Family

Today is family Sunday, and it's great to have families together in here for the service. I want to talk about families this morning. But before I do, I want to hear a little bit from you.

Have you ever thought about how you could describe a family to somebody who didn't know what one was?

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Imagine that somebody from outer space came here to church this afternoon, and they were from a planet that didn't have families. If they asked you, "What is a family?" what would you say?

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What is a family?

Generally live together
Parents and kids
Love each other
Parents take care of the kids
Brothers and sisters

Different families like different things.

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Some like to go on bike rides together, some like to play games, some like to go hiking or just eat together. What are your favorite things to do as a family (besides go to church)?

Let's go back to our space alien friend for a minute.

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Suppose he really liked what you told him, and he then asked you, how do you get into a family?

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What would you tell him? Do you have to take a test? Be really talented? Be super strong or smart?

How do you get into a family?

I think there are only really two ways to get into a family. First you can be born into it.

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You didn't even know when you joined your family. You were just a baby. You didn't have to do anything did you? You're part of a family from the moment you're born.

That's one way. But some babies are born into families that can't take care of them for some reason. When that happens, there's a way for them to get into another family. Do you know what that's called? Adoption. That's when a mom and dad hear about a baby being born in a family that can't provide for it, and they say, "if your family can't take care of you, come be in ours. We love you so much we want to take care of you."

A couple weeks ago, a family came to visit us that had 4 kids that were born into their family and 4 kids they adopted. The mom and dad love all of them the same and they're one big family. Whether you're born into a family or adopted into a family, the deal is the same. You didn't have to do a thing to get in it. It's just that your parents love you and want you in your family. That's a pretty good deal isn't it? Best of all, once you're in a family, you're in it for good. All your life, that will be your family.

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There are sure a lot of great things that come out of being in a family. Can you think of some of them?

You get a place to live, you get food to eat, clothes, toys, you get people to love you, if you have brothers or sisters you have built in friends. You also have responsibilities, don't you? Mom and dad expect you to get along, to clean your room, do your chores. There are jobs that are part of being a family. That's part of what helps you learn so some day you can have a family of your own.

Well what I want to talk about this morning is a different kind of family. Have you ever heard anybody talk about God's family? Did you know he has children and that he loves them?

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Now, as I'm talking, I'm going to mention several words that start with the letter P. Every time I'm about to mention one, this letter P will flash up. What I want you to do is

see if you can count how many times you catch it doing that. Whoever counts the right number will get a prize at the end.

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Just so you can see how this will work, we'll do a quick test. Ready?

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Keep your eye open for it. The counting starts now, so keep track of any time you see it from this point on.

Let's all say the verse together that we memorized earlier:

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I John 3:1

What marvelous love the Father has extended to us! Just look at it – we're called children of God. That's who we really are.

Wow. We can be God's children. God can be our Father. That's pretty amazing. It's a different kind of family than the one that lives in your house, but many things about it are the same.

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First, how do you get into God's family? Any ideas?

Do you get into it by going to church? Learning all your Bible verses? Being good at home?

God says it's just like your regular family. You have to be born into it.

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One time when Jesus was on earth, a man named Nicodemus came to see him at night. He wanted to learn more about Jesus but he didn't want his friends to know, so he snuck over after dark. He wanted to know how to be in God's family, part of God's kingdom.

Jesus told him, nobody gets into the kingdom unless they're born again. You have to be born all over again to enter God's family.

That didn't make any sense to Nicodemus. I like this painting because it really shows how Nicodemus wasn't too sure about what Jesus was saying. He said, "How can I be born when I'm old? I can't become a baby again can I?"

But Jesus wasn't talking about being born with your body. He was talking about our hearts inside, called our spirit.

You see, when we start out in life, the way we are on the inside isn't right with God. That's because God never does anything wrong, but we make wrong choices all the time. We think bad thoughts. We do bad things. We choose to do things God doesn't want us to. Everybody starts out that way. And as hard as we try, we can't change that. Nobody is good enough on their own to be able to live with a perfect God forever. And the punishment for all the bad inside us is that someday we die and our lives end. But God made us and loves us and wanted to fix the problem for us. So he sent Jesus, who came and lived a perfect human life. Even though he was perfect he died, because he took the punishment for us. Then, he came back to life, because he battled with death and he won. He made it so death doesn't get the last word for us either. And when we accept what God has done for us through Jesus, that's what the Bible calls being born as a new kind of baby into God's family.

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John 1:12-13

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

The Bible also says that accepting Jesus is also like being adopted.

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Ephesians 1:4

Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ.

Even though we weren't originally in God's perfect family, he loved us enough to want to adopt us. He planned it from long before we were born. Isn't that great? We can become God's children just by believing in Jesus. We can be born and adopted into God's family. Sometimes people call it asking Jesus into your heart. If you've never done that before, all it means is praying a prayer something like this:

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Dear God,

I want to become part of your family. I believe Jesus died for my sins to make me your child. Please forgive me and come into my life. In Jesus' name, Amen

When you pray a prayer like that and mean it in your heart, you become part of God's family. That's what it means to be a Christian. In this family, we are all children. Did you know that? Even the adults. We're all brothers and sisters with the same Father.

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And there are all kinds of great things about having God for our Father.

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First, we have a place to call home home. We haven't seen it yet, but it's our real home, because it's a permanent place to stay. Our houses here on earth will eventually get old and worn out. But our real home is with God, and we'll be able to live there forever.

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John 14:2-4

Trust me. There is plenty of room for you in my Father's home. If that weren't so, would I have told you that I'm on my way to get a room ready for you. And if I'm on my way to get your room ready, I'll come back and get you so you can live where I live.

That's so great because it means that we don't have to be afraid of dying someday when we get old. Because if we're in God's family, then after we die, we have a home that we'll go to. Our life won't be ending – it will be just beginning.

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But being in God's family isn't just about getting to go to heaven. There's plenty of good stuff about it that we get here and now.

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For one thing, we can know that God always provides for his children. What are provisions? We will always have everything we need.

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Philippians 4:19

You can be sure that God will take care of everything you need, his generosity exceeding even yours in the glory that pours from Jesus.

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Psalm 37:25

*I was young and now I am old,
yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken
or their children begging bread.*

God won't abandon us at all. He will always be there to give us what we need. And if we have a need, all we have to do is ask him and we can trust that he will supply us.

It doesn't say we'll get everything we want, but he will always give us what we need and what is best for us in the long run.

Besides providing for us, God does something else.

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Look at this spaceship. What can you tell me about it?

God is like our force field.

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The Bible calls him our shield, because he guards us from evil. He gives us protection.

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We don't need to be afraid of life when the God of the whole universe is looking out for us. What kinds of things does God protect us from?

He can protect us from being afraid. He can protect us from evil things in the world. Once you're in God's family, he stays with you forever.

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Have you ever seen the president walking or driving someplace? Anywhere he goes, there are always secret service agents around him. They surround him, protecting him

from all sides and any possible attack. The Bible says that God surrounds his people like that.

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Ps 125:2

*As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
so the LORD surrounds his people
both now and forevermore.*

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God's protection comes in many different forms. Sometimes, dads have to protect their kids from doing things that could hurt themselves. God does the same thing. Sometimes he steps in and won't let us do something because he knows that if we did, we would get ourselves in trouble.

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When God is your Father, that also means you have a direct **personal relationship** to him.

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To get God's attention, you don't have to go through a pastor or a teacher or your parents. You can talk to him directly, anywhere, anytime.

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Ephesians 2:18

For through him we...have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Remember how we talked about being born again in our spirit? When that happens, God puts his very own Spirit in our hearts, who makes it possible to talk to God directly all the time. We don't need cell phones or walkie talkies. We don't even have to say anything out loud. We can think prayers to God and he hears us all the time.

So the Bible says that when God is our Father, we can act like we know him, even though he's a powerful king.

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Hebrews 4:16

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

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I have an office at home, and a lot of times when I'm working, Annika likes to come in and get my attention. Now, if I always locked my office door and never answered her when she tried to talk to me, I wouldn't be a very good dad, would I? God is a good Father, and he always makes time for his children to talk to him. He's never too busy.

Do you ever talk to God at school? What are some things you can talk to him about?

It's one of the best things about being in God's family. We have a personal relationship with him.

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Now when we're in God's family, that means we have brothers and sisters. We don't just get a relationship with God – we get relationships with other people, too. We have **people who care about us.**

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That's an awesome thing. You never have to feel alone in the world again.

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Psalm 68:6

God sets the lonely in families.

He gives us people to care for us, people who will help us get through the hard times in life and celebrate the good times with us. That's part of what you do as a family. You look out for each other.

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When I was in third grade, my sister and I were riding the bus to school one day. My sister was older than me – she was in sixth grade.

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There was this other sixth grade girl on the bus named Denise who started picking on me.

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She was pretty tough for a girl, and I didn't really know what to do.

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My sister saw the whole thing, and she wasn't happy about it.

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The next thing I knew, she went over to Denise

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and punched her and gave her a black eye.

Now that wasn't a very nice thing for my sister to do, but the point is, when you're in a family, you have people looking out for you, and you look out for other people in your family. I was sure glad my sister was sticking up for me, because Denise never bothered me again after that.

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I John 3:17

If you see some brother or sister in need and have the means to do something about it but turn a cold shoulder and do nothing, what happens to God's love? It disappears.

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So God's family gives us a place to call home, provisions we need, protection from evil, personal relationship to God, people who care.

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And the last thing I want you to remember about God's family is that he gives us a **purpose for living**.

Have you ever watched Arthur or read the Arthur books?

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One time D.W. ran away from home. She tried to get her Grandma to take her to live on an island. But then her Grandma reminded her that if she was gone, baby Kate wouldn't have a big sister.

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Suddenly D.W. remembered that she had a purpose in life. She had a job in her family to do. So she went back home.

In any family, one of the most important things you can do is love each other, and God's family is no different. With all the great things we can enjoy in this family, God expects us to love him and other people in return. That's part of our purpose.

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1 John 3:11-12

This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.

How do you show people in your family that you love them?

You do nice things for them, you help them when they're in trouble. If they're your parents, you listen to what they say.

With God as our Father, one way we can show that we love him is by listening to what he says and obeying him. And we can show that we love each other by paying attention to how people are doing and feeling and helping them any way we can.

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That's it. How many flashing Ps did you see?

Can anyone list the words?

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Being in God's family is a great thing, whether you're a kid or a grown up. I'm going to put that prayer back up on the screen one more time. Take a look at it again.

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