



Don't Waste Your Family

Text: Ephesians 3:14-21

Bible Teacher Ben Stuart

1. God has given us roles in our lives in which to live out our discipleship. How we do that is an indicator of our relationship with Him. What roles has God given you? Which role do you think you steward well? Which role do you struggle to steward?
2. God purposely places us in our families. It's not an accident you are in the family you are in whether that's biological or through adoption. Share with the group a little about your family.
 - a. What ways can you think of to honor them or thank them?
 - b. What is hard about your family or feels dysfunctional?
 - c. How have you seen God use you in your family?
 - d. Are there healthy boundaries that you set with your family to see it flourish? (see Postscript for more of this conversation)
 - e. Where might He be asking you to be a compassionate agent of grace in your family?
3. Read 1 Timothy 5:1-8
 - a. What is the importance of these first two verses about how to treat other people in the gospel community?
 - b. What two things are said of one who will not provide for his own family? (why/how verse 8)
 - c. In our small groups/community there are many widows, single moms and dads, elderly without family. How can you honor these commands not only within your own family, but within the body of Christ? (See Postscript for more of this conversation)
4. Read Ephesians 3:14-21.
 - a. In Paul's day people usually stood to pray. Note in verse 14 how Paul prays – "I kneel before the Father" or "I bow my knees". (See Ezra 9:3-5 and Matthew 26:39) What does Paul's position praying indicate about how Paul feels or Paul's attitude during this prayer?
 - b. In verse 15 - from whom do all God's family on earth and in heaven get their name? What does it mean to be called by someone's name? What does it mean to be called by God's name?
 - c. In verse 16 – what does Paul request that God the Father do for the readers? Through whom will he do this? Out of what resources? In what part of the person?

- d. In verse 17- the condition for this further request of Paul is that his readers are “rooted” and “established” or “grounded” in love. These are metaphors used to describe a Christian. (See 1 Corinthians 3:6 and Colossians 2:6 &7). Read also Psalm 1. What is the picture here?
- e. In verse 18 - whose love are we to grasp?
- f. In verse 19 what else are we to do with His love? Why?
- g. In verse 19 - the end result is that we “may be filled with all the fullness of God”. Read Ephesians 1:23, 4:13 and Colossians 1:19, 2:9-10 and John 1:16. Describe “the fullness of God”.
- h. According to verses 20 and 21, what is God able to do? What are we unable to do? According to what does God do this? In whom?

Challenge: What are you asking God to do within your own family? Within the families in your small group? He can do immeasurably more than we even think to ask! Spend some time intentionally praying for your family and the families represented in your group.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You that You care for all of Your creation and all of Your children – but Lord, there are so many areas in our home and family life that need You.

Father I know that we have all made mistakes—I know that have made mistakes and ask Your forgiveness, and we have all made some foolish choices, but Father I know that You are in the business of restoring those that are hurting and mending those that are broken—and I pray that You would heal any wounds that we may have from our families. Heal any wounds we may have caused ourselves.

Lord we ask that you would give us the grace and love that we need to meet our family in broken places, encourage one another, honor one another even when it’s hard.

Lord I come to You for guidance and help to restore our family’s relationships, renew our love for each other and may the respect that we showed one to the other return. May we all look to You to lead and guide us as we move forward in our relationship with each other and with You, I ask this in Jesus name.

STUDY DEEPER

Jesus Also Had Unbelieving Family Members

Do you, like me, have family members who do not believe in Jesus? If so, we are in good company. So did Jesus. And I think this is meant to give us hope.

According to the Apostle John, “not even his brothers believed in him” (John 7:5). That’s incredible. Those who had lived with Jesus for 30 years really did not know him. Not one of Jesus’ brothers is mentioned as a disciple during his pre-crucifixion ministry. But after his resurrection and ascension, there they are in the upper room worshiping him as God (Acts 1:14).

Why didn’t they believe? And what made them change?

The Bible doesn’t answer the first question. But I’ll bet it was difficult to have Jesus for a brother.

First, Jesus would have been without peer in intellect and wisdom. He was astounding temple rabbis by age 12 (Luke 2:42, 47). A sinful, fallen, gifted sibling can be a hard act to follow. Imagine a perfect, gifted sibling.

Second, Jesus’ consistent and extraordinary moral character must have made him odd and unnerving to be around. His siblings would have grown increasingly self-conscious around him, aware of their own sinful, self-obsessed motives and behavior, while noting that Jesus didn’t seem to exhibit any himself. For sinners, that could be hard to live with.

Third, Jesus was deeply and uniquely loved by Mary and Joseph. How could they not have treated him differently? They knew he was the Lord. Imagine their extraordinary trust in and deference to Jesus as he grew older. No doubt the siblings would have perceived a dimension to the relationship between the oldest child and their parents that was different from what they experienced.

And when swapping family stories it would have been hard to match a star appearing at your brother’s birth.

Jesus out-classed his siblings in every category. How could anyone with an active sin nature not resent being eclipsed by such a phenom-brother? Familiarity breeds contempt when pride rules the heart.

More pain than we know must have been behind Jesus’ words, “a prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household” (Matthew 13:57).

So as we assess the role our weak, stumbling witness plays in our family members’ unbelief, let’s remember Jesus – not even a perfect witness guarantees that loved ones will see and embrace the gospel. We must humble ourselves and repent when we sin. But let’s remember that the god of this world and indwelling sin is what blinds the minds of unbelievers (2 Corinthians 4:4).

The story of Jesus' brothers can actually give us hope for our loved ones. At the time his brothers claimed that Jesus was "out of his mind" (Mark 3:21), it must have appeared very unlikely that they would ever become his disciples. But eventually they did! And not only followers, but leaders and martyrs in the early church.

The God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," shone in their hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of their brother, Jesus (2 Corinthians 4:6).

So take heart! Don't give up praying for unbelieving family members. Don't take their resistance as the final word. They may yet believe, and be used significantly in the kingdom!

And while they resist, or if they have died apparently unbelieving, we can trust them to the Judge of all the earth who will be perfectly just (Genesis 18:25). Jesus does not promise that every parent, sibling, or child of a Christian will believe, but does painfully promise that some families will divide over him (Matthew 10:34-39). We can trust him when it happens.

It is moving to hear James refer to his brother as "our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory" (James 2:1). Can you imagine what this phrase meant for James? The Lord of glory had once slept beside him, ate at his dinner table, played with his friends, spoke to him like a brother, endured his unbelief, paid the debt of his sin, and then brought him to faith.

It may have taken 20-30 years of faithful, prayerful witness by the Son of God, but the miracle occurred: his brothers believed. May the Lord of glory grant the same grace to our beloved unbelievers.

<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/jesus-also-had-unbelieving-family-members>