

Where you belong - the church as God's Forever Family

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[0:00] And some thoughts today about God's family, the family of God. We're not the children of God cult, but we are God's children, as it tells us, that we can be God's children by faith. And some thoughts about that today.

In fact, I just saw a meme on social media that I wanted to quote this morning, which captures really what I wanted to say. And it goes like this, church is not something you go to, it's a family you belong to.

Is that right? I thought there's a lot of truth to that. And I wanted to just start off with a scripture, Hebrews 13, verse 1. Hebrews 13, verse 1. I know not everyone's got a Bible to look it up, but it says this.

And it's a really easy memory verse for you that love memory verses. Four words. So I'm sure we can all remember this one. Let brotherly love continue. Let brotherly love continue.

Hebrews 13, verse 1. Shall we say that together? Let brotherly love continue. Hebrews 13, verse 1. And again, let brotherly love continue.

[1:02] Hebrews 13, verse 1. So along that theme today, God wants us to love each other. Amen. Sometimes it's a challenge, isn't it? But we're meant to love one another like brothers and sisters do.

And sometimes brothers and sisters don't always love each other, but it's like brothers and sisters are meant to, isn't it? To love one another. And so along that theme today, that fellowship is about that kind of family sentiment, about sharing.

And it's about relationships, isn't it? Like brothers and sisters, building those relationships. How can we build it? And I kind of had the hope that we could engender more of that and just have enjoyment and have joy together in fellowship and as like a family of God because that's what we are.

And really when we think about love in the Bible, it's a selfless, intentional love, isn't it? That we go beyond our own reach. You know, we go beyond our own limits.

That we should love one another so. And building that kind of love as well. And it's a bond, isn't it? It's a closeness, that relationship, like you have for your own kinfolk.

[2:09] And we can have that as God's kinfolk, if you like, can't we? That sense of belonging. And what are some of the building blocks that make families work? The Bible tells us about a number of one another's, one another's.

So just some thoughts on those one another's briefly today. And the first one I wanted to put to you is love one another. And that's John 13, 34, which reads, A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

Love one another as I have loved you. Sometimes we gloss over that, but that's pretty serious love, isn't it? To think that the love that Jesus loved us with is the same love we should love one another with.

And there's a whole lot right there in just that verse. And we think about God's family. It's meant to be knit together, isn't it? In love, close knit. I know Julie's done a bit of knitting while she's been here.

But we think about love as that knitting, it's that glue that holds us together as a church family. And brotherly love can be a powerful testimony of itself, can't it? How can we better love one another?

[3:21] How can we be better at that? How can we know that godly spirit that God wants us to have to so love one another, that bond of love? What does it look like? Love one another.

We could think a whole lot more about that, couldn't we? Unpack that in our own mind. Another one another is serve one another. And it says in Galatians 5.13, in part, it says, by love, serve one

another.

By love, serve one another. Now, there's a lot of people been serving behind the scenes, just getting on with it, just now sweeping the floors, tidying up, packing up, preparing food for all of us to enjoy in this camp together.

And we think about serving one another. How can we serve one another? How can we make the church work, function better? What does that look like? We can think of the servant-hearted love of our Lord, can't we?

In John 13, how he demonstrated love by taking the towel and washing dirty feet. But that's the kind of love that we should have for one another, that we should serve one another.

[4 : 22] By love, serve one another. And you can see that in John 13, as you see the account of our Lord, how he stooped down, he took the towel, and he showed such service, such love.

And we think about families. Families work together, don't they? We're meant to work together, to function together, to operate. And we all have different roles, different ways we can serve, different ways that we fit together.

We've all got something to bring. And when we think about families, we should look out for one another, shouldn't we? We should look out. When someone's got a need, Colossians 3 verse 12 talks about compassion, that compassion, the bowels, as it were, literally bowels, and you get moved on the innards.

And we should have that kind of thought for one another, that we're moved, we've got a compassion, and we serve one another. And serving is about putting others first, isn't it?

And God commends humility, humility. Think about serving one another. It's something we should do willingly, not that we're forced to, not that we're doing it out of obligation or duty.

[5 : 26] We're serving willingly, sacrificially. And you think in the home setting, and I'm probably not the best example of this, wash the dishes, help out, care, you know, show some consideration, isn't it?

Do we do that? Consider the needs of one another. That's what we should be like more as a church, shouldn't we too? We could do more. We could do better. Consider the needs of one another above your own needs.

We think of Philippians 2 verse 4. It tells us, look, not every man on his own things, but every man on the things of others, the things of others. Think about family.

Family's about sharing, caring. We've got a duty of care, really, to each other, haven't we? And I know there's a hymn that goes like this. It talks about others, others.

And it really is very poignant sort of thoughts when we think sometimes it's easy to get self-centered and preoccupied with our own needs and what we want as our own person instead of thinking wider about other people.

[6 : 29] And here's how it goes. It's a very telling poem, a hymn, and it's called Others. And apparently, William Booth used it when he expressed, you know, what he wanted to say.

He just used the one word, Others. Others. Others. Lord, help me to live from day to day in such a self-forgetful way that even when I kneel to pray, my prayer shall be for others.

Others, Lord, yes, others. Let this, my motto, be, help me to live for others that I may live like Thee. Help me in all the work I do to ever be sincere and true and know that all I'll do for you must needs be done for others.

Let self be crucified and slain and buried deep, nor rise again, and may all efforts be in vain unless they be for others.

So when my work on earth is done and my new work in heaven's begun, may I forget the crown I've won while thinking still of others.

[7 : 40] Others, Lord, yes, others. Let this, my motto, be, help me to live for others that I may live like Thee. It's so true, isn't it? We can be self-centered, self-occupied, but God's family is about others.

It's about loving one another, serving one another. It's about caring for one another, considering one another, consider the needs of others above our own. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

Another, another is praying for one another, pray for one another. And I was encouraged when I saw that someone had a need and someone just naturally went and prayed for that need and naturally went and prayed for that person.

Just did it so naturally and so considerately. I thought it was really touching and that was, that's what it's all about, isn't it? Pray for one another. That's what we should do and someone's got a need.

Our heart should be to pray. And we may not, you know, have even a vocal prayer, but we can pray for one another. We can have that heart to pray. Think about others. Pray for one another.

[8 : 48] In James 5, 16, it says, confess your faults one to another and pray one for another that you may be healed. The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

You think about that verse. Confess your faults one to another. I could tell you a few faults of mine, but I suppose it's being real, isn't it? Being human. We're just, we're just ordinary, everyday people. We've all got faults. You know, when we think about it, we probably think of more of our own faults than the faults of others, but when we think about it, it's being human, isn't it? That should be what families do to be human, to be real.

Don't be fake. Be honest. You know, confess your faults one to another, it says, and pray one for another. Let's be prayerful. Amen? Be a prayerful church.

And when we pray, sometimes we go to God with a shopping list of all our own needs, but rather let's think, well, what do my brothers and sisters need? Let me pray for that. Let me pray for them. And in praying for others, God will answer your need too.

[9 : 48] Another, one another, is forgive one another. Forgive one another. In Ephesians 4.32, it says, and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, have forgiven you.

Forgive one another. That's what helps families work, isn't it? When we see someone maybe hurt us or do the wrong thing, or even in a church family, we might not always see eye to eye, or there might be some difference.

We can forgive one another, even if we might feel like we've been hurt. Let's not hold hurts. Let's let it go. Forgive one another. That should be the heart of Christ, shouldn't it?

Put yourself in the other's shoes and be generous. Be selfless. Forgive one another. It goes on, really, in the same vein that we should forbear one another. Now, some people are good at helping me learn about forbearing one another.

I mean, can you identify with that? We're told to forbear one another. Forbear one another. In other words, sort of overlook their faults, all right? Overlook their ways. Try to be generous and kind-hearted and not to take it the wrong way, not to make a big deal about something.

[11 : 00] Some people test us more than others like sandpaper, don't they? We can actually, it's improving you, having people that make you forbear one another because it's making you more like Christ.

It's making you more generous and tender-hearted and kind-hearted. So forgive one another. That's another building block that makes families work, isn't it? You don't hold grudges, you just let it go.

Just don't carry the chip on the shoulder, you know, be mature and forgive, forgive one another. Another one is encourage one another, encourage one another.

Hebrews 3.13, it reads, but exhort one another daily while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Encourage one another.

In other words, exhort one another, encourage one another, same kind of thought. We're told to consider one another. How can we exhort, how can we encourage one another? Find some kind words to say, find some uplifting words to say, find some generous words to say, find some positive things to say.

[12 : 04] When you see someone who might be downhearted, give them a lift, give them an encouragement and be a part of that exhorting one another. And we're also told elsewhere, consider one another, consider one another.

Are we considerate that we actually think, well, it's not all about me and what I want or what I think. It's about considering one another. That's what families do, isn't it?

Or meant to do. Another thing is that we can encourage one another like a family does. And we've been doing that, I think, as we've had some joy together, haven't we?

Who's had some joy? I know I had some joy last night as we enjoyed a good laugh. You know, families laugh together. We're allowed to. We're allowed to actually have fun together as a church.

Not that we're all about fun like some churches where it's all, you know, empty, superficial, you know, empty, vain fun. But there's good godly fun, isn't there?

[13:04] We can have that enjoyment of one another's fellowship. And I think we can encourage one another like a family does. As mums and dads encourage the little ones and the little ones encourage one another and we can all be part of that strengthening.

We can play together. We've had a bit of playing together with the water balloons and all the other games and the board games. I know people are just enjoying some relaxed time. We can play together.

We can laugh together. We can enjoy fellowship. Fellowship isn't meant to be something morbid and unpleasant, but it's actually enjoying family time, isn't it?

Really. God's family time. And we all bring something when we come together. We get together and share. We're stronger together too. It helps us to grow our faith because we're growing together.

We're all learning together. Every one of us. Me too. We're all learning from each other. Exhort one another. And it says daily. We shouldn't just wait for Sunday or, you know, we can't wait for Sunday night. We just want to have that enjoying that time together.

[14:05] And so fellowship with one another. Fellowship with one another. 1 John 17, it says this, but if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.

And the blood of Jesus Christ, his son cleanseth us from all sin. So we think about fellowship. What does that look like? It's spending time with each other, isn't it? We can spend time with each other. And that needn't be just on a Sunday. Hopefully we can share some time outside of church time. It should flow naturally that we want to touch base with one another.

Maybe if we see someone not at church, we can try to make contact, reach out, encourage one another, fellowship with one another. And heaven is going to be full of people when we think about it, isn't it?

I like to think sometimes maybe that brother or sister I don't get on with so well, maybe they're going to be my next door neighbor in heaven. Now wouldn't that be something? You get to forbear with one another up there as well.

[15:08] You can think about it, couldn't you? How can we, if we're meant to be together forever, then we should start to get on with each other down here. So be together.

Church helps as we get together. And as God's family, we worship together, don't we? We sing together, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, teaching and admonishing one another. So there's an interplay even as we're singing together. And so it's about taking that time together, teaching and admonishing one another. It talks about making melody in your heart to the Lord. You know, there's some melody. Even the discordant voices are all part of that melody, aren't they? You know, the voices that might be not quite so in tune, they're still part of the melody because we're all a symphony, aren't we?

With different instruments, we've all got different parts to play and there's a sweet harmony, a sweet melody. Really, it's a symphony, isn't it? We think of it, the different instruments like we had the, I can't think of all the ones last night, but you were so in tune when Joel was leading the, I can't think of all the different instrument names, but you know, what a picture that is of the church, isn't it?

[16:17] Different instruments and all playing different notes and different parts of the song, yet all pulling it all together to make it, that's what church is, we're together as a family, like different instruments in a symphony.

And so, when we think about fellowship, fellowship with one another, take time, take time together, enjoy being a blessing to others. You know, when we finish the meeting in a few minutes, it's not the end of the fellowship, you can keep fellowshiping.

I kind of joke when we're chatting at church, well, you know, we've got to stop the fellowship now because we've got to start the meeting, you know, it's not about the meeting, is it? It's meeting with God and it's meeting with one another, but it's also the fellowship.

It's not about having a meeting per se. And another thing about families as the church family is that we grow together and fellowship builds that, doesn't it? Builds that cohesion, that connection, that we can get to know one another in such informal ways as we've had at the camp, there's even more so we can build that fellowship.

And as I say, there's an eternal dimension too. So we're not just brothers and sisters in the Lord in the here and now, but in the hereafter. It's forever. There's an eternal dimension.

[17 : 33] And the wonderful thing about when you think about it, the family of God, is that we're adopted. We don't all look like each other. Some of us are from different countries and different cultures. I mean, I'm a foreigner here.

I'm not really an Aussie. I sound like an Aussie, but I'm really a Pommy. So, you know, we all come from different cultures and backgrounds and might have different experiences, might have different complexions, different colors, different experiences.

experiences. We're all a bit of a cosmopolitan fun, aren't we? And those differences actually are complementary, aren't they? When you think about it, it's like a fabric with rich, different colors makes that fabric look so beautiful, the pattern of the tapestry.

And really, when you think about it, it's like heaven where it talks about we're from every kindred, tongue, tribe, and nation. And it's all a bad story, isn't it, that we come from so many different, even different language backgrounds.

For some, here today, English may not be your first language. And that's just all part of the wonderful fabric that the church family is. And that's what heaven's going to be like, that we're going to have all this cosmopolitan, multicultural, you know, multi-tribe, multi-tongue, multi-nation gathering.

[18 : 48] And it's like a foretaste of that eternal dimension, isn't it? Fellowship, fellowship with one another. And we think about it, though we're all different, God has brought us together. I like to think of it how, like in an adopted family, if you might be adopted, that you might not necessarily be of the same heritage, the same genealogy, but you're adopted in the sense that you're chosen to be a part of that as an adopted child.

That's what God does, isn't it? He adopts us into his family such that we're not born into it. You can't be born into church. You can't be born into God's family. You've got to actually be born again into it. And so that's, no, that's true for all of us. None of us were born into this. We had to come to our own faith, our own trust in Christ. And God has brought us together. That's the wonderful thing.

Just like an adopted family gets pulled together with might be children from multiple different families that they've come from and they've come into one family. That's what church is, isn't it?

That's what God's family is.

As we're brothers and sisters together. You know, if you can think about just the thought that we're brothers and sisters together, that's really precious, isn't it? I like how John 1, 12 says, but as many as received him, to them gave you the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.

[20 : 08] It says, as many as received him, those that they're the ones, the ones who've received him, he's given them the power to become the sons, the children of God. And the wonderful reality is that we can join the family of God.

If you're here today and you might think, well, I'm not sure that I am a Christian. Well, it's by simple trust. That's for all of us. That's how we all got admission into this family. You know, God's got the adoption papers here and basically, yeah, I want to be a part of this family.

I want God to be my father. I want to be God's child. I want to be God's son. I want to be God's daughter by faith. And as many as received him, to them gave you power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.

That's all it takes. All it takes is to say, yeah, I believe. I believe Jesus died on the cross for my sin and I trust him as my savior. And by faith, it says, bang, that happens, that you're instantly made his daughter, his son by faith.

And that can be true for you. You can join the family of God right here, right now by faith. I hope that we leave this place with a renewed sense of the family of God, brothers and sisters, that renewed sense of fellowship, what it means, what it's all about, that greater appreciation of each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, as the children of God together, as God's family.

[21 : 35] We think, as I'll just quickly recap, what does it say? It says that we should love one another, love one another. It says we should serve one another, pray for one another, forgive one another, forbear one another, encourage one another, consider one another, fellowship one with another, join the family of God by faith.

And let's encourage that thought as we might later fellowship. And the fellowship doesn't stop when the meeting finishes. The fellowship is ongoing, isn't it?

You can fellowship every day and through the day and build your faith and fellowship does that. That's why church matters. That's why it's important that we do fellowship because when we miss it, the family gets fractured.

It's not the same if we're not together. So staying together is really precious. And so I encourage you that way. Lord, we thank you for the family of God that by faith we can be saved, that you died on the cross for our sin.

You rose again. Lord, you made us your child by faith. Pray that we might receive one another, honour one another, love one another. Thank you for those brothers and sisters in faith, that we would be those children of God, that we'd be a son, a daughter of the living God.

[22 : 59] And we know, Lord, that such a step is not something really we deserve. We don't really deserve your grace and love.

Yet you give us by faith such a blessing, such a privilege. Help us to treasure such a thing that we'd learn how to be a closer-knit family of God, that we'd be knit together in love.

Help us, Lord, to appreciate each other and to grow our faith together. And help us to invite others to come and join this family of God, that they too can be adopted and they can become our brother and sister.

Lord, we thank you for these things. We pray our fellowship would continue, Lord, that you would be glorified in us, that we would truly bring you the glory and honour. Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God, the sons of God.

Lord, we thank you for that, the great promises of your word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Thank you.