

Gospel Shaped Families

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[0 : 00] All right, today is our final day in the Gospel-Shaped Family series. My voice is a little bit croaky as well, so please bear with me as I speak.

Right. He's got us a chance to take a seat. So far in the series, we looked at relationships and how we're actually created for relationship.

We're created by an eternally relational God, Father, Son and Spirit, yet one God. And we're created for relationship with each other, a relationship that is expressed toward God as worship and toward each other as fellowship.

We've then looked at some of the different dimensions that relationships can take in terms of between us and our church families, so husbands, wives, parents and children, and singles, in terms of how that works in our relationships within the church family.

And today we're bringing it all back together again, looking at Gospel-Shaped Family. And as we do that, there's a bit of a surprise to it in a sense. And I hope you appreciate that that surprise is there for a very good reason, and actually it helps us to pursue the relationship that God intended for us to pursue and not just our own.

[1 : 20] Now, earlier this winter, I like buying stuff online. It's cheaper, right? Earlier this winter, I ordered a jumper online.

It was actually supposed to be a dark red hoodie, a zip hoodie. You know what those are, yeah? A dark red zip hoodie was what I ordered. And this is what I got. Okay.

That picture, if you have a look on the screen, that picture is a picture of Frankenstein's monster, nothing like what I ordered. This is not a large.

It is not the same colour I ordered. It has no hood, no zip, no bearing or similarity to the thing that I ordered.

And this is the first time I've worn it. It's still got the tags on. If you want it, it's yours after the service. But the really interesting thing about this is, this issue of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein.

[2 : 22] You see, Frankenstein was a scientist who decided that what he would do was, through a process of chemistry and alchemy is how it's described, it's kind of vague in the book. But this issue of, this thing of alchemy is actually where you, so I'm not dissing scientists, that's Dave's job.

What I'm saying is that this person, Frankenstein, as a scientist, was actually trying to purify or perfect humanity.

So in a lab, he assembled a person with the goal of actually making the perfect person. The result was a monster that even he as its creator could not love.

The result was a monster who could only respond to how he was treated and paid back in even more, greater extent.

So when his creator rejected him, he responded with incredible anger and revenge, vengefulness. One of the really interesting things about the Enlightenment movement is this tendency in us to want to actually create our version of humanity, a version of humanity that we actually think is better than any other version of humanity, including God's.

[3 : 39] But what I want to suggest to you is this. The version of humanity that you create is always destined to be the monster.

The version of humanity that God creates is beautiful, it's pure, it's inspiring. It's the only one really that we can set up and that we can set up as the thing to pursue.

What are we, according to God? We are beloved children. Whatever we think of ourselves, good or bad.

Good or bad, we are God's beloved children. Beloved is an old word. It means dearly loved or much loved.

We are God's family. Now there's three key points in Ephesians where Paul applies this family imagery in chapter 1, chapter 3 and chapter 5.

[4 : 43] And we'll look at those as we go through. But each time he applies it, he's not talking about our families or families as we like to think of it. The families that we construct.

He is talking about God's family. In his mind, this is the first family. This is the perfect family, the main family.

Our families, as we express them, are derivative. They depend on God for meaning, significance and shape. And we see this in terms of how it unfolds.

We see the Father, the Father loving. The Father loved us, we see in the book of Ephesians. He loved us by sending the Son. His beloved Son.

Not the one that he could spare. We all have kids in our families that like that, don't we? Not the one that he could spare. But the one that it tore his heart out to send. Our Father is the giver of good things.

[5 : 49] He delights in calling us his own precious children. In Ephesians 1, we discover that he set his heart on us to love us before he even created us.

Our Father is also where the concept of fatherhood comes from. And in chapter 3, in verse 14 and the following, he is the Father from whom all fatherhood everywhere is named.

And whatever good you've experienced in your earthly father, that's a reflection, just a reflection, a power reflection too, of your heavenly father.

Now some of us, I'll acknowledge this now, some of us will experience little or no good from our earthly father. But consider this. The fact that those experiences hurt so much points to something that's wrong, something gone wrong, which means that there is something right, a right expression, something way better in fact, and that better is our heavenly father.

Now I can look at my own father's attempts to raise me, and you can probably judge from my behaviour how he did, but I can look at my father's story and I can tell you now, it is one of success and failure.

[7 : 10] There are many things that I look to my father and I'm just so grateful for. And there are a number of things that I'm not grateful at all for. Now I know I'm not just having a shot at my dad, because I can actually see that same pattern in myself as I parent my kids.

There are many things that I just praise God that he's actually shone through me, despite me in a sense, in terms of how I've tried to parent my kids. But there are a number of things that if I could have a do-over on, I would love to have that opportunity.

I'm supposed to be that safe space for my children, the nurturing person in the family, the protective person in the family.

But the reality, the only person that can be that for my family is my heavenly father. He is that safe space. He is the one who knows us better than we know ourselves.

He is the one who has held back nothing in his love for us. He is that one from whom before time began, has been longing to draw us to himself.

[8 : 16] That's our heavenly father. So father, and our son, the son, God the son, God the father has been loving and desiring to draw us to himself.

God the son came to us in an act of love, saved us, rescued us. Jesus loved us by sacrificing himself to rescue us.

We see that in verse two. It's not just a generic version of love that Paul puts out there. Oh, just be, you know, just love each other. Try and, you know, nurture and harness that, that mushy feeling. he actually talks about love as self-sacrifice. This is the ultimate act of love. It's an extreme image too. I mean, when you become a sacrifice and you think about the way that they actually approach sacrifice, it wasn't just in a, like a hypothetical or a theoretical or a, a cognitive sense.

It was actually in a very practical sense. The sacrifices, well, let's just say, if you became a sacrifice, it wasn't something you walked away from. Well, this kind of love, this sacrificial kind of love is a humbling love.

[9 : 33] Jesus laid aside everything that he was to become the thing that he created. He had rights. He had power.

And he let them go for our sake, just laid them aside for our sake. And we didn't even deserve it. We were the sinners, the rebels, suspicious of God's goodness.

Our hearts were darkened. And Jesus became our rescuer, our redeemer. Now, we didn't dodge a bullet, and it was the executioner's bullet.

We didn't dodge a bullet when we became Christians. Jesus stepped in the way of the bullet for us. Jesus' rescue was costly.

It hurt. But its goal was our rescue, and that's something that God delights in. Our redemption was an act of love, grace, will, God's pleasure, his desire to forgive us.

[10:38] And it was all of these things, because it accomplished our adoption as his children. And that is something that God eternally delights in. So the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, as the Father loves, and as the Son loves by saving us, the Spirit loves us, it embraces us by connecting us to God, the Father, Son, and Spirit.

Can I ask you, which person of the Trinity do you actually relate to most? If you were to think about it, who do you pray to? Who do you think about most? Do you relate your faith in God to most? Who do you think about when you think about God? Well, whoever it is, we need to remember this truth. The Spirit is the one who connects us to God.

He's the one who joins us to God. In Ephesians 1, verses 13 and 14, we read that the Spirit is the deposit guaranteeing our inheritance. Now, a deposit is the first payment.

Not just a, you know, a token amount. It's the first payment. So what we're receiving is the first part of what we will get in full when Jesus returns.

[11:57] We're getting that first payment in the Spirit. He is God with us. He provides a security in our relationship to God.

In fact, it's a pretty one-sided relationship in that sense. And I'm sure you know what one-sided relationships are. The nature of how we relate to each other.

I can remember the first year of marriage, which I thought, you know, everyone tells you the first year of marriage is so hard and I thought it was great. I thought it was wonderful. I was having a chat with some friends about how wonderful the first year of marriage was and they were newly, we'd been married for about 10 years and they were newlyweds.

They'd just completed their first year of marriage and yeah, and you know, my mate's going, yeah, it was great. The first year of marriage was great. And I can see looking at his wife thinking, wow, she doesn't look like it was quite so great.

But before, but before we got to that, I actually saw the look on my own wife's face and discover, well, okay, she has a different view to me. I'm there saying, wow, you know, first year of marriage was great and Joe said, it wasn't for me.

[12:59] That's one-sided. Things were great for me because I was taking and she was doing all the giving. We know what it's like to be in a one-sided relationship and that's just in an earthly sense.

In the sense that we're talking about here where God actually has to rescue us from ourselves at the cost of his beloved son, we're talking about an infinitely one-sided relationship.

Perhaps during the series you've been drawn to thinking through your relationships in terms of how one-sided they are. Perhaps you've been thinking, wow, you know, as husbands have been listening to us talk about wives and wives have been listening to us talk about husbands and each of you have been thinking, wow, he's not delivering or she's not delivering or kids and parents, you know, our parents aren't delivering.

Think about this. The relationship that you have with God as his beloved child is entirely one-sided. In Ephesians 3, verses 14 to 19, we discover there that the spirit actually provides the strength we need to know God.

That's really interesting. The spirit provides the power behind our faith. He provides us with the ability to understand, to maintain our faith.

[14:24] He provides real experience of God's love, we discover in those verses. Now, in Galatians 4, 6, which we preached on Galatians earlier this year, and Romans 8, 15, we discover that the spirit actually teaches our spirits to cry, Abba, Father.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. He is connecting us to God relationally, deeply. And in Ephesians 5, 18 to 21, in this passage we've just had read out, Paul urges us to get drunk on the spirit.

That's what he's saying. Do not get drunk on wine, but be filled with the spirit. The spirit turns our hearts from wanting more in life to overflowing with thanksgiving to our heavenly Father for all that

we have in Christ.

the spirit teaches us what it actually means to submit to one another. Apart from the spirit that would just be not just a scary thing but just totally unnecessary thing in life.

The spirit connects us to God personally, relationally, cognitively, and emotionally. Our triune God, three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, yet one God.

[15 : 43] And his family is the family that Paul sees as a source of all other family. His family is the one that we've been invited into for the rest of eternity.

What you are, beloved children of God. What you become is imitators of God. When we enter his family, we become his children.

This is our identity. God is our protector. He's our provider. He's the one who actually raises us and transforms us. And as he loves us without condition or restraint, we need to understand the basis of that.

He loves us without condition or restraint because he sees us as having the righteousness of Christ. And children, even adoptive children, take on the characteristics of the fathers that raise them.

Now, when I was working as a physio, I had a patient recovering from a broken leg. Now, he came in one day. I told my small group this last week. But he came in one day and this particular day he was bringing his son in with him.

[16 : 59] He didn't have someone to look after him. He was a three or four year old kid. And so they walked into the waiting room and he hobbled in with his crutches as he usually did. and his son, his three or four year old son, walked alongside him and imitated the limp of his father.

This little three year old, three, four year old kid limping into the waiting room as well. Now, I asked him, is your child alright? Has your child been injured or something? And he said, oh no, no, no. He just likes to copy me. That's the nature of parenthood, isn't it? That there's this bond between a parent and a child. There's a very strong bond between the father and the son.

That bond is such that we want to imitate our father. We just want to be like him. Children imitate their father.

Our fathers have a powerful influence in their household, and you can look up the research for that later if you like. We're just discovering more and more the truth of the pattern that God set up for us. Our earthly experience of this can be inspiring, as I've said, or it can be painful.

[18 : 12] But our experience of God as our father is always inspiring. We don't obey because we have to. And please don't get me wrong here.

I'm not questioning the authority of God and his right to command us to do whatever he chooses. but what I'm saying is this. We have a father who has that authority and yet goes after our hearts. I'm saying that we have a father who loves us perfectly, a father who delights in giving us good things. And Jesus even describes this in Luke 11.11. Which of your fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?

Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, here's a nice way of speaking to a crowd and keeping their attention, isn't it? If you then, although you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

We have a father who loves us perfectly, who delights in giving us good things, a father who is undeniably good, a father who has captured our hearts, who is worthy of our praise, who is someone we delight in imitating like little children do.

[19 : 31] This is more than obedience. I mean, and I mean by that, it's more than obedience in the sense of an expression of the will, simply an expression of the will. This obedience goes deeper.

Even that difference is best summed up in the word grace. I think about how I parent, and this perhaps is one of the areas that I'm kind of concerned about and in a sense trying to redress, but have I modelled grace as a father?

I taught my kids to obey, yes. I taught my kids obedience in terms of appealing to their wills. But did I actually teach them inadvertently that that was the foundation of my relationship with them, my regard for them?

See, if I express a desire to promote obedience in my child and obedience without grace, my feelings for my child will waver based on how they perform.

But if my approach to raising my children is obedience with grace as my Heavenly Father relates to me, my feelings for my children will remain unchanged.

[20 : 42] children imitate their father from admiration or wonder.

As his precious children, we are called to do the same. Children imitate the father. Paul also calls us in chapter 5 to walk, and he describes walking in two different ways.

He's imitating the father. He's like, he uses action words for these things. He says to walk in love and to walk in light. Imitating the father is something that shapes what we do.

We become children who love like God loved us. And verse 2, as I've said, Paul gives us a model for loving to set us on the right track so we don't go astray even in that.

And the example is Jesus' sacrifice. When you become a sacrifice, when you become a, when he became a sacrifice, he didn't walk away from that. When you become a sacrifice, it's the same deal.

[21 : 50] This kind of love expressed in sacrifice is a humbling love. When it's expressed in relationship, it's a humiliating love.

I think we've sanitized humility. I'll explain this to you. In our minds, we've kind of categorized humility as the opposite to pride or arrogance.

And that, you know, in Australian culture, that's something that we're kind of born into anyway. But it's more than that. You see, it is that. But being humble in practice, exercising humility, is actually opening yourself up to the experience of humiliation.

humiliation. Think about that relationally. I can value humility as a virtue, but I can only live humility if I'm prepared for and accept humiliation as an outcome.

Now, I come from a family background where one of the ways that we love each other, so to speak, is by put-down humour. Do you know what that means? Where you basically chip each other all the time.

[22 : 58] You don't have that. No, none of you do that. No? Okay, it's just my family then. That's fine, I'm happy to own that. But one of the things I found was that when I married Jo, she does not come from that kind of background.

She's British through and through. I'm kind of British by birth, you know, made in England, assembled in Australia. But she's actually British. And over in England, you put yourself down, but not other people.

That's just not kind. So here she was married to someone like me who had actually perfected the art of put-down humour. It was costly for Jo to continue to love me through that when what she was hearing was the opposite.

It was costly for her to continue to love me. It was humiliating. Friends, love is costly.

Sometimes it hurts deeply to love another person. But remember this, the kind of love that Jesus modelled is a love that actually has its goal outside of self.

[24 : 11] In the lifting up of another, each other, ultimately in worship of our God. That's the noble thing that we were created for.

When you think about walking as a beloved child of God, think about that as your calling. The other thing that Paul does right in the middle of chapter 5 is he basically says wake up is the other thing that he uses.

So he talks about being children imitating their father walking and he talks about waking up.

Imitating God involves, it also involves not just how we live but how we think, even getting behind what we do to why we do what we do.

Paul says wake up. Don't let anyone deceive you. Examine things in the light. Pull things into the light and examine them closely. Look carefully how you walk, he says in this passage.

be wise. Understand the Lord's will. All of these things addressing how we think, what we believe, what we value, all of these things requiring us to put those things under scrutiny.

[25 : 31] Question ourselves. Think through why we're doing what we do. not just conforming the will by force to a particular pattern.

I can tell you you do that, it doesn't last. And you hate yourself for it when you fail. God's asking for more than that from us. He's calling after our hearts.

And friends, that takes effort, that takes mental effort to actually do that, to actually examine our hearts and really put them under the microscope. Walk.

Wake up. And the final thing that Paul finishes with is worship. There are a number of ways that being in God's family changes us. The final thing that he wants to say to us though is this.

He wants to bring us back, I guess, to what David talked about in our very first talk on the series, Gospel-shaped relationships, when he described how we were actually created for worship. We are creatures who were created to worship.

[26 : 40] When we don't worship God, we will find other things to worship. Mostly ourselves, though on the bulletin front you'll see, sometimes it's our families, our marriage partners, our parents, our children.

Sometimes it's just stuff and that's really sad. when we do that, when we practice idolatry, Paul again in this passage links idolatry to covetousness, wanting it more than we have.

Or in terms of covetousness you could even say wanting what is not ours to have in God's providence. all the time we're doing that, all the time that we're looking for more in life than there is, all that time, we are missing all that we have in Christ.

Paul says in verse 17, and I paraphrase here, don't get drunk on wine, get drunk on the Holy Spirit. Yes, your pastor said get drunk, but listen to the second part of the get drunk on the Holy Spirit.

And when we do, he will transform us. A community of people who invite the Holy Spirit to fill them will be characterized by the things that Paul lists in this passage.

[28 : 02] Joyful, exuberant, God-shaped conversation. In fact, not just conversation, but we sing to each other, we turn into a musical. For some of you, that may be a nightmare, but that's actually a beautiful thing.

Yes, it really is a nightmare for some of things. But that's what we become. And you know what a musical is like? A musical is one of those things that just evokes the emotion all the way through. You come through it wrung out, exhausted, emotionally.

Imagine if that was us, a musical devoted to singing praise to our God to each other, constantly lifting each other up, inspiring each other, constantly creating and encouraging in each other, all for God, delight in Him.

We also have a community characterized by thankfulness to God, always, in everything, says Paul. Thankfulness rather than setting our hearts on getting more out of life than God has actually given us.

More from our lives than in God and His commands and His good pleasure have actually destined for us in the path that we walk as His beloved children. And the final thing Paul says that the Holy Spirit does in us is the Holy Spirit actually promotes submission to each other.

[29 : 31] Friends, if we're struggling with that concept of submitting to one another, putting others first, seeking their good, sometimes at the cost to ourselves, if we're struggling with that concept, where do we go but to God to ask for more from the Holy Spirit, to ask Him to fill us more.

If you're a Christian, you have the Spirit in you. He is the deposit guaranteeing your inheritance. But the interesting thing Paul says here is you can also actually engage with the Holy Spirit relationally so that He fills you with all the things He's desiring to produce in you.

Was it G.K. Chesterton that described? No, no, sorry, it wasn't that. It wasn't him. I can't remember the guy's name, the guy who first translated the Bible into English. William Tyndale, was it?

William Tyndale. who describes a Christian community as like a summer garden, a garden where the sun is always shining and fruit is always being produced.

The Christian community is like a summer garden, which the Spirit is delighting in and desiring to produce fruit in us. So I need to finish there.

[30 : 54] I think I may have gone too long, but let me just say this. The thing that we try and create for ourselves, is destined only to become a monster.

But the family that God has called us to be, that he's rescued us to be a part of, that he's given us a spirit to guarantee us and is building in us even now, that family is beautiful, compelling, nothing better.

God, let me pray. Let me pray and as I pray, the musicians will come up. Father God, we thank you for inviting us into your family.

Thank you for the thought you've put into that that actually just goes back before even the beginning of time. It's hard to even imagine that. The love that you've invested in us, the sacrifice you were willing to make for us and the delight you have in us even and despite what we know about ourselves.

Lord, we thank you for that. Thank you for making that possible through Jesus Christ and for awakening the reality of it in our lives through your spirit and we pray that you would continue to do

that. Lord, I pray that we would be a community that delights in being drunk on your Holy Spirit.
[32 : 20] Amen. The next song is By Faith. The lyrics to the song comes from Hebrews 11, if you'd like to read through that.

But it's right through the old text and it's been By Faith. The author says and it's By Faith in the pen for the verse stands to it. So let's stand.