

# Church Weekend at Home: Family of Christ

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Most of you do know me, but for those of you who don't, as Lacey said, my name's Kate, and I used to be here, but now I am in Cottenham, which is just north of Cambridge. I've been there for nearly 15 years. I'm married to a man called Simon, and have two boys, James, who is 12, and Joshua, who's nine. I said to someone who was eight, I said to you who's eight, because I forget, you know. Are you supposed to remember? It's, yeah, ever-changing, ever-growing.

So it's good to be here. We're looking at this session about what it is to be family, and I'm going to read in a moment from the book of Ephesians, which I think you did a while ago, because you've been doing a study on the book of Acts in recent weeks, I hope, because that's what I'm referring to. So I'd like to read from Ephesians chapter 2, verses 11 to 22, which I think will appear on the screen. It says this, You who are not Jews by birth, here is what I want you to remember. You are called uncircumcised by those who call themselves circumcised, but they have only been circumcised in their bodies by human hands.

Before you believed in Christ, you were separated from him. You were not considered to be citizens of Israel. You were not included in what the covenants promised. You were without hope and without God in the world. At one time, you were far away from God. Now you belong to Christ Jesus. He spilled his blood for you.

This has brought you near to God. Christ himself is our peace. He has made Jews and Gentiles into one group of people. He has destroyed the hatred that was like a wall between us. Through his body on the cross, Christ set aside the law with all its commands and rules. He planned to create one new people out of Jews and Gentiles.

He wanted to make peace between them. He planned to bring both Jews and Gentiles back to God as one body. He planned to do this through the cross. On that cross, Christ put to death their hatred towards one another.

[ 2 : 0 0 ] He came and preached peace to you who were far away. He also preached peace to those who were near. Through Christ, we both come to the Father by the power of one Holy Spirit. So you are no longer outsiders and strangers. You are citizens together with God's people. You are also members of God's family. You are a building that is built on the apostles and prophets. They are the foundation.

Christ Jesus himself is the most important stone in the building. The whole building is held together by him. It rises to become a holy temple because it belongs to the Lord. And because you belong to him, you too are being built together. You are being made into a house where God lives through his Spirit.

If you're following in the Bible, it might be slightly different because I'm reading from the New International Reader's Version, just in case you're thinking I'm making it up. I'm not. It's from the Bible. Let's pray together. Father God, we thank you that we can share this time together.

We thank you for your word. And we pray, Lord, that you'd speak to us clearly and powerfully by your Holy Spirit. Father, we thank you, Lord, that you have much to say to us. And we ask that you would open our ears and our hearts and our minds that we may receive what you have for us today.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. As I said, I see in the past few weeks on Sundays, you have been looking at the early church in the book of Acts, which is interesting because at our church in Continental, we've also been working through the book of Acts as well. We're a little way ahead because we started a bit further on, but it's a really interesting series. And what I've noticed in the series in the book of Acts, and what I've actually found quite encouraging in a way, has been the amount of struggles that the early church went through. Now, I'm not necessarily talking about the persecution that they came upon when they shared the good news, although there is a lot of that in the book of Acts as well.

[ 3 : 56 ] But what has encouraged me is the number of times that they have encountered internal issues, which they have had to solve and work through. Because if you work your way through the book of Acts, you will see there are a number of disagreements that lead to discussions. And then there are councils who have to gather to make difficult decisions about the way forward for the early church.

There's even an argument which causes people to go in different directions. And the reason this is happening, of course, in the book of Acts is because as the disciples follow the call of Jesus to go out into all the world, the church of God isn't just changing slightly, but it's actually becoming something completely new. It's becoming something that it has not been before. It's described here in the second chapter of Ephesians as one new people, or in a different translation, a new humanity that is being created, made up not only of Jewish people, God's chosen people way back in the time of Abraham, but those who are near, as described in this passage, but also the Gentiles, a completely different people who previously did not follow God, described in this passage as those who were far away. Both groups being brought together into one humanity. People with completely different backgrounds and cultures in different stages of faith, all brought together by Jesus as one people, and described not just as one people, but as members of God's family, as a family created and designed by God himself. Now, you know, that can make it tricky, can't it? Because families are tricky things, I think, at times, but it could just be me.

You know, when we were here, those of you knew, Simon and I were a family, our own little unit, and, you know, we worked out how to be. That was fine. We got on well. You know, all was good. We had our own different things that we did, and it was really fine. And then when we moved, and we thought we'd maybe have a child, James came along. And James was five weeks early, so it was a bit of a shock. And, you know, we didn't have a clue what to do. I mean, if he'd come on time, we wouldn't have had a clue. But, you know, I use it as an excuse. It was five weeks early, so I didn't have a clue. And, you know, we had to sort of integrate this little being into our way of being family, which was difficult, but we managed it.

So then when Joshua came along, I was like, oh, I've had one of these, so I can do this. This, I did this for this one, so I'll do it for this one, and that'll be fine.

But turns out, you know, that Joshua's a completely different person. And, you know, what I used to do for James that worked for him didn't work for Joshua. Many embarrassing moments where Joshua in the supermarket, I hate you pushing me away. It's all right, he's my child. You know, it's a bit embarrassing, but he's a completely different person. And so integrating all these different personalities into one family is tricky. Because you talk to one and you say, I hear you, I can hear you, what you're saying, don't be upset, it's fine. And they're like, okay, you can hear me. You talk to another and you go, I can hear you. And they go, I don't want you to hear me. You're like, oh gosh, I don't know what to do now. It's tricky. Family is tricky. And the road to creating and being family, whatever type of family we're in, is really hard. Because we're never fully sorted, are we? We never have things fully sussed. Especially when it turns out, you know, we're not all the same. Who knew?

[ 7 : 39 ] And we are ever changing through different stages of life. That's complex and complicated. And in the book of Acts, summed up, if you like, I think, in this passage in Ephesians, this was especially hard. Because it was the coming together of two completely different people.

In fact, in many ways, they were opposing groups of people. And not just to spend time together, listening to teaching or being there on a Sunday or whatever day it might be, but to become a family, to be integrated, to be one. Now, the Jewish believers, those who came from the people of Israel, had, of course, grown up with the teachings of God. They had a whole history.

They've got rituals and ceremonies and ways of being that had enabled them to remain in a relationship with God over the years, despite some horrendous mistakes that they've made in the past.

They were his people. They were God's people. And so they knew what it was to be family. They were God's family. And to them, everyone else was not God's family. They were, as it says here in the passage, not included in what the covenants promised. They were without hope and without God in the world. They were pagans. They were people to steer clear of and avoid. Sure, God had called the people of Israel to be a light to the nations, but that was sort of a long forgotten mission. And now they were just seeking to stay together as a family in a dangerous world. And you know, for all their faults, the people of Israel, the Jews of Jesus's day, if you like, knew their history. They did try to stick to their rules. And so when, through Jesus, the Gentiles were also brought near to God, drawn into the family, if you like, it was hard. It was really hard because these people were different.

For a start, they did things that were unclean. They ate the wrong foods and they didn't wash in the right way. They didn't know God's laws. They hadn't grown up with them. They didn't abide by the teachings of Moses. They didn't respect the ceremonies of ancient years. They were different.

[ 9 : 50 ] And for those who had the history, for those who had always been family and known what it was, it was scary. And it was worrying. And it was not what the Jewish believers felt comfortable with.

But they had to learn. Because the thing was, Jesus, through his sacrifice, had brought the Gentiles in. They were no longer outsiders and strangers. They were citizens, together with God's people. They were family, just as much as the Jewish believers were family. And not only that, but they were being built together into a holy temple. God's temple. Does anyone here like Lego? Just in case I'm talking to, you know, oh, brilliant. Good. There's a few. So you know what I'm talking about. Lego. Everyone knows Lego, right, though? Oh, good. Excellent. Now, I quite like building Lego. Discovered this again when, because James, my eldest, likes Lego. But you see, I've really realised that I like building Lego Lego from the box with the instructions. So, you know, we'll buy a bit of Lego. And when James was younger, we'd build it together. And I'd be like, oh, you need this piece and this piece. And we build this amazing creation, which goodness knows how someone designs it. But we build it all up. And it looks amazing. And I love that. And I feel safe and secure with that. We've got the instructions. We've built it. Brilliant. And I'd go, look at that, James. Isn't it wonderful? Yeah, it's great. He'd play with it for two minutes. And then he'd start to take it apart. And I'm like, what? What are you doing? And he's like, oh, I'm creating something else. And so he'd go in the Lego box and he'd find other bits of Lego that didn't belong to the original set. And he'll start adding them on, creating something new. Now, I'm like, well,

I'm his mum, so I need to be encouraging. So I'm like, this is brilliant, darling. This is lovely. Oh, what a great creation. But inside, I'm like, oh, my goodness. What are you doing? We have instructions here.

And these instructions tell us that they make this. And this is far better than that weird thing that you're creating. That's great, darling. What amazing imagination you've got. But it scared me inside because I'm like, I can't do this. I can't build this freestyle creation. But you know, that's James.

He's a freestyler with his Lego. And he does actually build some amazing things. And I don't know how he does it. But I don't like it. Because I like to know where I'm at. And you know, in the Bible, in effect, we are told that Jesus is a freestyler. He's a freestyle builder when he builds the people of God. In the past, things may have always been built by the instruction book.

[ 12 : 43 ] You know, following the sacrificial system and the laws of Moses and the ceremonies that God required. But when Jesus arrives, things are different. He starts to create something completely new, made up of many more multicolored bricks that are being drawn in and added to the creation to make this magnificent temple. Sure, it started long ago with the people of Israel. But now no one really knows how it's going to end. It's going to be amazing. But no one knows what the final creation will look like as more and more people are added from more and more places. And the outworking of this in the book of Acts is really hard. Because living out a new people in practice every day, being the family of God with all our differences and our diversity, when we don't fully know what something will eventually look like, it's really, really hard.

It's hard for the first followers, but it's also hard for us today as God's people being family. It's difficult living out a new identity together, being made into a new humanity.

When the world is changing and we are being challenged by lots of different things, because, you know, we're all different. And some of us in the family believe that one way is the right way. This is how we should do it. This is how we've always done it. This is what God says, so this is how we're doing it. Whereas others of us believe another way is the right way.

Well, no, things are different. You know, this is the way we do it now. This is how we connect a bit more. Some of us believe that, you know, we should stick to the rules. Some of us love rules, don't we? Oh yes, I feel safe with rules. I know where I am. This is how we should do it.

Whereas other of us, well, we like to push the boundaries a little bit. Don't like the rules. We like to move out of that a bit. Some of us are confident in what we have always known.

[ 14 : 53 ] This is what I was taught. This is what I have known. This is how we should live. Whereas others of us are a bit unsure and we're searching and we're thinking things are changing and it causes us to think through things. Some of us love extravagantly. Everyone is welcome. I just love them. I love people. I'm going to welcome them in. It doesn't really matter. Anyone, everyone.

Whereas others of us are a bit more like reticent. Well, hold on. We just got to make sure, you know, that everything's fine. We've got everything okay. We don't want to be too extravagant. We don't want to welcome everyone. We've got to be careful. Some of us believe we all have it sewn up. You know, we've got it all sorted. Whereas others think, well, increasingly we don't actually know what we think. Maybe, you know, the older we get, the less we think we know. Things change and things are different. And that's not to mention, of course, our backgrounds and our age and our cultural differences. The way we read the world and the way we read the Bible and the way we put them together, it's all different. We're all so different. But the thing is, none of it is wrong.

There's no right way and wrong way of being family together. There's no one who has exactly all the right things. And that means someone else is wrong. We're different. And God walks with us in our differences. But it makes being family tricky. Because it means when we try and work out how to be family, we make mistakes. Maybe we become proud. Sometimes we're a bit pompous. Sometimes we're very insecure. And sometimes we're scared. And sometimes we have arguments. And we react in the wrong way.

And we say and do things that aren't right. And this can make it really hard. And it can make it really messy. But the thing is, if we want to be the family of God, if we want to be all that we were intended to be, we've got to work it out. And we've got to do it in the right way. Because the truth is, we don't get to choose who's in the family. We don't get to choose what the family looks like.

We don't get to feel totally comfortable with everyone else's views. Because we're not the ones creating the family. Or at least we shouldn't be. Jesus is the one creating the family. Christ Jesus himself is the most important stone in the building, it says here. The whole building is held together by him. Not us. By him. And so in this family, no matter what our difference is, we need to remember that everyone is of equal value. And everyone should be able to be themselves in the family of God. In Christ, it doesn't matter, it says in Galatians, if you are a Jew or a Greek or slave or free or male or female, you're all the same in Christ Jesus. Whatever our qualities and whatever our differences in the family of God, we're all equal. We're all valued. What we're called to do is not to seek out those who are the same as us, not to create a family that we're comfortable with, to work out how together we can be a diverse family that functions well together. But those who look at us will see a new people, a new humanity, what actually humanity is supposed to be like. What we're called to do is to love each other in all our diversity and difference. You know, a few weeks ago, well, a couple of weeks ago, I had COVID. And so did James. And so did Joshua. Simon avoided it. I think it's because he's decided to create a little man space and not leave it. So, you know, apart from putting food through the door. So James and I were off, well, James was off school and I was off work.

[ 18 : 48 ] And we were lying on the COVID sofa because we weren't allowed to move from the sofa. And we decided, probably mistakenly now, to work our way through disaster movies.

So we were on Netflix and we were like, how many disaster movies, end of the world movies, can we watch in the time that we've got COVID? It did get to a point actually where James said, mom, can we stop now? Because this is just too depressing. The world has ended up at four times in different ways. But the thing that struck me about these movies was that there came a time in every movie when people knew, you know, the world was going to end and we're all going to die. So I've got to make a phone call to someone who I love. You know, they're all there making their phone calls.

And you know, what they wanted to do was to mend relationships or to tell someone they love them or to make that last and final words. Because when you know that this is the last thing you're going to do, you say what you want to say. None of them rang up and went, oh, I really enjoyed eating cake with you the other week. That's not important. They wanted to say, look, I've always loved you or I'm really sorry that this has happened. They just wanted to make things right.

Because when you have fewer things to say, when you're coming towards the end of something, you want to say something really important. And when Jesus was coming to Jerusalem in the Bible, at the start of what is known as the farewell discourse in the book of John, he expressed to the disciples something that was really important. Didn't say a lot else, but after, at this point, he said, a new command I give you, love one another as I have loved you. So you must love one another.

By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another. To be fair, love had been the theme throughout the whole of the Old Testament. So it wasn't new in that sense.

[ 20 : 42 ] But this new command was that Jesus was calling the disciples to love as he had loved. So that now they knew what love was actually like, that it was about sacrifice and service and putting others before yourself. Then they could love. They could love not just when they felt comfortable or when they all agreed or when life enabled them to, but they could love in a sacrificial way, which would take them beyond all the things that normally stop them. They could exhibit love that covered a multitude of sins and considered others better than themselves. A love that comes from God. Because not only is this the only thing that keeps family together, it's also the one thing that God has called us to show above everything else. Love one another as I have loved you. Love one another. So as we start this day, as we think maybe about what has happened recently at the church, but also look forward and hopefully take steps to think about what kind of church we want Herne Hill to be. I thought it'd be good to remember who we are. Not a people who are called to believe exactly the same thing and sign up to exactly the same thing, but a people who are God's family, who are called above and beyond everything else to love each other. A new humanity who are drawn together of many different multicoloured bricks. So I thought it would be quite good to take a moment of quiet as we start this day. And I was going to read in a moment from 1 Corinthians 13, very famous of course, but maybe so famous that we often brush over what love actually is. And we'll reflect a little bit on that. So let's have a moment of quiet right now.

If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy, don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate. If I speak God's word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day.

And if I have faith that says to a mountain jump and it jumps, but I do not love, I am nothing. If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've got nowhere. So no matter what I say, what I believe and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love. Love never gives up. Love cares more for others than for self. Love doesn't want what it doesn't have. Love doesn't strut. Doesn't have a swelled head. Doesn't force itself on others. Isn't always me first. Doesn't fly off the handle. Doesn't keep score of the sins of others. Doesn't revel when others grovel. Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth.

Puts up with anything. Trusts God always. Always looks for the best. Never looks back. Keeps going to the end. Love never dies. Inspired speech will be over someday. Praying in tongues will end.

Understanding will reach its limit. We know only a portion of the truth. What we say about God is always incomplete. But when the complete arrives, our incompleteness will be cancelled. When I was an infant at my mother's breast, I gurgled and cooed like any infant. When I grew up, I left those infant ways for good. We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won't be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright. We'll see it all then.

[ 24 : 25 ] See it all as clearly as God sees us. Knowing him directly, just as he knows us. For right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us towards the consummation.

Trust steadily in God. Hope unswervingly. Love extravagantly. And the best of these three is love. Father God, as we come before you this morning, we thank you that we're your family.

That you have called us together. We thank you that you love us so much. That each and every one of us is valued. That each and every one of us is your child. That you gave your life for each and every one of us. We thank you also, Lord, that you are committed to creating one people, a new humanity.

Forgive us where we do things that are foolish. Forgive us where we react in the wrong way. Forgive us where we push love aside and put something else as the main focus. Forgive us when we forget that the people around us are loved just as much as we are. That the people around us are our brothers and sisters. Help us to remember that, Lord, in the way we speak to each other, in the way we interact with each other, in the effort we put in to be united as your family. And we pray, Lord, for your help because it's hard. It's hard being a family. We pray for your spirit. Guide and lead us to move among us, to unite us as we have not been united before. And we pray, Lord, that this day would be an important step and that you would work in our lives in new and fresh ways. We ask this, Lord, in Jesus' name.

Amen.