

A CARING FAMILY, ACTS 2:42-47

The Church You Always Longed For #1

Intro: Today I want to think with you about family. That is, in the best sense of the word. Lets just say, one with more function than disfunction. Here are a few examples of dysfunctional family or parenting at least... (pics of parenting **fails**).

Sometimes we can be careless with our family, but I would guess that most of the time family means you get special attention. For example, how many of these would you agree with?

If you're family, we put up with your quirks and foibles.

If you're family, we come to celebrate your events even if we don't feel like it.

If you're family, we'll go out of our way for you.

If you're family, I want to know about your stories

If you're family, we invest in your growth

If you're family, I'd risk my life for you.

Well guess what? As we begin looking at The Church You've Always Longed For today, I want you to know that the Church is God's family and a healthy one works at being a caring one. Paul wrote...

"For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name." Ephesians 3:14, 15, NIV.

So I'd like us to observe a few things about the very first church/followers of Jesus using the outline of FAMILY.

F. In God's family we care enough to fellowship. Our text observes that as soon as the first people were converted to be-

A CARING FAMILY, ACTS 2:42-47

The Church You Always Longed For #1

believing that Jesus is in fact the living God, they automatically, or quite naturally became a fellowship. A fellowship is a union of fellow humans around a shared interest, cause or purpose. This is how it is for Christians. Every other believer becomes a brother, or a sister. A family member. For example, JR Tolkien's book *The Fellowship of the Ring* is about an unlikely fellowship of an elf, two men, a dwarf, four hobbits, and a wizard all working to destroy a ring that possessed great evil power. They were united by their purpose. Well, every one of us Christians is in fellowship with each other around our Father God and his purposes for the world!

When Tammy Harris from Roanoke VA turned 21 she began searching for her biological mother. After a year, she hadn't succeeded. What Tammy didn't know was that her mother Joyce Schultz, had been trying to locate her for nearly 20 years. She also didn't know that her mother was one of her coworkers at the convenience store where she worked. One day Joyce heard Tammy telling another coworker about trying to find her mother. Soon the two ladies were comparing birth certificates. When Tammy realized that Joyce was her mother, she fell into her arms. "We held on for the longest time," she said. "It was the best day of my life." *Well friends, every week we come here and see family who share birth certificates in God's records. Church services are like coming to Dad's house for a get-together. How un-*

A CARING FAMILY, ACTS 2:42-47

The Church You Always Longed For #1

fitting and ironic if we often hardly notice people who are in fact relation!

Why is fellowship natural in the Church, and why is it an oxymoron to be a member of a church and not do anything in life with the people there? I'll tell you, fellowship is natural result of love. Where there is no fellowship, there is no love. Where the love of God increases, so does human fellowship. People hang around longer. They go up to others and ask about them. They sign on for events. These are all just normal for people who love each other. By the way, God wants us to love each other.

"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No-one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." 1 John 4:7-12, NIV.

Is your heart amazed daily that Jesus atoned for your sin? Then thank him in more than words by loving his family.

A. In God's family there is natural adoration of God. Another word for this is "worship" of God. God is central to the fellowship of Jesus. Our eternal Father is who makes us family. And we

A CARING FAMILY, ACTS 2:42-47

The Church You Always Longed For #1

will not grow much in love for other people if we do not grow in love with God. One results from the other. You will notice our text said that the first church devoted themselves to “the breaking of bread and prayer” and “every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.”(v42,46) The first is probably a reference to the Lord’s Supper the second to worship times. Wow. Can you imagine being so on fire for God that you stopped by the church everyday!? That you just wanted to come talk with God, pray with others everyday!? I was at a Korean Church in CA a few years ago for several days. Know what? The whole church shows up everyday at 5:30am to sing and pray to God. Everyday! You will not be surprised that growth is happening there! And this is what makes the church the church and not another club. This is how Life Groups differ from say, a book club. One of our purposes as Christians is to attend to God, to love God, and obey him, and speak with him.

Let me here encourage your small groups to consider having some worship time together that might included singing favorite songs to God if possible, or naming God’s attributes, or praising his name for specific experiences. It reminds us that we are bound by a higher person and a higher purpose.

M. In God’s family we care through ministry of mercy. This is caring lived out. Our text comments on this phenomena of sharing goods and property that happened in Acts 2 (v44-45). The first church thought so much of each other due to God’s love,

A CARING FAMILY, ACTS 2:42-47

The Church You Always Longed For #1

that if you needed, say my motorcycle, I'd give you the keys. If you couldn't afford to go on a mission trip, someone else who could would pay for it. These folks considered the needs of God's people worth more than the accumulation of goods.

Now we know they didn't all go and sell everything and pool the money and live off of it. Chapter four shows another example of how they would sell something as a given need arose in order to provide for it. It's quite amazing actually. I wonder how many of us would sell, say our boat so that we could fly 10 people to disaster relief in Puerto Rico. Or maybe give up a piece of a collection of ours to have money to give someone who needed it. It does happen though! Where you find people to whom Jesus comes first, you find immense generosity.

Charity is in the nature of the biblical God. In the Old Testament Israel was commanded not to combine to the edges of the fields and not to go back through the orchards to pick again in case they missed some fruit. These were to be left for the poor, and whoever had need. It was the way of life. How different we are when we pinch our pennies and use our coupons and shop on sale but still balk at donating money to a cause, or leaving much of a tip, or dropping free money in an offering plate? No no. See, we live thrifty lives not to build for our greater luxury at retirement, but to live now as generous givers. We save in order to share! That's God's way. In Matthew 25 Jesus says that when we invited someone home, it was him we were inviting. When we

A CARING FAMILY, ACTS 2:42-47

The Church You Always Longed For #1

stopped by the hospital, it was him we were visiting. When we went to the jail, it was him we reached out to. When we made a meal for a family with a sickness, it was him we were feeding. Historically Christians have followed the scriptural standard of saving at least one tenth of their income to give away. In the Roman world charity (called liberalitas) was given with the expectation that it would be returned in kind. Not so for Christians. Cyril, the bishop of Jerusalem (5th century) sold the treasures and ornaments of the church for the relief of starving people. Ethelwold, bishop of Winchester (tenth century) sold all the gold and silver vessels from his cathedral to relieve the poor during a famine, saying "There is no reason the temples of God should abound in riches, while the living temples of the Holy Ghost starve for hunger."

On the other hand, Roman philosophy taught that it was disrespectful to associate with the weak, poor and dying who could not contribute to the valor of Rome. Benevolence was considered beneath you. They also habitually practiced infanticide and child abandonment. This culture was going on 500 years before there were any Christians around. But Christians took literally thousands upon thousands of abandoned Roman infants in. Orphanages commonly built in the shadow of a church, were an innovation of Christians, that never existed in Greco-Roman culture. Hospitals were another innovation introduced by Christianity in the fourth century. What is a healthy Christian Church? A

A CARING FAMILY, ACTS 2:42-47

The Church You Always Longed For #1

healthy Christian Church is a giving, sharing place that exists to minister to others. All God's people are ministers.

I. In God's family we care enough to give Instruction. Another one of the church's purposes we call instruction or discipleship. That is, a Church that is a caring family is one that wants people to mature, grow up, become better, kinder, and more obedient to God. Jesus said in the Great Commission to go and make disciples, teaching them to obey all I have commanded you. The Acts 2 church devoted itself to the apostles teachings (v42). To this day, Christians gather to learn out of God's word, to teach children God's truths and ways, and to continue to develop adults. Some grown-ups believe on-going learning is for kids. That they have progressed beyond needed discipleship. But Christians are eager to keep learning.

L. In God's family we care enough to listen. I've chosen this trait of Christianity because it is the action step for week one of our 50 Adventure (The Listening with Jesus Prayer). And because as I age I increasingly agree with what those who study the human psyche that *perceptive listening is a major element often missing in our culture yet remains one of the very best ways to say "I care about you."* I grant that Acts 2 does not single out the skill of listening to another. However, there is an "L" in "family" and listening is a mark of those who really care. Communications consultant Art Robertson says "The number one cause of divorce in our society is lack of listening. Listening builds relation-

A CARING FAMILY, ACTS 2:42-47

The Church You Always Longed For #1

ship. It demonstrates compassion and puts others at ease so they can open themselves up. When Solomon asked for wisdom (1Kings 3:5) it was literally the gift of a "hearing heart" that he requested from God. We translate that "wisdom". The apostle James counseled Christians this way.

"My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry," James 1:19, NIV.

Lets focus a few minutes on this caring skill, shall we? *Perceptive listening looks for the true meaning behind a person's words. It looks for their thoughts and feelings.* It doesn't assume they say exactly what they mean because we each give different meanings to words. Usually the hidden message consists of emotions.

Example 1: A family member says, "You're going out again? This is the firth night in a row you've been gone. " If I'm listening perceptively for you, instead of thinking about me, I may ask "Are you lonely? Do you feel neglected?" Would you like me to stay home?"

Example 2: One of my children comes home from school, slams the door and stomps into his bedroom. Those are good clues that he needs someone to listen to him. A poor listener living in their self and will react: "Oh no you don't come stomping into my house. Now you get back there and open and close that door 25 times quietly." That might be fitting in some instances,

A CARING FAMILY, ACTS 2:42-47

The Church You Always Longed For #1

particularly not volatile ones. But not here. Such a reaction here leaves the child unheard, not understood, and feeling uncared for. Love looks into the other person, reads clues, wonders, cares,

Example 3: when a child says, "My teacher doesn't like me." many parents might respond "Oh that's just a foolish thing to say. Of course she likes you!" Or, "Well try paying attention more in class, then she'll probably like you more." Neither one would be hearing the child's inside. Both tried to fix it. One blew it off. One gave a teaching. Neither response communicates genuine *care*. A wise listener wants to explore what's going on inside the child. A perceptive listener wants to understand, not correct, defend, or advise because this communicates that I care about you.

Time for an exercise called **Fast Food Communication**. At a fast food lane the teller repeats back to the buyer what they ordered so as to be clear. "Ok, that's 14 cheese burgers and 2 chocolate shakes. Is that right?" Ok, sometime today get with someone else and try this. Pick one emotion and simply say, "I'm feeling _(blue)_". The other person responds with a question using the same or different words for the same thing. "Are you saying you feel _(down)_?" Then switch roles. If the other person thinks it's weird just tell them your pastor said it would be good for spiritual growth and untold riches will fall from heaven if they cooperate.

Y. In God's caring family You belong. This is our conclusion: All these caring things (fellowship, adoration, ministry of mercy,

A CARING FAMILY, ACTS 2:42-47

The Church You Always Longed For #1

instruction, listening) show other people they belong, they matter to God. Why show other people they belong? Because that's what Jesus does! This week you'll read Philippians 2 in your devotional guide. It reminds us how Jesus, God's only son, left home in heaven to become man like us, to die for us, so we could come home with him and belong. So the Father raised him out of death, and gave him the highest name in the universe! Paul says there that "your attitude should be the same as Christ!" Bless his name! What makes a great church? The kind that's so in love with Jesus that it loves people into belonging, just like he did! When you discover Jesus is your savior, you're family! For eternity! How awesome is that?