



Sermon Growth Guide

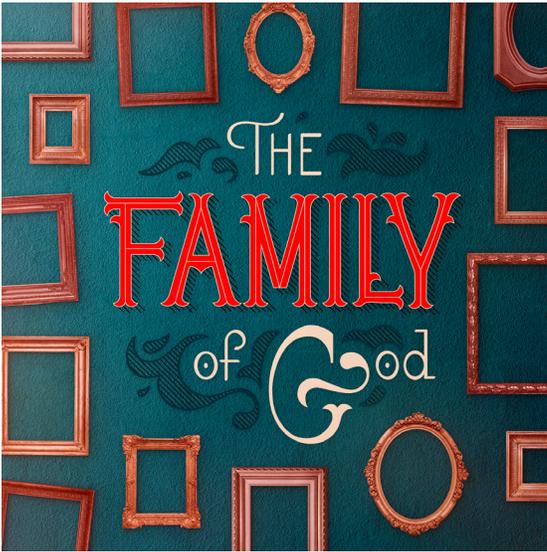
DECEMBER 26, 2021

THE FAMILY OF GOD // "MESSY FAMILY"

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Family of God – Messy Family

Mark 3:31-35

Key Verse: Mark 3:35 “Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”

Big Idea: God works above the difficulties of our family to draw us near.

Foundations

In this week’s passage, Jesus has an awkward moment with His biological family. When the Kingdom of God enters a sinful world, messy situations unfold. Jesus was proclaiming the Kingdom, but was being accused by the community and religious leaders that He was demon-possessed.

Then, to make matters worse, Jesus’ own family tries to come and get Him. It feels a little like when a mom and dad get a phone call from a neighbor asking them to come pick up their child because of bad behavior. “Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him,” (Mark 3:31).

Mom comes to pick up son and son refuses to come out. Instead, Jesus says, “Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother,” (Mark 3:35).

Jesus is never shy about where His ultimate allegiance lies, with His Father in heaven. As we conclude our series this week and next week on **The Family of God**, how has your understanding of belonging to God’s Family been shaped? Is it Good News that the strongest family bond we have is with our eternal Family of God? But why is it so hard in the here and now?

May your conversation be rich this week as you dive into discussion around **Messy Family**. And blessings as you share your lives with one another and point one another to our true and eternal family.

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read Mark 3:31–35. Now read the pretext to today’s sermon, Mark 3:20–30. According to verse 21, why does Jesus’ family go to find Him?

Host a discussion on verses 34 and 35. What pain do you feel in Jesus’ response? What joy is also present in the words of Christ?

Applying God’s Word

Family can be messy. This week Pastor John reminds us that God works above the difficulties of our family to draw us near. We are called to be near to God spiritually, but also in high alignment with God’s Kingdom values.

In what ways is your earthly family “messy” and how can your Life Group join you in praying for God’s Kingdom to come into your family’s story? What’s your role to play in your family’s reconciliation?

Witnessing God’s Word

Today’s passage holds a surprising scene with Jesus and Mary. One reason it’s surprising is because the images we generally hold of Jesus and Mary are in the manger, at the wedding in Cana, and at Jesus’ crucifixion. But here it is. God doesn’t withhold this moment. How can we take this week’s sermon and apply it in such a way that it increases our witness of God to those around us?

Families can be a mixed bag, can't they? They can be a source of wonderful experiences and rich memories together. Deborah and I are blessed each year to get to celebrate Christmas with our son Matthew, his wife Meghan, and our daughter Suzanne. This year is particularly poignant after Matthew and Meghan gave me an early birthday present this fall. The gift was a mug. But not just any mug: it was one that announced my new family role as a grandpa.

As we anticipate the arrival of this new family member in May, each of us is filled with love this Christmas for one who doesn't yet have a clue who we are. We're all reflecting upon and anticipating new experiences ahead as parents, aunt, and grandparents.

Families can also be messy, and that's today's theme: **Messy Family**. Once, when Matthew and Suzanne were around ages 4 and 1, Deborah and I gave them baths for the night, then let them play a little more before bed. At some point before bedtime, we suddenly realized they were way too quiet. We discovered them downstairs, playing in the fireplace ashes. There were ashes all over them and all over the room.

Then there was the time we had a babysitter, and they decided to play hide and seek while we were gone. No big deal. Except that Suzanne hid behind the Christmas tree and knocked it over trying to get back out. It took hours to untangle the lights.

Those are now humorous stories, but the messiness of families can sometimes be a lot more painful. Conflict and misunderstandings can become magnified over time, and hurts and resentments can linger for years. It wouldn't surprise me if some of us long for different family dynamics than we're experiencing.

Families are always made up of flawed, imperfect people, like me and like you. We're all doing the best we can with what we have to work with. Today's passage reveals messiness within Jesus' own family. It also offers an encouraging promise of membership in another family.

Context is always important when reading the Bible, so let's go back a few verses to where today's story begins. "Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind'" (Mark 3:20-21).

It wasn't unusual for Jesus to place ministry over His personal needs, driven by all He had to do in such a short time. This, coupled with His growing confrontation with religious leaders, prompted Jesus' family to believe He was a danger to Himself. The Greek wording for the family's response indicates that they went to seize Jesus, believing He was out of control. Mark uses the same wording elsewhere to describe attempts to bind Jesus and deprive Him of freedom. We learn that Jesus' own family wasn't on board with what He was doing.

Instead of continuing this story, Mark pauses to sandwich it around other resistance against Jesus. This back-to-back combination reveals a growing push against His ministry from multiple directions. "And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons'" (Mark 3:22).

This delegation from Jerusalem may have been legal specialists, sent to determine the legitimacy of His ministry. Such a declaration required a thorough investigation on



the spot by official envoys. Earlier in this chapter, religious leaders began talking about killing Jesus; this was a necessary step to discredit Him. These teachers from Jerusalem don't deny Jesus' power to perform the miracles He had. Instead, they denounce the source of power by bringing two charges against Him: He was demon-possessed, and in collusion with the prince of demons. They concluded that what Jesus was doing was unlawful.

After recording Jesus' response to these leaders, Mark returns again to the family drama. "Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, 'Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you'" (Mark 3:31-32). The phrase "looking for" Jesus occurs 10 times in Mark; each indicates an attempt to gain control over Him. Jesus' family believed it knew better than He did what was best, and they expected Jesus to honor their wishes. This expectation was rooted in the important role that family played in that culture.

The constant challenges by religious leaders were surely wearying for Jesus. Imagine how much harder it was to have family members who didn't believe in or support what He was doing. Mary, the one who so quickly said "Yes" to God when told of Jesus' miraculous birth and the role He'd play, is now, along with the rest of the family, telling Jesus to stop what He's doing and come home.

When Jesus' family couldn't penetrate the crowd around Him, they sent word for Him to come out. Instead of agreeing to their request, Jesus responded with a teaching moment. Without even acknowledging His family, Jesus offered a rhetorical question. "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked"

(Mark 3:33). After allowing this question to linger for a moment, Jesus provided the answer. "Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother'" (Mark 3:34-35).

Jesus' dismissal of His family tends to make us cringe; we understand how hurtful it must have sounded to Mary and His brothers. Those around Jesus were probably shocked to hear such an abrupt, dismissive response to His family. But let's step back a moment and consider what these words meant to early Christians who read them years later. It wasn't unusual for those leaving other faith backgrounds to follow Jesus to be disowned by their families; it still happens today. Jesus' reassurance of gaining a larger family of faith would have helped ease the sting of what they lost. And Jesus wasn't completely dismissive of His family. We later see a tender moment with His mother during Jesus' crucifixion.

Jesus' declaration describes two characteristics of membership in His family. First, we remain close to Jesus. "Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers!'" (Mark 3:34). Jesus' new definition of family encompassed those who sought to be near Him in this home. Any family relationship that's meaningful requires a lot of time together. Like those seated with Jesus that day, we want to remain in close proximity so we can be influenced by Him.

The second characteristic of family membership by Jesus is that we remain aligned with God. "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother'" (Mark 3:35). Spending time with Jesus helps us better understand what's important to our heavenly Father. As we live this out, we develop more of a family



resemblance over time. By adding sisters to his mention of mothers and brothers, Jesus reinforces the inclusive nature of His family.

Jesus didn't teach much about family, and this passage probably won't work on Mother's Day! This Christmas though, it offers a helpful reminder of what we're celebrating. Is it the birth of Jesus? Yes, but also more. Is it God's incredible initiative to enter our world and take on our flesh? Yes, but also more.

At Christmas, we celebrate our entrance into the family of God, through Jesus. The Apostle Paul writes, "But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir" (Galatians 4:4-5, 7). Jesus entered our world and went to the cross so we could be adopted into His family of faith.

Perhaps this Christmas, there are things about your earthly family that you wish were different. Or perhaps you long for family experiences that aren't available, because you have no family or they live many miles away. Here's the joyful encouragement of today's passage: Jesus calls us His brothers and sisters. We're also part of His larger family.

Now, let's get the bad news out of the way first: Jesus' family consists of the same flawed, imperfect members as your family! But here's the good news about our divine family: our Father knows each of us intimately; He loves us unconditionally; He understands us fully; and He longs to draw us deeply into His loving embrace as loved and valued members of His family.

Some of you may be here or watching today with family, and

you're not yet sold on what Jesus has to offer. If that's the case, I want to highlight a beautiful footnote to today's story. The family members who came to collect Jesus most likely included His brother James. Doubts that James shared with his mother and siblings probably lingered as Jesus continued in His ministry.

At some point, though, James moved from doubt about Jesus to conviction and decided he wanted to be part of what Jesus was doing. We know this because James eventually became the leader of the church in Jerusalem following Jesus' death, and one of our New Testament books was written by James.

It took James longer to get there than it did those listening to Jesus in the crowded home in today's text. And that's OK. Because when it comes to entering God's divine family, we'll all have different timing. He's willing to wait for each of us, though, and there'll always be room in God's family for one more.

Jesus came so we could experience a new family of faith. We've been affirming this throughout Advent, with the song "Our Family Was Born on Christmas Night." Listen again to the words: "Our family was born on Christmas night, when hearts beheld God's Son. This child is salvation's Holy light, In Whom we're all made one."

In Jesus Christ, we've been adopted into God's heavenly family. And that's worth celebrating!

