

WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 24



DAY
1

THE FAMILY OF GOD

Ephesians 3:1-13

There are all sorts of ways that we divide ourselves. We divide based on gender, political affiliation, nationality, race, and preferences. We all experience being separated from one another in some way. During the month of August, we looked at some of the ways that sin has separated us from God. Here, Paul is writing about the ways that we are alienated from one another.

In Paul's time, there was a huge divide between Jew and Gentile. The Jews, as God's chosen people, looked down on the Gentiles. A Jew would pray, thanking God that he had not been born a Gentile. Paul himself was a Jewish Christian, and he was writing to mostly Gentile Christians. So, he begins by reminding them that there was a time when they were estranged from God and from one another. He opens this passage reminding the Gentile Christians that, because they are not Jewish, they were outside of the promises and community of God.

Howard A. Snyder describes something interesting that was happening during Paul's time: "Christians began to think of themselves as a third race: neither Jew nor Gentile, but something new transcending both ... The church became not just a subculture within a dominant culture, but a new counterculture, a contrast community in the Greco-Roman world."

And somehow, this rag-tag bunch of problematic people from messy backgrounds had to figure out how to get along! What a powerful example their unity was to the people around them. Back in Galatians 3, Paul had written, "In Christ's family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal. That is, we are all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ." What if we could reclaim this full unity experienced by the early church? What if we could show the world around us what true unity and community looks like?

Pray that the Holy Spirit would continue to make us humble, make us unified, and make us a distinct community, different from the division-plagued world around us.

DAY
2

ADOPTED BY GOD

Ephesians 1:4-6

Adoption is a beautiful way to describe what Jesus has done for us. In adoption, one is chosen to become part of a family that they weren't originally born into. In his book *Adopted for Life*, Russell Moore writes, "The New Testament continually points to our adoption in Christ in order to show us that we're really, really wanted here in the Father's house. The Spirit is continually telling the people of Christ that they, we, are 'blessed' in Christ through adoption."

How does it make you feel to know that God really, really wants you as part of his family? Like Paul, are you moved to praise? These verses describe how, before the creation of the world, God chose us. These sinning, failing, messed up people were chosen by God to be holy and blameless in his sight. Jesus' love has brought us into this new family.

Scripture suggests that we learn about the goodness of God as our father by what we experience in our own families (Matthew 7:9-11). You may have grown up in a home where you did not have a good father, or your father was absent. But God has chosen you to be a part of his new family. There is a good, good father and you are dearly loved.

Isaiah 43:1-4

There is a scene in the 2011 movie *Hugo* where the main character, Hugo Cabret (an orphan who lives alone in a train station), is finally caught by the police inspector who has been hunting him down. As the inspector drags the crying Hugo through the station, he asks him, “Where do you belong, then? A child has to belong somewhere!” Hugo describes how he doesn’t understand why he is all alone, and his friend Méliès steps from the crowd and says, “Monsieur, this child belongs to me!”

We all want to belong somewhere. Scripture reminds us that we belong to God. God steps into the chaos of our lives and says definitively, “This child belongs to me!” *The Message* translation of today’s passage says,

*But now, God’s Message,
the God who made you in the first place, Jacob,
the One who got you started, Israel:
“Don’t be afraid, I’ve redeemed you.
I’ve called your name. You’re mine.
When you’re in over your head, I’ll be there with you.
When you’re in rough waters, you will not go down.
When you’re between a rock and a hard place,
it won’t be a dead end—
Because I am God, your personal God,
The Holy of Israel, your Savior.
I paid a huge price for you:
all of Egypt, with rich Cush and Seba thrown in!
That’s how much you mean to me!
That’s how much I love you!
I’d sell off the whole world to get you back,
trade the creation just for you.”*

Too many of us have felt like Hugo, alone in the world, baffled at how we’ve ended up so alone. Perhaps you feel that way now. But scripture reminds us that we are the beloved children of God, and that he will never leave us. God is with you. God is for you.

James 4:1-3; John 13:34-35

Siblings fight. A lot. Growing up, my older sister and I bickered nonstop. As a parent, I watch my own children argue over just about everything. It can be frustrating to watch the kids that you love struggle to get along. I wonder if this is akin to what God feels when he looks at his own family.

In our passage, James turns his focus to division within the community of believers. There may have been actual physical fights among the Christians. More likely, it was quarrels and disagreements, filled with angry, harsh words. James addresses it swiftly, knowing controversial attitudes and actions will undermine the unity of the church. The Church in our day has often been divided by arguments. Instead of fighting with our brother or sister, James reminds us to ask God earnestly and sincerely for what we need.

The Christians described here are selfish and only interested in praying for things to advance their own self-centered agendas, rather than building up the community. James isn’t concerned with the actual content of the conflict, but rather the attitude with which the believers fought.

God knows our sinful nature drives us toward division rather than drawing us toward unity. Jesus said that the world would know us by our love for one another. Too many of us have felt the pain of loneliness. Too many of us are still feeling that. But we are not alone. As God’s children, we are part of a family.

PERSONAL REFLECTION & LIFEGROUP DISCUSSION

You can always pick any idea from the sermon or the daily readings and biblical passages and talk about those ideas. A good format is to have each LifeGroup member share one idea that was most powerful for them.

Day One:

What was it like to be a part of your family growing up? What do you love about the family of God? How does it make you feel to be in this new family? How did you settle disagreements in your family? How should we settle disagreements in our Christian family?

Day Two:

Some adoptive families describe the day they brought their children home as their “gotcha day.” Each year, they remember when their child became part of their family. How do you commemorate the “gotcha day” of when you became part of God’s family?

Day Three:

Have you ever felt alone in the world? How does it feel to know that you are a child of God? As a group, reread the Isaiah passage from *The Message*. What thoughts do you have as you read it? What is God saying to you?

Day Four:

How can you pray intentionally for the unity of the body of Christ? How are you doing when it comes to loving your brothers and sisters in Christ?