

SERMON

Philippians 2:1-5

Life in the Family

Nunawading and Waverley, 18-5-22

Dear friends in Christ,

Today, I would like to begin a series of sermons on living as a Christian. The first is "Life in the Family". Our ideal of the family is a place where you are loved, understood and forgiven. Where these are present, happiness can exist and endure through the years. A child comes home and is able to share how her day went. A husband and wife have a few moments for each other at the end of day. A family I know, held a family night every Wednesday. Happiness in a family comes from **putting aside selfish ambition and vain conceits**, which is a way of saying, "What can I do, to make your day a little more pleasant?"

Everything worthwhile will require effort. Family, is God's gift to humanity because he is a family of three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Yet, it is also a task, something that requires our effort. All good things, such as nurturing a young person's faith, require your commitment, a steady effort and a constant reminder to stay on task.

When young, I played at building a house. Sometimes in a tree, or a deep hole excavated in paddocks adjoining the back fence or out of lupin bushes. In it, I would place a rug, utensils. When older, my friends and I would bake potatoes, hangi style, in tin foil place on hot coals then covered with leaves and dirt. The Lord has placed this yearning, this ideal of a home and a family in our hearts.

Is the ideal always reached? About 50,000 divorces occur in Australia each year but this does not include de facto relationship break-ups. Just over 100,000 marriages are solemnised each year. Perfectly good people end up unhappy in families.

I spoke of love, understanding and forgiveness. Christians place a lot of value on these things because they come from a heavenly Father who loves us, understands our inadequacies and is always ready to forgive, even before we turn to him. **When we are united to Christ**, we begin to see others the way he sees us. We call this, Christ-mindedness. **In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus**, the Spirit tells us. That will lead to family health.

Let's consider love. Initially, we were attracted to our spouses. When children arrived in the world, we were overjoyed. The task, is to make that love grow through time. Someone pointed me to the four horsemen of the apocalypse in family relationship: criticism, contempt, defensiveness and shutting off from others. Yes, these are things to consider but where is the power and motivation for change? Christians have received into their lives the tenderness and compassion of the Lord and will be looking to see his love develop within them. Remember, we want to be Christ-minded. Let our love be sacrificial. Instead of struggling to get what we want, we enquire about the burden someone close to us is carrying. We may forego something, perhaps for a time, in order to preserve love and unity in the family. I know a Christian man who left his job and country to return to his wife's country and family because she could not get over her home-sickness. On a smaller scale, practicing pleasantness and cheerfulness each day are tiny sacrifices we can make. Be ready to listen, help, show appreciation, affection, and respect. Spend time together and do things together. Look for points of connection. Find service projects in the home and outside of the home the family can engage in. Have hope for just as love can die and it can also grow again.

Understanding. Jesus said to **love our neighbours as ourselves**, which means that if we yearn to be understood then we need to take the time to understand those around us rather than trying to change them. That other person close to you in the family is more like you than you think. Do we notice faults in others? We understand these things because we are prepared to look into our own hearts and admit the same faults. We can also understand the good in family members, the desire to help, wanting to explore and try things out, the need for independence and to have responsibility. The Spirit says: **in humility value others above yourselves**. So, let us find the value in those close to us through understanding.

Finally, forgive. Condemning, attacking, finding fault, criticising, punishing, correcting and generalising about people do not grow a righteous life. Some things have to be called out but they are not the Christian's modus operandi. Build-up, affirm, explain actions, look for the best in each other and encourage are the approach of God's holy children. Family members have to face consequences but must do so in the embrace of forgiveness and reconciliation. Forgiveness entails the desire to restore rather than to hold on to a grievance.

We have the ideal of family but to reach this ideal we must be Christ-minded, which is to love, understand and forgive.