



“But those who did welcome him, those who believed in his name, he authorized to become God’s children, born not from blood, nor from human desire or passion, but born from God.” - John 1:12-13

“Keep loving each other like family.” — Hebrews 13:1 (CEB)

“We are a family,” we sometimes say of the church. And as followers of Jesus, we often refer to each other as “brothers and sisters in Christ”. But what do we mean?

The Bible uses the concept of family in a variety of ways to describe the community of those who believe in God and follow Jesus. Exploring some of these Scriptures, we’ll discover what it means to be a church family, and we’ll consider how the Bible might inform and shape our life together as the “family of God”.

Discussions marked with an * and highlighted in red can be used to skip through the lessons for Circles meeting less often than weekly or biweekly.

WE ARE FAMILY

MAY 10: WE ARE FAMILY (John 1:12-13) **(Mother's Day)**

What does it mean to be a church family? What distinguishes a church family from any other group of people that feels a connection or kinship? How does a church family compare to our blood families, which more often than not come with both blessings and challenges?
Jesus invites us not into private relationship, but into a family!

MAY 17: FAMILY VALUES (Hebrews 13:1-8) **(Featuring the Confirmation Class)**

Every family has a foundation of values, sometimes spoken and sometimes unspoken. So what are the values of the church family? Would an outsider be able to identify what is most important?
The purpose and power of the church family is found in its reflection of the values lived and taught by Jesus.

MAY 24: SACRIFICE (Philippians 2:1-11) **(Memorial Day Weekend)**

Jesus gave his life for us. So what does that mean for how we live and who we are as a church family? How might a clear understanding of forgiveness and sacrifice transform our relationships?
Forgiveness and sacrifice, as shared with us in the life of Jesus, are the foundation of a strong and loving family.

MAY 31: LEGACY (Proverbs 22:6) **(Celebrating 2020 Graduates)**

Jesus instructed his followers to go and share. We know Jesus today through witnesses who shared the Good News with us. So how are we sharing it with the next generation? What do you want your faith legacy to be?
The church family is called to witness to Jesus from generation to generation.

WE ARE FAMILY

DAILY QUESTIONS

MAY 11-16

We Are Family

- Monday Read Proverbs 31:10-31. Who, in your life, has been a model of faithful living?
- Tuesday Read John 1:12-13. What does it mean to be a child of God?
- Wednesday Read Mark 3:31-35. What does being part of a church family mean to you?
- Thursday Read John 19:25-27. What do we learn from Jesus on the cross about family and caring in the midst of grief and loss?
- Friday Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9. How are we, as a church family, all involved in and responsible for raising our children to know Jesus?
- Saturday Read Matthew 19:13-15. How can you help the church family "bring children to Jesus"?

MAY 18-23

Family Values

- Monday Read Joshua 24:14-15. What values are most important in your family?
- Tuesday Read Hebrews 13:1-8. What values of the church family does the author of Hebrews share?
- Wednesday Read Matthew 5:1-12. Which of the Beatitudes, the "blessings" shared by Jesus, is most challenging to you?
- Thursday Read Colossians 3:1-17. Which of these teachings do you think our church family most needs to hear today?
- Friday Read Exodus 20:1-21. What core values are found in the Ten Commandments?
- Saturday Read James 1:19-27. What values matter most to James?

MAY 25-30

Sacrifice

- Monday Read Philippians 2:1-11. What does this passage teach about sacrifice?
- Tuesday Read 1 John 3:16-18. What is the relationship of love and sacrifice?
- Wednesday Read Luke 9:23-27. What do you think Jesus means when he tells his followers to take up their cross each day?
- Thursday Read 1 Chronicles 29:1-9. When have you witnessed a sacrifice that led others to also give of themselves?

WE ARE FAMILY

Friday	Read Ephesians 4:25-32. In what ways can forgiveness and holding your tongue be a sacrifice for someone else?
Saturday	Read Hebrews 9:11-14. How does Christ's example encourage you to live a life that uplifts others?

JUNE 1-6

Legacy

Monday	Read Acts 2:1-13. Where have you witnessed the Holy Spirit moving in the community of Jesus followers?
Tuesday	Read Deuteronomy 4:9-14. What have we witnessed of God that we should not forget, and that we must teach our children?
Wednesday	Read Exodus 12:24-28. What stories of God do you hope the children of the church will know?
Thursday	Read Isaiah 54:9-17. How does peace come from children being "taught by the Lord" (NIV)?
Friday	Read Proverbs 22:6. If you could go back and share a Scripture or Bible story with yourself as a child or teen, what would you share?
Saturday	Read Psalm 145. What do you want your legacy of faith to be?

WE ARE FAMILY

WE ARE FAMILY

SERMON ON MAY 10, 2020

When we baptize someone at Clay Church, the pastor says, "I commend to you [name of person] whom we this day recognize as a member of the family of God. Will you nurture [her] in the Christian faith and life and include [her] in your care?" So what does it mean to be part of the family of God? Let's look at what the Bible has to say.

- **What is one of your favorite family memories or stories?**

Read and discuss John 1:12-13.

- **What do you think John means when he says those who believe in Jesus are born from God?**
- **What does it mean to you to be a child of God?**

Rev. Dr. Amy Peeler, a professor at Wheaton College, teaches that the early church practiced "fictive kinship", treating and referring to fellow believers as family. The Gospel of Mark says that Jesus taught this idea of a "family of believers" early in his ministry. The story in Mark 3:20-35 has an interesting structure called a chiasm. Think of it as a "story sandwich".

3:20	<i>The crowd</i> comes to Jesus desiring to hear more
3:21	<i>The family</i> of Jesus arrives to take him away
3:22	<i>The legal experts</i> challenge Jesus
3:23-29	Jesus speaks and teaches
3:30	<i>The legal experts</i> still don't get it
3:31-32	<i>The family</i> of Jesus are still on the outside
3:33-35	<i>The crowd</i> is told that those who do the will of God are family

What makes the "story sandwich" fascinating is the movement and the focus on what stands in the middle. Those closest to Jesus don't understand his mission or his ministry. Those further away, however, are invited to be family by doing the will of God. And at the center of the story Jesus says: "People can be forgiven all their sins..." (NIV). Being part of the family of God isn't about bloodlines or status or what you know. Being part of the family of God is about what you do.

Read and discuss Mark 3:20-35

- **Who does Jesus say will be part of his family?**
- **What does it mean to "do God's will"?**

WE ARE FAMILY

*Discuss the characteristics of a church family shared by Pastor Brian.

Mark 3:31-35.	A church family does God's will.
Galatians 6:1-2	A church family is human and sometimes messy.
John 19:25-27	A church family cares for each other, particularly those who are alone.
Matthew 28:19	A church family is always looking to grow as a community where everyone is loved and where everyone belongs.
Romans 8:12-17	A church family lives by a different set of values than the rest of the world.
Deuteronomy 6:4-9	A church family passes the story of God's love in Jesus from generation to generation.

- Where do you see these characteristics in your church family?
- What characteristics do you think are missing from this list?
- What would you share to encourage someone else to be part of a church family?
- How can you, or your Clay Circle, contribute to passing the story of God's love to another generation?

TAKE THE NEXT STEP!

1. Contact Tori Yoder (tyoder@claychurch.com) or Desi Ash (dash@claychurch.com) and offer to contribute as a volunteer in Clay Church's FaithWorks! Children's Ministry or Firehouse Youth Ministry.
2. Write out all the reasons you think having a church family is important, or what difference having a church family makes in your life. Share your list with someone.
3. Think of someone who doesn't have a church family. Commit to inviting him or her to join you 4 times in the next 4 months for connection with your Clay Church family – worship, Circle, an online connection, etc.. Don't worry about whether the answer is yes or no. Offer the invitation and let the Holy Spirit direct what happens next.

WE ARE FAMILY

FAMILY VALUES

SERMON ON MAY 17, 2020

Have you ever heard, or said, something like this? “That’s the way we do things in this family.” Or, “That is not the way we do things in this family!” Every family has values. Sometimes, however, if values aren’t named, there can be a disconnect between spoken values and lived values. So let’s talk about the values of our church family.

- **What are the most important values in your household?**
- **Or, what were the most important values of your family during your childhood?**

The last chapter of the Book of Hebrews begins with these words: “Keep loving each other like family” (CEB). The author then lays out a list of “family values” for the gathering community.

***Read and discuss Hebrews 13:1-8.**

- **What values do you find in this passage from Hebrews?**
- **Which of these resonate for you?**
- **Do you think they all apply to our church family today? Why or why not?**
- **Which values are most challenging?**

Our Confirmation students shared on Sunday what teachings of the Bible are most important to them and why. From the teachings shared by Jesus, to the lists of codes and values found in the letters of the New Testament, the Bible teaches the core values of being a follower of Jesus. These are our “church family” values.

Read and discuss Matthew 5:1-12 (Beatitudes).

- **What values does Jesus teach in the Beatitudes?**
- **Which of these teachings is most important to you?**
- **Which is most challenging?**

Read and discuss Colossians 3:1-17.

- **What values do you find in this passage?**
- **Which of these do you think our church family cherishes?**
- **Which of these do you think our church family needs to talk about more?**

WE ARE FAMILY

In the times of Jesus, the individualism we celebrate in Western culture today didn't exist, and one's identity was tied directly to one's family. Honor and shame were important concepts, as everything you did, from your work to your social standing, could bring honor or shame to the whole family. Thus, when the Bible talks about being children of God, or brothers and sisters as believers, this was accompanied by the truth that the way you lived, the values you lived by, reflected on the whole family and on Jesus.

"This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other."
– John 13:35

- Think of people in the area of Michiana not connected to Clay Church. If they joined us for worship or encountered our church family in another way, what values do you think they would say mattered most to our Clay Church family? And why?

TAKE THE NEXT STEP!

1. With the Bible as a guide, create a list of 8 to 10 values that matter most to you.
2. With everyone in your family present, make a list of the values that are most important to your family. Discuss if others would know your values by what they see of your family.
3. Write a note to one of our confirmation students that encourages them in their faith exploration and study and shares what you value in your faith.

Current Confirmation Students

WE ARE FAMILY

SACRIFICE

SERMON ON MAY 24, 2020

On Memorial Day, we remember and honor those in the military who died while serving their country, protecting and fighting for our freedom. These men and women are heroes who have made the ultimate sacrifice for others. We love stories of heroes. Why? Because there is no greater act than risking one's life to save another. And at the heart of our faith story is the ultimate sacrifice!

- Who is someone who has made a sacrifice in his or her life to make your life better?
- What sacrifice have you made for someone else?

*Read and discuss Philippians 2:1-11.

- What does this passage teach about sacrifice?
- What does sacrifice look like in our daily lives?

In the Old Testament book of Chronicles, King David has a dream of building a great Temple for God, but God tells him he won't build the Temple. How would you feel if your big dream was smashed? David responds not by lamenting, but by setting aside a huge gift from his personal fortune so that his son Solomon will be able to build. He then invites the people of Israel to also make a sacrificial gift.

Read and discuss 1 Chronicles 29:1-9.

- What do you think helped David get over the disappointment of not seeing his dream become a reality in his lifetime?
- When have you witnessed a sacrifice that led others to be more willing to make a sacrifice themselves?

The letter to the Hebrews speaks to followers of Jesus who are facing persecution and tempted to give up. It tells them that sacrifice and suffering are part of a life of faith, and it grounds this teaching in the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus. This sacrifice, the letter says, finds its meaning in the Old Testament sacrifices at the Temple, which were given to cleanse one of sin.

Read and discuss Hebrews 9:11-15.

WE ARE FAMILY

- What does this passage say is the purpose or result of Christ's sacrifice?
- How does Christ's example encourage you to live a life of sacrifice for others?

*Read and discuss 1 John 3:16-18.

- What is the relationship of love and sacrifice?
- How can acts of sacrifice and forgiveness be the foundation of a strong and loving family?

TAKE THE NEXT STEP!

1. Think of someone who has made a sacrifice for you. Write him or her a letter of thanks this week.
2. Offer a sacrifice of your time, energy, or resources for someone else this week. As you do, reflect on the sacrifice Jesus made for you and for everyone.
3. Forgiveness is a sacrifice, choosing to give up justice or what one owes in favor of a restored relationship. Offer forgiveness to someone this week. If appropriate, write him or her a note or talk through what forgiveness means to you.

WE ARE FAMILY

LEGACY

SERMON ON MAY 31, 2020

Billy Graham once said, "The greatest legacy one can pass on to one's children and grandchildren is not money or other material things accumulated in one's life, but rather a legacy of character and faith." Do you ever think about the legacy you want to leave? Sometimes this is a conversation we avoid, because we don't like talking about death. The conversation of legacy, however, is less about death and more about how we want to live so that our lives make a difference, an impact. The Bible speaks often of legacy of God's people, of the family of God.

- **Who is someone whose legacy has impacted your life?**

In Exodus, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Proverbs, Psalms, and 1 Timothy, among other places, the Bible emphasizes the importance of telling the story of God's deliverance and God's grace to the next generation. We often think of this task as the responsibility of a few "paid" church professionals and select volunteers in the church, but the Biblical witness emphasizes that this is the responsibility of both the immediate family and the whole church family.

***Read Proverbs 22:6.**

- **If you could go back and share a Scripture or Bible story with yourself as a child or teen, what would you share and why?**
- **How could we all be more involved, as families and as a church family, in raising the next generation in faith?**

In the Old Testament, the festival celebrations were given by God to the people with instructions to remember what God had done while celebrating what God was currently doing. The stories of the past became a testimony to God's promise and faithfulness that reminded the people that God is also present and active now.

Read and discuss Deuteronomy 4:9-14.

- **What are your favorite Bible stories to teach to children?**
- **What stories of God at work in the world today should we be sharing with our children?**

WE ARE FAMILY

The Psalms of the Bible carry a rich legacy of faith. They share, from generation to generation, the witness of the faithful, including the struggles and the victories. Several of the Psalms are written to share the story of what God has done in the lives of God's people, and Psalm 145 carries this sharing one step further, calling for the telling of the story from each generation to the next.

Read and discuss Psalm 145.

- What do you want your legacy of faith to be?
- What are you doing now to foster that legacy?

TAKE THE NEXT STEP!

1. Talk with your family about what you want your legacy to be.
2. Write your own psalm, sharing what God has done in your time and in your life. Share it with your family or with a friend.
3. Contact Tori Yoder (tyoder@claychurch.com) or Desi Ash (dash@claychurch.com) and leave a faith legacy as a volunteer in Clay Church's FaithWorks! Children's Ministry or Firehouse Youth Ministry.