



ELIZABETHTOWN
CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

PRACTICING PEACE, SERVICE AND OPENNESS TO ALL

Family Matters
Part 1

Luke 10.38–42

By Pastor Greg Davidson Laszakovits
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777 South Mount Joy Street
Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania 17022
717-367-1000
www.ETOWNCOB.ORG

FAMILY MATTERS

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Over the next four weeks we are going to celebrate and analyze the family. As we all know, things have changed over the years. At the macro level our culture has changed with the modern onset of rapid information, ever-present technology, inexpensive and accessible travel, and so on. These changes affect how our families operate and relate. We live further away from our extended families than we once did and see them less often because of that. Personal electronic devices change the ways we communicate with one another and the amount of eye contact we give one another. And the parents are to blame as much, or more so, than the kids.

Changes are also occurring that are not tech related. For example, more parents work outside the home and more children are in day care, in school programs, and with extended family and friends as caregivers. Extensive research, new information, and the new awareness of the reality of child abuse has had a negative side effect of keeping children indoors more than just a few years ago, and certainly more closely guarded than in years past. Even biologically things are changing as children are reaching puberty earlier than just 15 years ago.[1]

Whether these changes are good or bad on balance, either way we note that family life is different now than it was just a generation ago.

Yet, no matter the time or era in which we live, the truth remains. **Family matters.** It matters because we count on our families. It matters because our families of origin shape us as children into the people we become as adults, and then shape us as parents and grandparents as we become the story all over again. How many of us have said something to our kids, our nieces and nephews, and cringed

2 when we realize just how much that sounded like something mom or dad used to say?

Because family matters we are going to talk about, well, family matters, matters of the family. That's the fun word play in this title. Next week Pastor Jason will share what it is like to be a new dad and how that has changed him, his marriage, and his life. The following week I will talk about chosen families, those families that God puts in our lives that may not be biological, but that lift us up. Pastor Pam will conclude the series with some thoughts on siblings.

Today, let's spend a little more time on **why families matter**. I listed a scripture in Ruth in the bulletin but really want to point to a number of biblical examples of family. I will get to Ruth in week three. In the Biblical story, we see families and family systems galore. From the infidelity of King David, to the parental favoritism and sibling rivalry between Joseph and his brothers. And jumping forward to Jesus' time we read of Mary and Martha's differing personalities leading to intra-familial friction. Family matters.

Family matters because it is a huge part of our happiness or unhappiness. Bonnie McFarlane said, "I once gave my husband the silent treatment for an entire week at the end of which he declared, "Hey, we're getting along pretty great lately!" In all seriousness though, our home lives have a huge impact on the rest of our lives.

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

⁴¹“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴²but few things are needed—or indeed only one.^[a] Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

I try not to question Jesus, but...I doubt everything was honky dory between these two sisters after that exchange.

Family matters because our families are where we experience our highest highs and our lowest lows. We experience life and death. Success and failure. Our families know our strangest personality quirks, but also why those quirks exist. No one knows us like our family.

Family matters because it is in our families that we learn how to live in this world. Families are the place where we have the ability to hurt one another very deeply, and redeem one another most beautifully. And odds are, we will do both over lifetimes. Families are where we learn to live with bitterness and self-interest or forgiveness and grace. And that love can cover a wide-range of inadequacies.

Because our families are so important to who we are and our well-being, they also matter to God. Families are often building blocks in the Biblical narrative—the setting in which God’s presence is real, and action unfolds. We see this beautifully depicted in Adam and Eve, Mary and Joseph and Jesus, and siblings Martha and Mary and Lazarus.

But the Bible doesn’t leave out the hard stuff. In the real world there is pain and hardship and letdowns. And the same goes for the real world of families in the Bible. The creation story begins with the formation of the first family, Adam and Eve. Then ends with the first family fight, and eventually the first murder with Cain and Abel.

As we know well, with the roses come the thorns in all families, not just Biblical families.

4 One of the first promises that the Israelites heard from God was to make their families even bigger to provide stability. Yet, again, with the good comes the bad as Abraham almost sacrifices his son Isaac to show the depth of his devotion to God. That must've been a fun story to relive every year at Thanksgiving.

Families have the ability to harm, yes. But also the ability to save and redeem one another, even when those families don't fit the conventional mold. It is not a husband, a wife, 1.8 kids, a dog and a white picket fence that makes the family. It is love and devotion and understanding and empathy and much more. In week three we are going to see an extended family—really a chosen family—live through crises because they have one another, and are faithful to one another.

Families are where we learn to overcome misunderstandings. Story is told of a wedding ceremony where the pastor asked the standard line...‘if anyone had anything to say concerning the union of the bride and groom, speak or forever hold your peace’.

The moment of utter silence was broken by a young beautiful woman carrying a child stood up and started walking slowly towards the front.

Everything quickly turned to chaos.

The bride threw the bouquet and burst out crying, the groom's mother fainted, the groomsmen started giving each other looks and wondering how best to help save the situation.

As the woman neared the front the pastor asked the woman, “Can you tell us, why you came forward. What do you have to say?”

There was absolute silence in the church.

The woman replied, “We can’t hear in the back. Can you speak a little louder?”

If only all family misunderstandings could be resolved so easily.

Families matter because they impact our faith. For example, when we pray to God as father, or even mother, what does that mean if your father or mother was abusive? It could be redemptive to know that there is another, wonderful, father mother in your life, God. Or it could block you from a full relationship with God. How about when we talk about the church as family? We could have similar blessings and challenges. These days, as this congregation lives under the scrutiny and threats from our extended church family at the district level, it feels more like we have a bullying, abusive older brother, than a sibling in Christ. How does that impact our relationship with God?

And it can go the other way too. If our family of faith is one where love is found, grace is extended, healthy boundaries are set, and justice is practiced, we can carry those good habits even into our dysfunctional family systems. As one of my friends said, you can put the “fun” back in dysfunctional.

I am really looking forward to these weeks ahead and hope you will come back as we live as God’s family and learn more about creating healthier families. Because it’s true: family matters.

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A FAMILY BLESSING

May you and your family, whether biological, church or chosen be blessed....

Blessed with commitment that draws us together to work out our differences.

Blessed with love that helps us to celebrate together and care for one another.

Blessed with Hope that rides like a banner in our lives and watches over us wherever we go.

Blessed with perseverance that overcomes adversity and gathers strength to overcome.

Blessed with vision for our future alone and together.

Blessed with love.

Blessed with the Spirit that fuels faith and breathes peace.

