

Riverview Baptist Church
Sunday School Lesson Guide
September 14, 2014
"The Family of God"

Memory verse:

"...you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." 1 Tim. 3:15

Kickoff:

Start out with a discussion about family. What makes a family strong? What makes a good family environment? How does a family act? None of our families is perfect and none of our families is totally bad, even if we've come from a negative background, so encourage people to briefly share some specific (or general) things they've learned about what makes a family loving and close.

Since the day we are born, we are members of a physical, flesh and blood family. Whether they love us, dislike us or disown us, nothing can ever sever that tie. Hopefully, we each have experienced more good than bad as we've grown up in our families. Even though they know better, brothers and sisters fight over toys and attention and who gets to ride up front with mom or dad to go run errands. More often than not, though, sisters will stand up against any gossip or bad mouthing of their siblings and brothers have been known to bust a nose or lip to protect their younger brother or defend their sister's honor. We love each other, we protect each other, we serve each other and learn from each other... and, yes, quite often we drive each other crazy. That's part of being an individual and yet also a part of a family.

Since the day we are saved, we are members of a spiritual family: the church, the Body of Christ. Once we are a part of that body, nothing can ever sever that tie. As we grow up in this family, we experience the good and the bad from our brothers and sisters. We might fight over our preferred music, the budget and the color of the carpet, even though we know better, but we also pray for each other, fellowship and eat together (especially Baptists,) and we take care of each other when we're sick or in need... even though, sometimes, we drive each other crazy. That's part of being an individual in the Family of God.

So while these two families are very similar in a lot of ways, the Family of God, the Church, has a few distinct advantages. First of all, our Heavenly Father is loving and perfect; our earthly parents, no matter how well-intentioned and loving, are not perfect any more than we are. Second, while our earthly families have operated under one or more sets of rules or traditions, and certain expected behaviors, their operations and conduct are only as good as those who oversee them, which is also to say "imperfect." God's Family has one perfect leader and therefore, one perfect set of rules and code of conduct: the Bible. Is the Bible comprehensive in outlining how to deal with every possible problem that could arrive in His family? Of course not, but, if we obey His commandments then as a family, we can survive (and thrive!) in any situation. Let's take a look at what God's Family should look like and how they should act.

Characteristics of the church family:

1. Obey the will of **the Father**. (Matthew 12:48-50)

These are the words of Jesus. If you are doing His Heavenly Father's will, then Jesus considers you His family. Don't get it twisted. Jesus didn't say if you're feeding the poor or working for a charitable

organization or volunteering at the hospital that you are His family. He also didn't say if you are in church every Sunday or singing in the choir or passing out tracts that you're His family. These are ALL good things to do, godly things to do, but if you're doing them for any reason other than out of a love for the Father and a respect for His will, then you're not necessarily a part of Jesus' family. A couple chapters earlier (Matthew 7:21,) Jesus had made this distinction: *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."* Just a quick look here will show that Jesus knew that there would be some people who claimed to follow Him, but would have no interest in doing the Father's will, and therefore, would have no place in the Kingdom of Heaven, either as His Church in the present or in His Eternal Kingdom. Loving God and seeking to please Him by doing His good and perfect will is THE defining trait of any member of the Family of God.

2. Close **relations** for the journey of obedience with our brothers and sisters in Christ. (1 Peter 2:17, 5:9)

We are not in this alone, and we need not act like it. All that we need in this life, God has already made provision for, if we walk in His will. We each face temptation and suffering of some kind every day of our lives, but we can get help and strength from God himself through the love and support of our Christian brothers and sisters. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:13,

"No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."

Many times, I think we look up to the sky and expect God to send a great, supernatural delivery of stamina and willpower as our "way out" of whatever temptation we face... and sometimes He does. But I imagine, more often than not, while we pray for God to drop miraculously bottled artesian spring water to us in the desert of temptation, if we would look 5 feet to the left or right of us is a well of relief in the form of our Christian brothers and sisters, who have been thirsty for God's deliverance before, and have brought along an extra canteen this time.

If that metaphor is a little too clunky or vague, let's shoot straight. God put us here together. Like we said in last week's lesson on Baptism: there are no Lone Ranger Christians. God's plan involves our living, working and worshiping together. Our lives and experiences aren't just milestones for us to look back on fondly or with regret. Those are gifts from God too that we are to use to help those in our family who are struggling with the hurdles we've already cleared, by God's grace, or are still struggling with ourselves. If we believe that God is sovereign (and we do) then we have to believe that not one event the testimony of our lives is wasted, but can be used in service to Father, even if it's the wisdom we gain from a previous failure or period of suffering. So what's more miraculous? A God that drops water from the clear, blue sky for us, or a God who orchestrates every possible outcome of this world to provide for His children and magnify His own glory? Either which way you answer, our God is MORE miraculous because He can do and does BOTH at the same time. (*"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."* Romans 8:28.)

So a church that draws close together in love for the family of believers lightens the load of those among them who struggle in temptation and suffering and in doing so, lightens their own load for the future when those same brothers and sisters will provide relief in return, and that is part of God's will for us.

3. **Dedication** to God and one another in... (1 Timothy 3:14 – 4:16, Galatians 6:10)

These scriptures are full of instructions for how the Church specifically should conduct themselves during the 1st century A.D. Isn't it amazing that these exact same rules should apply to us almost 2000

years later?! The power of God's word over time is a story for another day, but the fact that these items read as fresh to us as any contemporary issue is a testament to God's sovereignty, indeed.

Finally, this Family of God that we belong to, following the Father's will and drawing close to one another in fellowship and service, must continually dedicate itself to Jesus and one to another. Paul's instructions could be expounded upon for pages and pages, but to be brief, these are just a few disciplines and services we must strengthen in order to persevere and prosper as a family and persist as the "Foundation of the Truth."

a. **Study!** Fight! (1 Tim 4:1-16)

Study God's Word so you will know His Will and won't be deceived when deceiving spirits and demons come to try to drive a wedge between us and God or between us as brothers and sisters. This is How We Defend Our Family. We're not Gunslingers, we're Wordslingers. A man or woman who can handle a gun might fight off a few attackers, but someone who can be used of God to "rightly divide the Word of Truth" can fight off whatever demons Hell can put on the battle field and save the church from deception, division and dissolution.

b. **Generosity!** Give! (Acts 2:44-45 and Acts 4:32-36)

The early Church in Acts gives us a perfect example of the generosity that should be present in the Body of Christ. Nowadays, the politically conservative start to sweat and the politically liberal start to grin when we talk about how those believers had "all things in common," and how the rich business owners sold their lands and properties and "it was distributed as any had need." Let's drop the foolish political context of the 20th century and REALIZE that the reason this generosity was shown had nothing to do with our modern games of Commies and Capitalists, but everything to do with how God showed us to treat each other in His Family. Family sacrifices for each other. We meet each other's needs when we have the means at all. If I'm eating, you ought to be eating and vice versa, or else what kind of family are we?

c. **Prayer!** Connect! (Acts 2:42)

The early church devoted themselves to prayer. They met each other's financial and social needs, and the Apostles met the churches need for spiritual teaching and guidance, but they still all sought the Father for their need for their spiritual needs and to connect with Him. We can give and teach and feed and defend and love our brothers and sisters in Christ, but we will always be only brothers and sisters. We can never replace or complement the love and relationship with God that each family member needs to maintain in order to survive and thrive spiritually on this Earth. One day we will talk to Him like we talk our brothers and sisters now, face to face. Until then we must never get lax about prayer: prayer for ourselves, prayer for the Family of God and prayer to know the Will of our Heavenly Father.

Past: We read stories of the successes of the Church in the most hard and times of persecution, famine and disease imaginable throughout the last 2000 years. It cannot be denied that our God protects and provides for His children.

Present: We have our own present-day testimonies that bear witness to God's faithfulness to His family, even in times when we have grown weak, disrespectful and cold to Him in our failures as individuals and as churches. God's love for His children is perfect and He leads us in our triumphs and He chastises us in our trespasses.

Future: One glorious day, we will truly dwell in the House of the Lord forever. We will be a closer family than we can even imagine (closer to our Father and closer to each other as siblings of our older, perfect Brother, Jesus.) We will walk in Jesus' eternal kingdom as joint heirs in the Family of the Heavenly Father.

Assurances:

Adherence to God's model of Family will give us victory over any trials that seek to divide or disable God's Church. We aren't guaranteed smooth-sailing, but a safe harbor!

**Find a time this week to practice generosity, prayer, Bible study and fellowship with and for your Church Family.