

Growing God's Family

Small Group Lessons

By

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Lesson 1 - Growing God's Family

The 2011 theme at Northwest will be "Growing God's Family" and in our LIFE groups we will be looking at what the Bible teaches about family. These lessons will not just be about nuclear families but about how we all come together to form the family of God.

How do you see the church as your family?

In what ways has the church been like a family to you?

Read Ephesians 2:19-22

What does Paul say his audience used to be?

- Foreigners and aliens

But now what are they all?

- Fellow citizens with God's people
- Members of God's household

What Paul is saying here is that God had his household, the Jews, and now God has added in the Gentiles, non-Jews, to it. They were once far from God but God has brought them near. Notice, God didn't bring us near to be slaves in his household but what? **Fellow citizens.**

That means all Christians, from Jewish or Gentile background, black, white, rich, poor, etc...all have equal footing with God.

Next, Paul tells us what our foundation, as God's house, really is. *What does he say?*

- We are built on top of apostles, prophets and most of all, Jesus Christ.

Why is Christ called a corner stone? Why is that important to the construction of a house?

- If you don't lay the cornerstones straight, at 90 degrees with each other, the whole house will not be square. It will be weak. **See 2:21**
- Jesus is our cornerstone.

What then, as God's household, does that mean for us?

- Our lives are centered on Jesus Christ. Everything else is built around our relationship with Him.

How did the apostles and prophets lay a foundation for Christians to be God's household?

- Through their teaching and sacrifice God's Word was preached and led people to faith in God and in Jesus Christ.

Last, we see the purpose we serve as God's household. *What does Paul say is our purpose in Eph 2:22?*

- We are a place where God dwells through his Holy Spirit

What do you think about being a place the Holy Spirit is a part of?

If you remember back to Acts 2:38 they were told that those who were baptized received the Holy Spirit. Now we see that as a church, we are all God's people and all have the same Spirit within us.

It is important that God receives praise and glory, then, through the way we live our lives and the way we act toward one another.

How would we view each other if we really thought about God being the Father of us all and how we are all "under his roof"?

Application:

How can you express your thankfulness to God for changing your life, from being far off from him to being brought into his household?

Do you know any Christians who you haven't gotten along with that you need to make right? Because they really are your brother or sister in Christ and God wants his children to get along.

Is there anyone the group can pray for who you know who is not a part of God's household but you would like to see them become a part?

What can the group do to encourage you to make a difference for that person?

Lesson 2 - God As Father

One of the most often used symbols for God in scripture is “father.” *How might this be easy or hard to understand based on the relationship we had or didn’t have with our earthly father?*

Scripture outlines so many ways God is a perfect Father to us all. Here are a few verses from scripture that talk about the kind of Father God is to us.

God as our creator/Father:

First, he created each and every one of us – **Psalm 139:13-14**

Notice that God didn’t hastily throw us together. *How does this psalm describe God creating us?*

- Knitting

How does that show the care and carefulness God displays in creating people?

God as compassionate Father:

While our earthly fathers are imperfect. God is the perfect father and he is compassionate toward his children - **Psalm 103:13-14**

How do you believe God shows compassion to mankind?

How has God shown compassion to you?

God as loving Father:

Psalm 103:15-18 tells us just how much God loves us. *How long, does the psalmist say God has love for those who are his children?*

- Everlasting to everlasting = forever

How does the Psalmist define who God’s children are in verse 18?

- Those who keep God’s covenant and are obedient to his commandments/principles

God as disciplining Father:

Just as psalm 103 taught us that God does want us to be obedient, we know that God disciplines us when we rebel against him and that discipline is rooted in His great love for us.

How can discipline come out of love rather than out of anger?

- Someone may have had an abusive earthly father that makes God’s kind of discipline hard to understand.
- It is important to know the motivation for God’s discipline in our lives – he disciplines us in order to lead us closer to Himself - **Proverbs 3:11-12**

How can discipline and delight happen at the same time?

- A loving father will be able to discipline his children in love because he knows it sets them up for future success in life and helps them become mature.

God provides us what we really need:

God gives good gifts to those who ask - **Matthew 7:7-11**

- *What things in your life has God provided?* – Really, every single thing has ultimately come from Him.

This means that God is aware of who we are and what we need. *What comfort does it give you to know that God really is aware of your situation and will watch over you?*

Does that mean we can just sit back and let God take care of everything? Why?

- We still have responsibility to provide what we can for ourselves and our families.
- We cannot just pray that God will put food on the table if we are able but unwilling to do anything to provide for ourselves in whatever ways we can.

The ultimate goal God has for us, as His children, is for us all to be in loving relationship with God. He created us, redeemed us, disciplines and guides us.

What should our response be to a God who treats us like that?

Application:

Do you have trouble with the phrase “perfect Father”?

How have these verses helped you see God in a positive light?

How close do you feel to God, as your Father, in the recent past?

What moves can you make to rely on God more and yourself less?

Lesson 3 - Children of God

Ten times in the New Testament, God's people are referred to as the "children of God". *What does it mean to be a child of God?*

Being children of God has two dimensions. We can think of it vertically – God as our Father. We can also think of it horizontally – that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. This lesson will focus on the first.

Imitators of God:

Ephesians 5:1-4 sheds some light on what it means to be a child of God. *What does Paul say we, as God's children, should do with our lives?*

- Imitate God

What does that really mean...We do things like create the world in seven days?

- It means we try to be like our heavenly Father and be holy and godly

What kind of life does Paul say we should live since we are God's children?

- Lives of love

What does it mean to really live a life of love?

What challenges do you face in living a life like that?

Paul's naughty list:

Starting in verse 3 a list of things are given that are not compatible with living godly lives. *What made the list and why?*

- Sexual immorality, impurity, greed, obscenity, foolish talk, and coarse joking.

Do you struggle with any of those things? How might viewing yourself as God's child help you overcome those struggles?

Holiness as God's children:

Paul says God's people are holy. That is an important thing to remember. It reminds us that we just can't live like the world all around us. Our Father calls us to a better life than that!

Last, Paul puts one positive thing out there that he says should stand in the place of all those negative things. *What does he mention at the end of verse 4?*

- Thanksgiving

How would realizing we our God's children lead us to lives of thanksgiving?

How can thanksgiving help us not engage in the sinful behaviors listed in 5:3-4?

- When we realize how much we have to be thankful for we will be more likely to live the kind of holy lives God wants us to live.

Once you realize that we really are God's children and that we are representing our Father in a world that needs to know Him, it sheds new light on the importance of how we carry ourselves in the world.

When we are making decisions on what we will say, how we will act, the attitudes we have and the way we treat others; it is important enough to ask what our Father would think about our choices. This is more than "What would Jesus do"? The reality of being a child of God means our Father cares about the choices of His children.

What is more, the world often forms an opinion about the Father based on the actions of His children. There is a bumper sticker out there that says, "Lord, save me from your people." *What would inspire someone to put that on their vehicle?*

How can we, as God's people, change people's minds about God through the way we live our lives?

Application – Talk to your God as your loving Father this week. Try each day to understand how God, as your Father, would want you to live your life in a way that brings Him honor.

Practically, one of the biggest difficulties to application is the reality that we will all wake up tomorrow morning with so much on our plate that it would be easy to forget this discussion ever took place. *What is one thing you could do to remind yourself that this week you are living it to bring glory to God as your Father?*

Lesson 4 - Brothers and Sisters in Christ

Last week, our lesson focused on our relationship with God as Father. This week we want to see how Christians relate to each other as “brothers” and “sisters” in Christ. When the church began, many outsiders were confused by them calling each other “brother” and “sister.” Some believed Christians practiced incest because brothers and sisters in Christ were marrying each other. From an outsider’s perspective you can quickly see how this could be confusing.

When Jesus was asked about his earthly family he said that his real brothers and sisters were not just those he was physically related to. **Matthew 12:46-50**

Who did Jesus say were his brothers and sisters?

Have you ever known someone who was like a brother or sister to you but wasn’t a part of your family? What made you feel so strongly about them?

We tend to have so much in common with our family. The thing in life that is most important to have in common is a relationship with God. Jesus is saying that this commonality is so strong, that we can see each other as members of the same family.

Being brothers and sisters in Christ merely means that our common beliefs should draw us into close relationship with other Christians.

It also means we are all equal. No one is greater than anyone else. *Did your family treat all members with fairness and equality? Do you feel your parents showed favoritism? Why?*

Does God show favoritism within his family?

- **See Romans 2:11**

One barrier we have to overcome in our world is that the culture around us loves to play favorites. The world likes to separate people. *What are some categories that the world uses to separate people and tell us we are not all really equal?*

- Race & socio-economic status are two prominent ones
- We often show favoritism to people who are most like ourselves

How might we be tempted to view people in a way that shows favoritism?

How does being reminded that every single person is someone God cares for and Christ died for help us not show favoritism?

It is easy to call another Christian “brother” or “sister” but quite another thing to treat them like that was really true. God wants all of his children to reconcile their relationships with each other by forgiving each other of any ill will that might rise up between us – **Luke 17:3**

God really does want his children to get along. Truly seeing each other as brothers and sisters with God as our Father can go a long way in helping us treat each other as family.

What does it mean to treat someone as family? – It is more than just being nice.

When we treat people like family, not only does it help the church form healthy relationships, but it is also attractive to non-Christians. One of the things we often hear from our visitors at Northwest is how friendly people here are.

Application:

How can we attract or push away non-Christians by the reception they get when they visit our assemblies?

What role can you play in helping them have a positive experience when they step out and come to a place where they may know no one or just a handful of people?

Last, how will the world react if we, as brothers and sisters in Christ, can't get along with each other?

Lesson 5 – God’s Household

One of the ways the New Testament talks about our identity as Christians is that we are all part of God’s household. This doesn’t mean as much to us as it meant to them. In their world your household was your belonging, your identity, your socioeconomic status. The household you were a part of could bring you honor or it could bring you shame. This was a big deal in their world. For God to say we can actually belong to His household was a big deal.

One place we see this in the New Testament is in **Ephesians 2:19-22**

First, Paul says that once we have been reconciled with Christ that God no longer considers us foreigners and aliens.

What does it mean to be a foreigner or alien to God? How would someone get in that position?

- It means to be far off. Our sin alienates from God

What does Paul say we became?

- Fellow citizens with God’s people
- Members of God’s house

What did it take to reconcile us to change our status from aliens to fellow citizens and members of God’s house? (See 2:11-13)

- Jesus Christ did this through his death on the cross

What does the blood of Christ have to do with drawing us closer to God?

- Jesus took our place. He paid the price for our sins. Because he has cancelled our debt of sin we can approach the throne of God’s grace with confidence (**Eph 3:12**)

Next, Paul tells us that our being a part of God’s household has given a foundation to our lives.

What are the three things that come together to give us a foundation?

- Apostles
- Prophets
- Jesus Christ

What is so foundational about those three things...how do they give our lives stability?

- It is about their inspired teaching. Because they reveal the truth about God to us we can stand firm on their teachings.

Notice Jesus stands out. He is called the chief cornerstone. Cornerstones were the most important part of the foundation in ancient houses. Cornerstones were what made the rest of the building square. If your cornerstone was not square or not set properly the whole house would not line up or be built with any kind of quality.

What implications then does Jesus as the cornerstone of our foundation have for our lives?

- It reminds us that we have to be focused on Jesus Christ. We learn from Him. We live for Him. He brings all of what God is doing in the world together and into focus for us.

Last, we see that one of the blessings of being a part of God's household is that we have God's Spirit inside of us (2:22).

This all means that as Christians we have many things that unify us and should put us on the same page and bring us unity:

- We are all under one roof.
- We all have the same cornerstone.
- We all have the same foundation.
- We all have the same Spirit

Yet we see that God's people are not unified. Not only has Christianity split into many different groups but often even individual congregations have a tough time getting along.

Application:

If we really viewed God's people through the lens of Ephesians 2:19-22 how might we be able to achieve better unity as God's people?

Are there any members of God's house you are at odds with? How do these verses motivate you to reconcile that just as Christ has reconciled us all to God?

If the prophets, apostles, and Jesus Christ are to be the foundation of our lives, have you been able to make time out of your schedule to study their teachings? What benefits might come out of regular time spent in God's Word?

Lesson 6 – The Front Door

Last week we talked about how we are part of God's household. Over the next few weeks we are going to think about aspects of Christianity that are like rooms in God's household. One of the first things you experience when entering a house is the front door. There are many kinds of front doors. Some are big and wide with double doors and glass. They are easy to enter and easy to see into from the outside. Other front doors are smaller and have no way to see in so that someone can see what is going on inside.

Ministries help open the door to others:

If you have grown up in the church it may have never occurred to you that the church has a front door. There are avenues through which people come to church and it makes a difference that we are ready for them to come and ready to get people connected in meaningful ways. If we are going to be serious about "Growing God's Family" then it is important to realize the church's "front doors" and "front door ministries".

What do you think are the "front doors" at Northwest?

- Sunday class/worship
- LIFE groups
- Youth group/children's ministry
- Benevolence
- Gulfcoast Christian School
- There can be many things listed here...anything that offers a way for non-members to get involved or attend.

It is important that we all understand the opportunities we have to bring people into atmospheres where they can come into contact with godly people and learn about God. One of the primary front door ministries we have at Northwest is our LIFE group ministry.

People are the real front door:

No matter how many ministries we have or ways to bring people in none of those things are the real front door. You are the front door of the church. When you look at the New Testament and how people became part of the church it was through connections with people, relationships, conversations, and many more things. God works through us to make a difference in the lives of others.

Read Romans 16:1-16 (lots of fun names to read!)

This is a passage of scripture we don't often study but it does highlight how connected Paul was with so many people and what a difference he had made in their lives and the difference they had made in his life.

Who in this list stood out to you based on what Paul said about them?

Have you ever thought about the fact that you could be the open door to someone who needs Jesus Christ?

How would you open the door to them?

Notice that Paul had lots of experiences with these people. Some he had been in prison with. Others were like family to him. Still others he had worked and ministered alongside. This is really all about how we form relationships and how we allow the relationships we have to draw everyone in them closer to the Lord. Paul was very good at that.

What do you think hinders us from being more intentional in our relationships with others when it comes to being that open door in their lives?

Last, notice that many of these people had churches meeting in their homes and Paul knew their whole household. *How is that similar to what we are doing right now in our groups?*

What makes a LIFE group such a good place to invite someone who might not otherwise come to the building on Sunday morning?

- It is non-threatening
- Often people will go to someone's home before they will enter a church building
- Fewer people usually make things more personable and friendly
- Again...it is all about the people and how we care for others and share with them how much God loves them.

Application:

How might your LIFE group be more invitational to non-Christians?

Who do you know that you can be an open door to? Why is it important that you provide that to them, even if they turn you down?

Spend some time praying that we might open our doors to more people so that we can help them draw closer to Jesus Christ.

Lesson 7 - The Living Room

The central feature of most homes are the living room. The living rooms in our home provide an informal space where we can be comfortable with each other and share life with each other in an informal setting. The same is true within the congregation. We know that when we worship in the auditorium on Sunday morning, because there are so many people and only so much time, our time is not typically as relaxed as the time we spend in our living rooms at home. That is okay too. We need time where the whole church is together and Sunday morning provides exactly that. We also need time in smaller, more relaxed settings, where we can spend time with each other in more meaningful, personal, conversations than often happen with 500 people in the room.

We are not the only ones who have dealt with the types of spaces we have and how they are used. The early church also used multiple locations to accomplish their mission.

The Early Church - Read Acts 2:46-47

What two places do these verses tell us the new Christians met on a regular basis?

- Temple courts
- Homes

Why are temple courts and being in someone's home very dissimilar places?

How might these two different places accomplish different purposes in the life of the early church?

- **Temple** - The large area the temple provided could accommodate more people in order to teach, preach, sing, etc. This was the church in public
- **Homes** - The smaller setting of the home offered a place to take the Lord's Supper, study, pray, and fellowship with each other in a smaller setting. This was the church in a more private and personal setting.

The church needs both. We need public venues and more private venues.

What are some things we can do more effectively in the larger, more public settings with more people than we can in homes?

What are some things we can do more effectively in the smaller, more private setting of the home?

The living rooms in our home can be places of fun and fellowship. They can also be places where deeper conversations take place. Both are important in the lives of Christians. We often place a premium on getting deeper and having spiritual intimacy. Maybe that is because we have had so few venues to really live that out in the past. But it is important to realize that all of

our conversations can't take place on the deepest areas of our lives either. We need balance and that is what the church needs to offer.

How do you see what we are doing at Northwest as offering both aspects: fun/fellowship and deeper/more intimate arenas to get below the surface in each other's lives?

The ministry of Jesus:

One more place we can look to find this point being made in the New Testament is in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus didn't spend all of his time in deep spiritual conversation. He went to dinner parties and knew how to celebrate. His very first miracle was performed at a wedding! He also had private time with his disciples to teach them and help them learn and grow in ways that he couldn't accomplish with 100 other people standing around listening. Jesus knew how to balance that and so we should as well.

It is important that as a congregation we communicate to our members the need for this balance so that more and more of our members will find the avenues to grow deeper in their faith. The problem we face is that not everyone has found that balance or takes advantages of the opportunities we have to grow.

Application:

First, what "living room" type ministries do you think we have already at Northwest?

Second, are there things we are missing that could really help advance our mission to make disciples?

Last, how might you be a part of helping more people find this balance in their time spent with other Christians?

- For example, many people only come for an hour on Sunday. There is no way they can be forming deeper relationships with other Christians if that is the only thing they are invested in.
- So how can we help move them to the next level? Invite them to group or start forming a relationship with some of those who are not as connected.

Lesson 8 – The Bedroom

If you ever watch the show “Extreme Makeover: Home Edition” you will see that there is special emphasis given to the construction of the master bedroom. The families helped on this show are typically people who have sacrificed so much for others. When they build homes for these families there is always an emphasis on making the master bedroom a special place. They typically create a space that is a warm and intimate environment where they can get away from it all.

What words would you use to describe how an ideal bedroom would feel?

What do you find special about your bedroom at home?

If you remember a few years ago when Jerry and Lynn Jones had a marriage seminar at Northwest they defined intimacy like this, “The freedom from anxiety in the presence of vulnerability.” That definition works in marriage and it works in regard to spiritual intimacy as well. We need spaces in our relationships with God and with other Christians where we can be vulnerable with others.

Why is it important that we can connect with other Christians on a deeper spiritual level than just “hi, how are you?”?

What could having a spiritually deep conversation with another Christian include?

- Sharing struggles or confessing sin (**Gal 6:2 & James 5:16**)
- Praying for someone right there rather than telling them you will do it later
- Reading and discussing scripture together

Jesus is the model of what it means to be approachable. People were drawn to him. If we are going to get closer with other Christians we also have to be approachable. *What made Jesus so approachable to draw so many people to himself?*

- Kindness and compassion made people not fear “being real” and vulnerable in his presence.

Read **John 8:1-11** to see how Jesus allowed this woman to be vulnerable in his presence and in doing so helped her grow closer to God.

What made her vulnerable right there in the presence of Jesus?

- Her sins and imperfections

How did Jesus respond to her imperfections?

It is amazing how patient Jesus was with people. Some of us struggle to be patient with the mistakes of others and it isn't even our blood that is needed to cleanse them of their sins. Jesus was a patient man.

How did Jesus' patience open up the door to really connect with this woman in a way that helped her get closer to God rather than drive her further away?

How might we learn from that example when people share struggles with us?

Judging others is the quick and easy route. You don't have to get your hands dirty or really listen if you rush to judgment. But that is not usually the best route to use when someone is really being honest and confessing something they have a problem with.

When someone approaches us with a problem, what might we learn from Jesus' approach with this woman that would help us draw them closer to God rather than push them further away?

We have to pieces that work together here in order for us to have closer relationships with each other. On one hand, we have to be approachable and Christ-like so that people will feel comfortable talking with us about difficult things. On the other hand we some times need to be willing to share things that are sometimes difficult to share. But if everyone is acting like Jesus acted we wouldn't have any difficulties doing this at all!

Application:

Do you have any negative past experiences that might make it hard for you to put your guard down around other Christians? How might that be overcome?

Are you the kind of person someone could talk to if they needed someone in their corner or had a weakness they needed help or accountability with? Why?

What characteristics of Jesus' approachability are the easiest and hardest for you? (compassion, patience, etc)

Prayer – spend time praying for your group. Pray that God would open up our hearts to be honest with each other and be able to get any help that we might need from the members of our group.

Lesson 9 – The Kitchen

Nearly everything that happens in the kitchen is done to serve others. It is a place of service. This is true today and it was true in ancient times as well. Typically in our homes there is a lot of hard work that happens in the kitchen that results in a lot of joy and time together in the dining room (next week's lesson). This week and next we will examine how service and celebration really go together in our Christian walk. Just like the kitchens in our homes, congregations need to have venues to serve two groups: other Christians and non-Christians.

Why is serving others an important expression of our faith?

Jesus was the ultimate example of service. He taught about service in verses like **Matthew 23:11-12**

What does Jesus say will be the result of the one who serves vs. the one who exalts themselves?

Jesus took serving seriously not just in his teaching but also in practice. *When were some times in Jesus life that he took on the role of a servant?*

Why did the Jesus, who is God and a King, serve people the way He did when He didn't have to?

One of the biggest moments of Jesus showing his disciples what it meant to be a servant was when he washed their feet in John 13. **Read John 13:1-17**

In washing their feet Jesus was setting a very clear example of how they were to treat each other. He even tied a blessing to their follow through on serving each other.

Why is it easier to serve others once we have seen Jesus do it?

What does Jesus teach us here about how we treat our "enemies" as he even washed Judas feet?

Why is that difficult to practice in real life for us today?

Serving others is not just about being nice to other Christians or helping those we are friends with already. **Read Galatians 6:9-10**

What does Paul say will happen if we keep on doing good to others?

- We will reap a harvest

What do you think he means by "reap a harvest"?

- Bring people to Jesus
- Bring about other good things in the lives of others

He says “as we have opportunity”...is there a day that goes by that we don’t have opportunity to do good to someone? How might we get better at recognizing those opportunities?

- Pray for God to open our eyes to see the opportunities that surround us every single day

Who does he say we should do good to? Our friends, our family...?

- All men or all people...everyone!

What makes some people more challenging to do good for than others?

- Some won’t appreciate it
- Some people don’t like us
- Some people we may not like for whatever reason

It is possible that once we see even people we find difficult as someone we can serve rather than someone we can avoid that our heart toward them can change. *How does service open the door to seeing people in new ways, as opportunities rather than obstacles?*

So our service is not limited by lack of opportunities but by our own willingness to look for opportunity and help those we can help in the ways we can. If we follow the example and teaching of Jesus and the teaching of Paul all Christians will live lives of service that look beyond ourselves and into the lives of those around us to see how we can each make a difference each and every day.

Application:

Who is someone you can serve this week who is in need?

How is a way your group can meet a need you might have that you have been reluctant to share, or at least pray for you in regarding that need?

Note to leaders: Remember our groups are to have 2 service projects each year where you get outside the walls of the home and out where other people are to make a difference. This might be a good time to talk about what things your group might pursue in the coming weeks/months.

Lesson 10 – The Dining Room

The early church sprung out of Jewish culture and in that culture table fellowship was a big deal. Throughout Jesus' ministry we find him in homes eating with people at their tables. We see it at the Last Supper and we see it in the early church. God's people find the table a valuable place to fellowship with one another. We have lost some of that today. Many families no longer eat together. It is rare for Christians to spend time around the table as well.

What valuable benefits come from families eating together that they might miss otherwise?

- It can be a time for parents and children to talk about their day, pray together, and connect

The value of time together starts in the home. It starts with parents re-emphasizing and re-prioritizing this with their children. From there it more readily spills over into the church through our fellowship meals and LIFE groups.

Why do you think families don't spend as much time around the table together as they once did?

In the Bible many of the meals God's people ate together in both Old and New Testaments were reminders of their covenant with God. We will look at an example from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament.

Old Testament:

God's covenant with Moses was confirmed through their eating a meal with God.

Read Exodus 24:1-11

How does God at first maintain distance between himself and his people?

Why do you think God does that? What is he emphasizing?

Then Moses reads God's words to the people by reading from the Book of the Covenant and he sprinkles them with blood. *What do you think it symbolized when Moses sprinkled them with blood?*

At this point God allowed them to approach him. He was no longer far off and distant. *What had changed in verses 7-8 that God allowed them to approach his throne?*

Notice, it says they saw God! Wow, now that would be an amazing thing. *What do we see God not doing in verse 11? What do we see those 74 men doing in God's presence in the same verse?*

- They had a meal in the presence of God

Some of the deepest forms of fellowship we see in scripture between people and even between us and God is table fellowship. God was allowing them to approach his throne in a very close and connected way. We know that Jesus has also allowed us all, not just 74 men or certain priests, to come into God's presence today. **Read Hebrews 4:14-16**

What does the Hebrew writer say we are allowed to do because of Jesus' sacrifice for us?

We see this meal paralleled in Jesus' ministry at the last supper. **Read Matthew 26:26-29**. In Exodus 24:8 we saw the blood of the covenant that allowed the people to draw near to God. In Matthew 26:27 Jesus, at the Last supper, calls his blood the "blood of the covenant". Just like the Israelites at the foot of Sinai, we too must be cleansed by blood to be forgiven and take part in the new covenant with God. Once we have been made right with God in that way, we are able to approach God and be in his presence in a very real and profound way.

Jesus said we do this to remember him. In introducing the Supper, there are several things we can remember:

1. We can have somber thoughts because his body was broken and his blood spilled.
2. We have joy/celebration because we remember the empty tomb
3. We have hope because he pointed toward his return

Which of those three do you think gets emphasized the most?

Why should realizing all God has done for us result in great celebration?

Application:

What are some ways we can recognize the communal nature of the Supper when we take it?

- Pray for those around us
- Share with a loved one what Jesus means to us

For the families in the groups, how can they incorporate the meal back into how they spend time as a family (if that is absent)?

What potential good can come from the close and connected time we spend around the table as either a physical family or as a spiritual family?

Lesson 11 - Spiritual Bricks

One of the most important things a family can do for its members is give its members something to belong to where they feel loved and accepted. When people have an environment like that they can call home our families will be strong and unified.

What should be the most important unifying element in a Christian home?

Read 1 Peter 2:4-5

Who is the "living stone" that Peter is talking about here?

- Jesus Christ

Who else does Peter say are like stones or bricks?

What does he say God is doing with us, as these stones?

Peter begins building (no pun intended) the analogy that God is building for himself a spiritual house. Through Christ he begins to lay the foundation and on that foundation we are laid as well. When it all comes together God has built a complete and unified spiritual house.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-11

How does Christ Jesus act as the foundation for the life of the Christian?

How does this brick and mortar example teach us about our need for unity with other Christians?

- If we build our lives on Christ we will have unity with each other because we are allowing God to lay us side-by-side to be built according to God's own purposes.

How does Satan try to pull the bricks apart so that we cannot accomplish our purposes as Christians or as a church?

If God has built us together into a spiritual house that means the church is not just a place we meet on Sunday. The spiritual reality of it all is that we are the church and God has connected us shoulder to shoulder with one another. What is said in a marriage ceremony can also be said of God's church..."what God has joined let no man separate."

How would we treat other Christians if we viewed them as the brick God placed right beneath our own?

The point is, if we don't treat other Christians appropriately it has far reaching consequences. Therefore, we are to make every effort to make things right with each other. If there are any

other “bricks” we don’t get along with then we need to start viewing them as God does to make it easier to care for them the way we should.

Application:

What do you believe your purpose is as part of God’s spiritual house? (how can you use your talents, time, etc for the greater good is what is being asked here)

How can viewing God’s people as a spiritual house made up of individual Christian bricks motivate us to invite those bricks that are just lying around doing other things to come be a part of God’s household? - We will talk more about that next week.

What can you do this week to build up the household of God?

- Encourage someone, reach the lost, comfort the hurting or mourning, etc

Lesson 12 - An Invitation to God's Family

Over the last several weeks we have been talking about what life is like in God's family. One thing we have not addressed is that scripture is clear that God has invited all of mankind to be part of His family. Some have accepted and others have not. Our world doesn't like us using language like that because in their minds it might sound arrogant but scripture teaches very clearly on this. *What does **2 Peter 3:9** tell us God desires?*

*Who does Jesus say he will fellowship with in **Revelation 3:20-21**?*

Ephesians 1:5-8

This verse teaches that God adopts people into his family and that this is God's free gift to mankind. *What does verse 7 tell us was necessary for this to be true?*

- Jesus had to shed his blood

What does Paul say came through Christ's shed blood?

A few verses in 1:13-14 Paul mentions something else that had to take place for us to be "included with Christ." *What does Paul say were two things God requires of people to be included with Christ?*

How would you define the Gospel?

- It is God's plan to save mankind. The Gospel involves God sending his Son Jesus Christ into the world to be the perfect sacrifice for our sins. Through Jesus' death and resurrection we know that God has victory over death and has promised us that we too will experience resurrection.

Paul points out that salvation is a gift. It is not something we earn. We don't do more good than bad. God saves us and God alone. Yet, God is looking for a response in our lives to the Gospel. Part of that response is hearing and believing as mentioned above. We learn more in Acts 2.

Read Acts 2:36-37

Peter had just preached from the Old Testament to this group of Jews. He laid out the case that Jesus was the Christ and how he had fulfilled the scriptures prophesied about him. When the crowd realized it was true *what important question did they ask Peter and the apostles?*

That is a very relevant question because people today still need to know what kind of response God wants from us to the truth of the Gospel. With 3000 responses it would have been much easier for Peter to have them repeat a sinners prayer or sprinkle them. But he didn't. How Peter, an inspired apostle, answers the question of how men are to respond to God needs to be our answer when people today ask that same question.

What was Peter's answer? Read Acts 2:38-41

What two things did Peter say they needed to do?

What does the word “repent” mean and why is that important in turning our lives over to God?

Peter tells them they need to be baptized. Some people teach we are to be baptized just to recognize the fact that God has already saved us. That is not really what scripture teaches about baptism. **Read Romans 6:2-14**

Paul says when we are baptized we are baptized into the death of Jesus Christ. He says that those who have been baptized have “died to sin” (6:2) and have been made alive to God in Christ (6:11). So baptism serves a very important purpose in our conversion. It is a reenactment of Jesus death, burial and resurrection (6:5).

How does a baptism resemble a death, burial, and resurrection (See 6:4-5)?

- When you go under the water it is like you died and are buried. When you come up out of the water it is like you are being raised to new life.

If we want new life in Christ it only makes sense that we would unite ourselves with Christ in the way the New Testament describes. Baptism is more than a symbol. Baptism is an event that is all about submitting to God.

Some claim baptism is a work and since we are not saved by works (Eph 2:8-9) baptism must not be essential to our salvation. Scripture never says baptism is a work. We know that we are not saved by works (Eph 2:8-9). In Greek baptism is a passive verb. That means baptism is something someone does to you and not something you do to yourself. Have you ever seen someone baptism themselves? So it not a work done to earn salvation as some have said it is. It is a passive act of submission. It is God working in us and through us to make us right with him. See also 1 Peter 3:21-22 which also connects our baptism with Jesus’ resurrection.

Application – use your discretion on these questions based on who is in your group and what you think will be effective.

Are there things in your life that you really need to repent of and turn over to God?

How does knowing God has given you an open invitation to be resurrected to live for eternity with God and Christ give you hope?

When you think about what Jesus has done for you, how does it convict you?

[**note to leaders:** this question opens the door however far you want to take it if there are non-Christians in your group. It also works if you have group full of Christians because the gospel still convicts us to be stronger in many ways. You may need to follow up privately with someone after this lesson if you can sense any needs in your group, especially among any non-Christians. It is a lot less threatening to have an open invitation to baptism on Sunday with 500 people but if you feel that is something that would fit the people in your group and would be needed you can ask if anyone needs to at the end of the lesson.]

Lesson 13 – Wrap Up

Over the last three months we have explored what it means to be God's Family. We looked at God as our Father and us as His children. We looked at each other as brothers and sisters. We examined different components of our faith as rooms in God's household. We examined ourselves as spiritual bricks all coming together to form God's house. Last, we looked at how God wants each and every person to respond to the Gospel.

This lesson is just going to be a list of questions to discuss informally and then the lesson will close with an exercise and prayer.

Of all the things we have talked about which stood out the most to you? Why?

In what ways has scripture challenged you to be a better member of God's family?

Has anyone made any real changes in the way they do anything as a result of this Bible study? If so, what? If not, what changes have you considered?

Exercise – Go around the room and say something you appreciate about someone else in the group. Make sure every person has something said about them.

Prayer time – Spend time praying for God's family as a congregation but also as individuals that we may embody the kind of family God wants us to be. Pray for growth this year as we reach out to others. Pray that God would bring us all closer together under Christ.