

# “The Family”

Part 1 of Sermon Series: *No Longer Strangers*

a sermon based on  
Ephesians 1:3-14

and delivered on  
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Today, we embark on a six-week sermon series “No Longer Strangers” But how do these other events fit in? Vacation Bible School and commissioning these women and men for service as they prepare to go to Rosebud?

Rather than trying to force things to work together, I’m just going to trust. I’m going to trust that the Holy Spirit will speak to you; and I’m going to trust that all of you will fill in more than can even be said in this time we have together this morning. I think it might work.

The message today is “The Family”. That’s where we’re going to begin for this six-week exploration of Ephesians. It’s a good place to begin. Often we begin at the end, and wonder why it doesn’t work.

For instance, let me begin at the end of Vacation Bible School – where we learned:  
When you are powerless... Jesus rescues! (That is he gives us strength.)  
When we do wrong ... Jesus rescues! (He forgives our sin.)  
When we struggle... Jesus rescues!  
When we worry... Jesus rescues!  
And when we are lonely... Jesus rescues!

We don’t generally turn to strangers when we feel powerless or need forgiveness or to help us with our worries. We turn to those who love us – those whom we trust. So, are we jumping too far ahead when we when we invite others to claim the gift of salvation? What if we were to begin by addressing the loneliness that festers in so many lives?

Think about it, what was first thing that God recognized that the Man needed in the garden? A companion – a helper – an accomplice (because we know what happens soon after). When no other creature is suitable, we hear the story in Genesis 2 of how God takes a rib from the man’s side and forms a woman – and then these two human beings become the first family.

We are not solitary creatures – we need family. Not just a bunch of people around us whether they share the same lineage or not but family, people who are invested in us.

About a week and a half ago, I came across a news video from a television station in Oklahoma KFOR. The reporter is interviewing ten-year-old, Jeremiah. Jeremiah wants desperately to be adopted. This is what he says – and I’m quoting here, “I want to be adopted because I get beat up in my group home.” He has a place to live – and people around him, but he’s still lonely... still longing for a family. Describing the perfect family he says, “There would be a nice woman. There would be a nice husband. There would be nice kids. There would be pets.” Not a word about his own room or nice clothes or toys. And here’s the part that breaks my heart. Toward the end of the interview he says, “By the time I’m 18, I might not be adopted by then and I don’t want that to happen to me...” In effect he’s saying, I don’t want to go through my whole life without a family – without belonging. This is a good place to start. Because everything else comes down to that - belonging.

Several of you – even during my first meeting with Staff-Parish Committee – have said that you love this place because it feels like family. And I’ve asked what that means. Partly because family isn’t always easy to be a part of.

Consider the young man yearning to start his own family, but each time he’d bring home a prospective wife – his mother hated her. He was commiserating with a friend who suggested that he look for a girl just like his mother. So he did, and he brought her home.

His friend asked how it went. “You were right. Mom loved her. ... but Dad hated her.”

Families are good to be in... But sometimes getting in doesn’t feel so good. Sometimes it doesn’t happen – even when it’s made official. Suffixes like “in-law” take precedent over mother or sister. Prefixes like “step” stand over son or brother.

The church in Ephesus is sort of like that. None of the guys who actually knew Jesus in person founded the church there. Paul never ministered to them directly. As best we know they didn’t even get the benefit of having Timothy or someone else sent directly from Paul. They grew up just because of ordinary Christians

sharing their faith. But did they really belong? They were Gentiles so they didn't belong to God's covenant with Israel. They longed for their place in the church... but... the pedigree just wasn't there.

Several years ago, when I was preparing to go to my last appointment in Walnut, I was speaking with Les Renner. Les had grown up in Walnut, although he'd gone away for college and lived at various times in Rockford, Indiana and the Chicago suburbs – Walnut was home. His wife was from a prominent family in town. His parents had come from Walnut, but as we talked he said, "I'm not a native." See you're not really a native in a small town unless your grandparents were born there.

Don't get me wrong. Those comments were only a humorous twist on that "be careful who you talk about because everyone's related" spiel. But there's a truth to it. Isn't there?

Since the beginning days of the church there has been that struggle. The first disciples were born into God's covenant as sons and daughters of Abraham. Do Gentiles have to become Jews first to be Christian? They were serious – not trying to be mean but serious.

So what about these folks with a less direct connection with Jesus? Where do they fall in?

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will," (Eph. 1:3-5)

He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world AND he destined us for adoption as children.

Let me say that again... he DESTINED us for ADOPTION. Paul is assuring those Christians in Ephesus that they belong. They belong as much as Paul or James or John or Peter or Mary and that it's not some accident or afterthought.

Adoptees have that advantage. They know that they were chosen – not just a mere accident of passion. Come on. I knew my folks loved me but my birthday is in February and they were married in October. I was a preemie but not that preemie. Doesn't mean I wasn't loved or that I didn't belong. I have my family's pedigree.

But that intentionality of love and belonging. Wow.

Paul is assuring the Ephesians that God is intentional about them – that God desired them before they were even born – before their fathers or grandfathers ever got that twinkle in their eye.

That same God desires us. That same God has made a place for us in his family and he's filled out that adoption application in the blood of Jesus Christ. He doesn't want a single soul to miss out on being a part of his family.

And so that's where we begin as family, here. Caring for one another, but also making sure others know that they have a place in this family even before they get the rest of it.

These folks who are preparing to go to Rosebud. Why? Yes there's projects and work to be done. But you know that's not it. It's the opportunity for a family reunion with to love and to be loved through Jesus Christ.

When we're lonely... Jesus rescues. Inviting us into our place in the family of God which is our destiny and has been since before the foundation of the world. AMEN.