

## **Beyond Sunday: Experiencing God's Design for the Church**

### **Week 1: The Church is Family**

**Introduction:** Of all the word pictures and metaphors used to describe the church, one stands out above the rest: family. In fact, it is so much of the essence of the church that it cannot even properly be called a metaphor.

Metaphors describe what the church is like or similar to—light, flock, field, building—but family is not metaphorical; it is a literal description of the phenomena we know as church.

God is literally our Father, Jesus is literally our elder brother, and we are literally brothers and sisters in Christ. Family is the primary way the early church identified themselves.

This can be seen by the fact that the word disciple, so prevalent in the early part of the New Testament, disappears after the book of Acts. It is replaced by the term brother in the rest of the Bible.

Family dominates the self-understanding of the early church.

**The Big Picture:** The church is not like family; it is family. This identity comes from God's own Trinitarian relationship as our Father in Heaven. God is the one who designed the church to tell the truth to an unbelieving world. When the church engages together as family, we witness to each other and to those who do not believe the goodness of God.

#### **Discussion:**

##### **Share:**

- Share a memory that illustrates how you understand family.
- How do you think your understanding of family impacts the way you understand "church"?

##### **Discuss:**

##### **Sermon Review:**

- Write down any questions or thoughts that stand out to you as you review the sermon together. Discuss them as a group.
  
- "Who you are roots in who God is!" Do you agree or disagree with Pastor Jeremy's statement? Why?
  
- Respond to Pastor Jeremy's statement: "Because God is Father—my identity is family."

- How do you understand the following statement: “We are invited to fully participate in the family business?”
- Pastor Jeremy said that the family’s role is to encourage one another (Hebrews 10:23-25). How have you experienced this at Cornerstone or another church you have connected with in the past?

**Unsettled or Uncertain:**

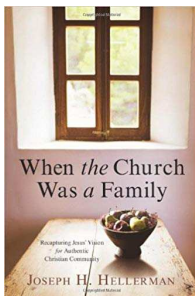
- What questions, concerns or doubts do you still have as this discussion wraps up?

**Now That You Know:**

The Bible reveals the church is a family. Household, brothers and sisters are regularly used in the New Testament to describe how people who believe in Jesus should participate in life together.

How will you live more into Jesus’ expectation to be family with other Christians? Write out one sentence that describes your intended attitude or action in response to God’s truth.

**Further Exploration on this Topic:**



*When the Church was a Family: Recapturing Jesus’ Vision for Authentic Christian Community* by Joseph H. Hellerman

**From the Publisher:** Spiritual formation occurs primarily in the context of community. But as the modern cultural norm of what social scientists call “radical American individualism” extends itself, many Christians grow lax in their relational accountability to the church. Faith threatens to become an “I” not “us,” a “my God” not “our God” concern.

When the Church Was a Family calls believers back to the wisdom of the first century, examining the early Christian church from a sociohistorical perspective and applying the findings to the evangelical church in America today. With confidence, author Joseph Hellerman writes intentionally to traditional church leaders and emerging church visionaries alike, believing what is detailed here about Jesus’ original vision for authentic Christian community will deeply satisfy the relational longings of both audiences.

**Jeremy’s Notes:** Dr. Hellerman is a personal acquaintance. I had the opportunity to shadow his church after reading his book. He is as authentic of a person you will ever meet. In a church that regularly gathers over 1,000 attenders each weekend, Oceanside Christian Fellowship in El Segundo, CA models this family community dynamic so well. When the church was family invites the reader to see the ancient perspective of church in a fresh way for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Link: <https://www.amazon.com/When-Church-Was-Family-Recapturing/dp/0805447792>