

WEEK OF FEBRUARY 26



DAY
1

God the Father and His Family Ephesians 1:1-3; Romans 8:15

I believe in God the Father Almighty... That's how the Apostle's Creed begins. God is the Father God who seeks after the welfare of his children Israel and, through them, all the nations of the world.

God's fatherly love, protection, and care is communicated through the covenant he makes with Abram. Abram will become the father of many nations, and the nations will be blessed in that lineage.

In Deuteronomy, the fatherhood of God is described. God carries Israel as a father carries a child (1:31); God is the Father and the Creator (32:6); and God is the rock who fathered Israel, the God who gave them birth (32:18).

The people of God are the children of God. God is their Creator, their Deliverer, their Protector, and their Provider—all roles that become more relational and intimate when God is Father.

In the New Testament, the nature and experience of God as Father expands to new heights and depths. God the Father and God the Son have great mutual love. Jesus reveals God as a Father in ways that the Jewish faith had simply not understood.

Look up these verses in the Gospel of John: 1:14, 18; 2:16; 3:35; 5:17–20; 10:15–18, 25. And Jesus says, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30, 38).

Of course, Jesus taught us to pray to the Father in heaven, using the language of ABBA, which is endearing and tender. The Father was Abba for Jesus and the Father is Abba for you.

Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our heart, the Spirit who calls out, Abba, Father. (Galatians 4:6)

Are you enjoying the Father love of God? Do you draw near to the Father in prayer, confident that he looks upon you with deep love? How is your love of the Father growing deeper?

DAY
2

The Family Matters to God the Father Deuteronomy 14:1-2

When the people of Israel left Egypt, they were a loosely assembled group of tribes. Life had been hard. Family had been hard. To be a slave and a family of slaves through the generations was devastating.

The people of Israel did not know how to be a family in the way God had designed. God taught them his will for family in the context of ancient cultures that had terrible practices about family. Sexual immorality was rampant. Family stability was fragile and precarious. Women were treated as property, and children were often seen as burdens. Many of the ancient religions of that region practiced child sacrifice.

In Deuteronomy, God gives a new way of being family, and God gives VERY STRICT instructions to separate from the prevailing practices. The family is in crisis and urgent care and rigorous new standards are needed.

- Deuteronomy 21 and 22 focus on God's plan for marriage. Many of these seem strange, but they were a VAST improvement to the prevailing practices.

- Deuteronomy 5:16 says to honor your parents (and there are severe penalties for failing to do so).
- Deuteronomy 5:18 says not to commit adultery. There are many kinds of sexual immorality that are forbidden. The general principle is sanctity, chastity, and fidelity. Divorce is bad. Intermarriage within families is restricted.
- Be very careful about marrying outside of the community, for the danger is your heart will be led astray.
- Take care of widows and the fatherless. This command is repeated over and over (10:18; 16:11, 14; 24:17, 20, 21; 26:12, 13).
- Teach the next generation the ways of the Lord or those ways will be lost.

The point is simple. Family is important to God. God has a clear will about the family. Don't be surprised that in rejecting God, society rejects God's plan for family. Don't be surprised to discover that when family fails, a society cannot endure.

DAY
3

The Family in Exile

Jeremiah 29:4-9

Yesterday we looked at how the family was a foundational element in how God gave Israel an identity coming out of Egypt. Today, through the prophet Jeremiah, we see that even when things aren't going well, family is still something infinitely important to God.

Jeremiah is writing during the Babylonian Exile, a time when Israel had forgotten God's promises and separated themselves from him through perpetual disobedience to the law. God had warned them, time after time, that if they kept going down this road there would be consequences. Now we find Israel removed from the Promised Land, under a foreign king, and forced into a culture that worshiped different gods.

Imagine yourself in this situation. You are forced out of your home and relocated to a strange land with strange customs. On top of that you probably feel like God has abandoned you, as everything you have built your faith and identity around has been flipped upside down.

In the midst of this we hear an unexpected message from God: "Put down roots." Build and plant, and most importantly, marry and have children. In other words, in this terrible situation remember the importance of family. If you've lost your community of faith, don't give up, build a new one to help you remember who you are.

In crisis, it's natural to become hyper-focused on everything that has gone wrong or been lost, and it's in these moments that we need to be reminded of God's goodness. His message is that not ALL has been lost, even if it feels like it. God's promises and covenant still stand, and it is through family and the community of believers that we will remember them in our darkest times.

Who helps you remember God in your darkest times?

DAY
4

The Family of God in Community

Matthew 7:9-11, Ephesians 1

For the past 3 days, we have taken a look at the idea of family in Deuteronomy and how God encourages the creation of families, even during exile. For some of you, reading these devotionals might have triggered some painful feelings of loss and regret. Scripture suggests that we learn about the goodness of God as our Father by what we experience in our own families (Matthew 7:9-11). Perhaps you don't have the family you imagined you'd have. Perhaps your family of origin has fallen apart. Perhaps you're feeling the persistent feeling of loneliness that plagues so many of us.

But when we become Christians, we belong to a family. It doesn't matter what our biological family or family of origin is like. God wants his children to be a functional family. So much of scripture focuses on the way those who follow Christ are meant to treat each other. God wants us to be shaped into a new community, where we are known and loved, and where Christ is represented well.

It doesn't matter what your family looks like. Married or unmarried, divorced or single, parenting or struggling with infertility, struggling or happy, all are welcomed into the family of God. Here is the place where we meet God in community, where we are bound together in common belief and common mission.

Scripture uses the language of adoption to describe all of God's children. In Ephesians 1, Paul writes that God "chose us in him," and verse 5 says that we are "adopted." Adoption is a beautiful way to describe what Jesus has done for us. In adoption, one is chosen to become part of a family that they weren't originally born into. In his book, *Adopted for Life*, Russell Moore writes, "The New Testament continually points to our adoption in Christ in order to show us that we're really, really wanted here in the Father's house. The Spirit is continually telling the people of Christ that they, we, are 'blessed' in Christ through adoption."

Do you consider your church a family? How are you involved in life at Living Word? Take a moment to pray that our church can be a place where the lonely are welcomed and find community in Christ. Pray that we will be the type of community where we find common identity and purpose in Jesus.

PERSONAL REFLECTION & LIFEGROUP CONVERSATION

ONE: What are some of the best things your family did for you as you grew up? What are some things that were painful (and may still be painful) from your family of origin?

TWO: Come up with a list of best practices that, when consistently followed, will make it possible to have a really good family.

THREE: Here are several statements from Rabbi Jonathan Sacks in an essay, "The Fragile Family." Think about each one and share your thoughts.

1. Love as a moral bond in the form of monogamous marriage is one of the great achievements of the West, a remarkable combination of sociological realism and moral and spiritual beauty: marriage as the crucible of the love that brings new life into the world.
2. What makes the traditional (note – not nuclear) family remarkable, a work of high religious art, is what it brought together: sexual drive, physical desire, friendship, companionship, emotional kinship and love, the begetting of children and their protection and care, their early education, and induction into an identity and a history. Seldom has any institution woven together so many different drives and desires, roles and responsibilities.
3. Sex has been divorced from love, love from commitment, marriage from having children, and having children from responsibility for their care.
4. The family – man, woman, and child – is not one lifestyle choice among many. It is the best means we have yet discovered for nurturing future generations and enabling children to grow in a matrix of stability and love. . . For any society, the family is the crucible of its future, and for the sake of our children's future, we must be its defenders.