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SERIES: FAMILY DONE GOD'S WAY

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TITLE: The Body of Christ Pt. 1

What comes to mind when I say the word family? What images, memories, or ideals immediately show up? I first think of my wife and three boys. I think of jumping off of cliffs in Arkansas. I think of laughing in our backyard around our fire pit. I think of Christmas at my grandparents. I think and laugh of my mom falling into a bush on New Year's Eve in downtown Lincoln, NE.

What comes to mind for you? Chances are we had various thoughts of family and extended family members. We thought about the holidays that were and what we dreamt they could be.

But did your spiritual family come to mind? If not, it probably should have. Who is our spiritual family? Why does our spiritual family matter to God? Why should it matter to us? That's what we'll talk about as we close out our series, "Family Done God's Way."

Since the beginning of June, we've been talking about family. Why? Because family matters to God. We've talked about marriage, husbands, wives, children, parenting, and now our spiritual family. Family of all kinds matter to God, so we must talk about the family that we all as followers of Christ become adopted into.

So let's begin by answering the question: **Who is our spiritual family?**

The Apostle Paul will begin to answer that question in Galatians 4:4-7 (ESV): "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ To redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God."

You and I, as followers of Christ, we become adopted sons and daughters of the King. I love this passage because it paints such a powerful picture of the love of God.

You and I, apart from Christ, are dead in our sins. We are enemies of God. We are hostile in mind towards God. Our lives are fixed on serving ourselves and our sinful desires. "But when the fullness of time had come..." What does that mean? It refers to the completion of the period of preparation in God's sovereign plan of redemption. This was the right moment in time where God ushered in a new period of redemption. In that right moment, God sent Jesus Christ to provide the righteousness that we needed, because we couldn't provide it ourselves.

So by God's grace of Jesus Christ, *we might receive adoption as sons*. Now, this doesn't mean salvation is only offered to men. It's inclusive to men and women: To all who repent and receive Christ by grace through faith, they become adopted children of God. Yes, when we take Christ as

Savior and Lord, we become his bond-servants, but we are no longer slaves of sin. Instead, we become His children. Therefore, our lives reflect a love and reverence for God.

Galatians isn't the only occurrence of this concept of God's children. John records this in John 1. There he tells us how to become children of God. John 1:12-13 says, "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." What constitutes a child of God? Not blood. Not creation. No, it's by saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Now, this often brings up a question. Aren't all people God's children? Well, in the sense that God is the Father of Creation, yes. But that is where it ends. God's true children are His spiritual children: Those who come to Him through Jesus Christ. To call God "Father" is a privilege reserved only for those who have put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

This brings up the other question that comes when talking about prayer. The question is often asked, "does God hear the prayers of unbelievers – people who are far from God – or just His spiritual children?"

I think this is a fair question, and I think the answer to that question is yes. Why? Because He is God. He is omnipotent – He is everywhere. He is omniscient. He knows everything. So does God hear all prayers? Yes.

Perhaps the real question is, does He answer the prayers of unbelievers? To this, it's harder to answer. Here's some of what we can find in Scripture about unanswered prayers:

1. James tells us that when we ask with wrong motives, God won't answer. (James 4:3)
2. Psalms tell us that if you harbor wickedness in your heart, God won't answer. (Psalm 66:18)
3. The Prophet Isaiah said this "But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden *His* face from you so that He does not hear" (Is 59:2).
4. Jesus said something quite similar: "We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him" (John 9:31). Verses like these probably provided the strongest answer to this question.
5. King Solomon told us if you reject hearing the law – God's Word - your prayers are offensive to God. (Prov. 28:9).
6. The Prophet Micah said that those who hate good and love evil, they may cry out to God, but He will not answer them (Micah 3:4).

So does God answer the prayers of the unbelievers? I think there is a strong case to say, generally, "no." However, He is sovereign, and can do what is consistent with His good and perfect nature. So generally, no, but possibly, and sometimes, yes. Yet the previous passages and others in the Bible share many reasons why God does not answer prayers, not just for unbelievers, but believers as well.

DISCUSSION:

N: Let me turn now to Arnie [Cole] and Cara [Whitney]. I've just shared some hard truths about prayer. Do you think Christians in general are aware of these truths, and why is it important to understand them?

C: I think for the most part, they understand the truths, but I think it's also a really hard thing to

understand prayer when God is saying, *No*. I think a lot of times, there's a perception there that God doesn't care, or that He isn't there at all, or not listening to you.

N: So it sounds like you may have experienced that at some point in your life. How do you reconcile that?

C: I realized that the answer is *No*. Dan and I were talking about this last night. We had family devotion time, and we were just talking about all the times that God protected you, even when you were an unbeliever, or backslid, or wherever; God is just orchestrating your safety. But also, just talking about the times that you prayed for something and He didn't answer that prayer, because there was something better down the road. I mean, when you can look back at things and you go, "Oh, thank you, Lord, for not answering that prayer". But He did answer it; the answer was "No," because He knew what was up ahead.

N: That's a good perspective. Arnie, what about you?

A: You know, prayer, especially as a researcher, causes me a lot of consternation. So these truths that you pointed out so well, I believe them a hundred percent. Even though you're a young preacher, I'm listening to you; I hear you, and it's right. But when I do research, and I've done research, a classic example is in Japan: I just happened to be there after New Year's, the Japanese New Year's, which is in mid January, I think, or something like that. But anyway, that day, millions of Japanese pray, go out and pray, to their idol. Everybody has an idol, (that's not a believer), in their backyard, or a shrine. And you talk to those people, and they tell you that "You bet, God answers prayer. Last year, I prayed for a new job and I got it". "My daughter was sick and she was healed." So I believe it, I understand what you're saying, but other people, with other beliefs, believe that their god, or their little idol, answers prayer as well. It's just an interesting phenomenon.

N: Right. And it is clear from Scripture that God does hear all prayers. The question is, whether or not He is inclined to answer them or not. And I think at times, He does answer those prayers of a nonbeliever. But I think that the most important thing that we need to remember is, as Christians, is our relationship with Him. So for our own lives, when we are out of touch with Him, and perhaps we are in sin, it's important to pause and confess our sins to God, because we know that that restores the relationship with Him. And He is more inclined to respond accordingly.

A: So Nat, help me out here. If I have unconfessed sin, can God still answer my prayer? Or do I need to go through somebody to have this unconfessed sin taken away? Then He will hear my prayer.

N: Well, Arnie, that sounds like a loaded question. And as you know, if you would like to pay for your sin removal, you can contact me at natecrawford.com and send a check. [Laughter]. No, oh my goodness, Um, no. The simple answer to your question is that God still hears our prayers. And as His children, His ear is inclined to us. However, we do know that sin is still an issue in us as His spiritual children. And so we think about First John, [Chapter] one, it says, *if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves. And the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* And I think

that's an important reminder that we need to come to God first of all, cognizant of who we are and what we've done.

And just what I do is, I compare it to any other human relationship, but with much more gravity. It's like if I told my wife, you know, she's dumb, stupid, and ugly, and then went in for a kiss, she'd probably smack me upside the head, and push me out the door and lock it. Why? Well, because I have offended her. And before I go back in for that intimacy in the relationship, I had probably better pause and ask for forgiveness, and try to restore the relationship. Now I know she'll forgive me, because she's a forgiving person, who has been forgiven much by God. Well, God, we know He's going to forgive us. And we are called to make that relationship right again. And so yes. Can he answer our prayers? Yeah. Is he inclined to? I think we could say, we need to really pause and think about who we are in our relationship with Him.

Today as we talk about family – we're emphasizing our spiritual family. So we want to clarify this important question: Who are God's spiritual children? It's people who have repented of their sins and put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. Peter said in Acts 3:19, "*Repent, therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out.*" **Who belongs to the family of God? Only those who God saves and adopts through Christ.** Remember, Jesus said that He is the only way to God. And when we are found in Christ, we are His children. In fact, we are heirs with Christ.

Therefore, Paul writes this in Romans 8, "*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.* ¹⁵ *For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"* ¹⁶ *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,* ¹⁷ *and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*"

And now that we know who is in God's family, does this matter to God? If so, what's the big deal?

Well, think about this from God's perspective: First, from the response to sin in His creation as a whole, and second to His right response to His children.

So, let's just consider the story as a whole. Genesis 1, God created everything out of nothing. God created the Heavens and the Earth and all that inhabit it, with the exception of mankind. But at the end of each day, He said, "It was good." But at the height of His creation, He created Adam and Eve, the first humans. And He declared all His Creation *very* good. So there was something special about mankind. What's so special? Well, we know that according to Genesis 1:27, **God created man in His own image.**

What does that mean? Well, it does not mean that mankind was a mini God. It does not mean that we could become like God, in the sense of deification. Unfortunately, we don't have time to totally unpack this, but what it does mean is, as creatures made image of God, we have **authority**. God gave mankind authority over Creation to subdue His Creation, including the animals.

It means we have **value**. Each person made in the image of God has value. We are all worthy of respect; we are all equal. It doesn't matter what skin color we have, what home we are born into, what our last name is, whether we're male or female. We all have value.

We are **relational**, which is reflected the fact that God is trinitarian. He has always existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet He is still 1 substance. But He has always been in a relationship. We are relational creatures.

God is moral, and so too, we are **moral**. Romans tells us that we have a moral law written on our hearts. That objective standard of morality comes from God and being made in His image.

We are creative, just like God, is **creative**. God created the world *ex nihilo*. In other words, out of nothing. And yet he made it beautiful, diversified. When you look around, whether it's at the trees, or the sky, or a baby, or we hear music, all of those pieces are like colors on a color palette that are beautifully painted by God's hand. This is why we are creative. I don't care who you are. I don't care what you do. You are creative. You may be a painter, a singer, or a writer, or a communicator, or you may simply be orchestrating a beautiful family, but you are creative, and you appreciate God's Creation. That's because you are made in His image.

One last piece I want to look at, is we have the ability to **love**. God is love. And we love because He first loved us. So we are made in the image of God. That's what Genesis one tells us, and we see the evidence today.

But that brings us to Genesis three. I don't know if there's a more tragic chapter in all of the Bible than Genesis 3. Because in Genesis 3, the serpent, Satan, he approaches Eve, and he begins to put doubt into her mind. The serpent says to Eve, *did God actually say you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?* He would go on to say, *you shall not die if you eat from the tree, but instead, your eyes will be open; you will be like God knowing good and evil.* And tragically, the woman ate of the tree and she gave the fruit to her husband Adam, and he ate, and their eyes were both opened. At that moment, the world changed, humanity changed, and Creation was now tarnished. Our nature was now tainted by sin. In fact, that's why Romans 5, verse 12 says, *"Therefore just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned."*

Remember, in Genesis one, God said His Creation was good, and what happened when He saw Adam and Eve? He said, "Wow. This is very good." But in a moment, mankind sinned. That created a break in that special relationship. In Genesis, we know that God would walk with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day. But in Genesis 3, *after* they sin, it tells us that God was walking in the garden, and He went looking for Adam and Eve, but they were hiding ... yet God *knew* where they were. God knows exactly what's going on at all times. He is not surprised. He knew exactly where Adam and Eve were, yet he calls out, "Where are you?" and they say, "We're hiding because we are afraid and we are naked."

So in a moment, this beautiful relationship was now broken. And forever, we would be paying the price. We are sinful creatures. God loved His Creation; He said it was good, and when He saw us, He said, *very* good. But now we are marked with sin, and our nature is corrupted. But as Ephesians 2: 4-5 (NLT) says, "but God." ⁴But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, ⁵ that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) And what is Paul talking

about in Ephesians 2? Well, it goes back to Genesis 3, because in Genesis 3 verse 15, God said, *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.*

What on earth does that mean? What that means friend, is He would send Jesus Christ, our only hope. He would send Jesus Christ to this Earth, to live a perfect life and to be bruised. Isaiah prophesied it, and in the Gospels, it is captured, that He would suffer and die for our sins. Satan, he would bruise His heel, but He would ultimately conquer sin and death forever. Jesus Christ would rise from the dead, and He would bruise the head of Satan, In other words, Satan's earthly grasp would be addressed, because God loves His Creation so much, He would become flesh and die on the cross for you and for me.

Why does God's creation matter, and why should it matter to us? Because He created it very good, and we broke the relationship, *but* He has provided a way.

N: Arnie and Cara, today, we're talking about the very nature of the Gospel, and that's the Good News.

C: That it is. God has provided a way for all people; all people, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity. God is an equal opportunity provider of eternal life. And He does that; He provides us with two options, *Nat*, and it's to follow Him or to not follow Him.

N: Well, I think that's such a good thing for us to remember today, that the Good News is for everyone. It's not just for people we like, or people we know, people that are like us, but rather it is for all people, at all times. And that really is why it is such Good News. But Arnie, I'd like to talk about sharing the Gospel, because sharing the Gospel is essentially inviting people into the family of God. Give us your perspective on making that invitation.

A: Yeah, I think the key word there is *invitation*, because how you do it, it's not a sales pitch. And even more importantly, is you don't start the conversation with using the Bible to condemn. The invitation has to be open, friendly, and the way you do that, is by living it yourself, living the invitation yourself, so others can see it.

N: I think that's such a good reminder, because so often we start with the behavior of the individual, but the reality is, it has to start with the heart. It's a heart issue and a sin problem. And until we are willing to go there, we can prescribe better ways of living all day long, but it honestly is not the real issue. It is a heart issue.

Cara, in your experience, what are some of the big misconceptions people have about becoming a Christian? What do you think holds them back, and what surprises them?

C: Well, I've had many, many conversations with people about the Lord. I've heard all kinds of things. A lot of them were excuses, but I would say genuine hearts, people will say, "Well, I'm not done having fun yet". So I think the assumption is, that following Jesus is not fun or exciting. There's a perception that following Jesus, or Christians - I always say I'm a Christ follower - that we're hateful, that we're following a fairy tale. I got the impression before I came to Christ, there's a lot of ritual involved, so a lot of leading in ups, downs, and things, but I would say their

biggest obstacle, the thing that holds people back, is themselves. You know, there was a point in time in my life, where I would go on the internet and search everything that would make me believe that Christianity wasn't true, because I wanted to disprove it. And then I switched gears from another set of eyes, to see if it was possible to prove it. It wasn't until then, but see, my heart was different. My heart was soft then, and it was hard the first time. But I would say, once they remove their boundaries, and you're looking for truth, I think people are surprised that it's more than showing up to church every Sunday, that it's actually a relationship with their Creator.

N: Yeah. I think most people, if they actually understood what Christianity is, and what it involves, I think they would be, frankly, shocked and amazed by how much life it really does bring. But again, it takes time to convey that, and to engage in that meaningful conversation. But I think you're exactly right. Arnie, let's talk about preparation. Do you prepare daily to share your faith with others? And if so, how do you prepare?

A: No, I don't. I don't like get up and say, "Hallelujah. You know, I've got to be prepared for this". Especially, I guess, I could have a cop out, that, you know, "while we're in this isolation thing", but actually what I do, and it's because my job is so unique, I have seven, eight different computer screens in front of me. And I know whenever we have a piece of biblical content that goes out, we're sharing our faith in essence. And I watch who has it, what they do with it, and how can we continue them down the journey? So my way is certainly not conventional, but I think Cara would probably be better [to] answer, because she's out there every day, being the evangelist that she is. And I just wonder if she prepares herself in the morning to share her faith?

C: Well, it's just such a big part of my life, I don't even think about it. But you know, yesterday I took my son to get his braces off at the orthodontist. So I look for places I could share the Lord in that, you know, and it could be just a little name drop here and there. So I would say I prepare, but I'm just always looking for holes. It just comes natural to me at this point. I would say everyone should be interested in evangelizing the Lord, because of what would happen to the person, if they don't hear the Gospel. I don't want to hear about anybody going to Hell. So just to be mindful that you're saving someone's life, anytime you come in contact with them.

N: Yeah. I think one of the prayers that I often give to God is, for eyes to see and ears to hear, those who I'm going to encounter, so that I'm aware of the opportunities that God's putting before me. Because the reality is, each one of us in this discussion, we do live different lives, and our days look very different. However, no matter where we go, we are called to be aware, I think, of who's around us. And to look for those opportunities to make little deposits, as Paul would say, scattering and watering, wherever we go. And I would say, that's our prayer for you, our listeners, as well, that you would be aware of who is in your sphere of influence, so that you might share the Gospel and hope they so desire and need.