

DAY 8

THE IDEAL FAMILY

What's a family supposed to be like? Our culture is enamored with this question.

Over the years, shows like *The Brady Bunch*, *Full House*, *Family Ties*, *Family Matters*, *The Simpsons*, *Gilmore Girls*, and *Keeping Up With The Kardashians* have taken part in shaping our view of family. Even if you love your family, you have an idea of how wonderful family could be.

Author James McBride once said, "Family love is like the wind: instinctive, raw, fragile, beautiful, at times angry, but always unstoppable. It is our collective breath. It is the world's greatest force."

But family is not a new idea. God created family for the benefit of human flourishing. His plan was to give us a defined space where we can each find a deep sense of love and belonging. Yet that's not the kind of family many people experience. For many, the very subject of family can be a mix of painful emotions.

The problem with family is sin. Sin deeply fractured the very institution of family. From the first pages of the Bible, we see sin's effect on families. God's defined space for love and belonging was broken. So He did something about it. He sent Jesus.

Jesus introduced a new kind of family. His family, too, is a defined space where we can gain a deep sense of love and belonging. But the family of Jesus is different than any other! God's redeeming love in Jesus has set His sons and daughters free from their past, creating an environment where anyone can belong!

1 John 3:1 says, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God!" The family of God is the ideal family—a place where you are loved, a place where you belong, and a place where you can grow and flourish.

Are you planted in the family of God?

John 13:34-35; Psalm 92:12-15

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- How are my thoughts and attitude toward family affecting how I view the family of God?
- How could I be more rooted in the family of God?

PRAYER TO PRAY

Father, thank You for sending Jesus to not only redeem me, but also to redeem family. Thank You for creating a safe place where I am loved, where I belong, and where I can grow. Help me to surrender my idea of what family is and embrace what You created the family of God to be. In Jesus' name, amen.

DAY 9

CALL ME “OLD CAMEL KNEES”

God’s plan for humanity has always been for us not just to know Jesus, but to be like Jesus; this is why we were created in communion with God and in His image. But the devil’s lie in the garden changed what it means to want to be like God. Rather than letting God define what we do, sin caused humanity to desire to rule over itself, to be the one who decides what is “right for me.” Sin allows us to know all about Jesus, but not live like Him.

James, Jesus’ half-brother, knew Jesus. In fact, he grew up with Him, but growing up in the presence of the Messiah didn’t change James right away. John 7:5 tells us that James knew about the miracles Jesus had performed and still didn’t believe in Jesus. But James went on to write one of the most practical books in the New Testament on being Christ-like. In fact, James was called “Old Camel Knees” by an early Church writer because he spent so much time kneeling in prayer that it deformed his knees! What changed? James 2:17 shows us he realized a life-changing biblical truth: “faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.” Knowing about Jesus is meaningless if it doesn’t compel you to be like Him—if it doesn’t cause you to do something.

Like James, it’s easy to grow up knowing Jesus, maybe even call Him brother or friend. But knowing His Word, sitting in His presence every weekend at church isn’t being like Him until it impacts our actions—until it changes us at our very core. I’m not talking about the type of life change that puts you in a pew; I’m talking about the type of life change that deforms your idea of yourself.

James 2:14-16; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Romans 12:1-2

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Do I just know about Jesus, or am I truly becoming like Him?
- What’s one practical thing I could do today to start being like Jesus?

PRAYER TO PRAY

Father, thank You for allowing me to know You and for creating me in Your image. Help me never to take the knowledge of what You’ve done for granted, but compel me to live like Jesus. I ask that You transform me as I surrender my thoughts, actions, and feelings to You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

DAY 10

CUT IT OUT

When you were a kid, did you ever fall asleep with gum in your mouth only to wake up with it deeply entangled in your hair? Or maybe you've had this happen to one of your kids? Nowadays, a quick internet search will give you tips on how to remedy the old gum-in-the-hair situation.

Some say peanut butter does the trick. Others say it's all about olive oil. But sometimes you have such a mess on your hands, the only solution is to cut it out!

Whatever your background is, one thing is for certain; you brought gum-in-the-hair issues with you into your relationship with Jesus. We all do. Some of us come to Christ entangled with a past relationship and or destructive habit. Others come mixed up emotionally because of hurtful things others have said or done to us. Still, others of us seem to bring natural tendencies of being overly critical of ourselves and others. We want to become more like Jesus, but how do we really say goodbye to our yesterdays?

The Apostle Paul talks about this idea in Galatians 5:1. He says, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage."

With His death, Jesus not only paid the penalty of your sin, He gave you His own righteousness. Jesus Himself said in John 8:36, "So if the son sets you free, you will be free indeed." Saying goodbye to your past starts by knowing your freedom has already been purchased!

Next, you need to know this freedom comes with the particular strength you need to be disentangled from your past (Hebrews 12:1). It may be uncomfortable, time consuming, and somewhat painful. You may have to cut out certain relationships or starve out certain habits, but you have the power to do it. You can throw off the old you (Ephesians 4:22) because Jesus said you are already free!

Galatians 5:1; John 8:6; Romans 13:14; 2 Corinthians 5:16-20

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- What habits, attitudes, and ways of thinking from my past or my family history are still affecting me today?
- What relationships should I walk away from in order to live in true freedom?

PRAYER TO PRAY

Lord Jesus, Your mission was to set captives free. Without You, I would be utterly lost and hopelessly bound to my past. Thank You for freeing me and empowering me to change. Help me to say goodbye to my yesterdays and become more like You every day. In Jesus' name, amen.

DAY 11

WHO KNOWS YOU?

You weren't meant to do life alone. No one was.

When God surveyed all He had created in Genesis 1, He pronounced that it was "good." But when He looked down at Adam, God changed His tune, for man was a prized and dearly loved creation.

In Genesis 2:18, we read, "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone.'" And it never is—for any of us.

Somehow though, we continue to find ourselves lonely and cut off from meaningful relationships with others. God understood from the beginning that the perfect recipe for our hardship and heartache is for us to be alone. So a critical question for all of us has to be, "How disconnected am I from others... really?"

Thankfully, if isolation is the path to hardship and heartache, the opposite is also true. Meaningful relationships with people who are following Jesus can be our greatest source of joy, blessing, and even healing.

James 5:16 says, "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." Think about that. Sometimes, God chooses to deliver supernatural healing to us through our connection with other people—not shallow greetings as you walk into church or a text message every now and then to say, "How's it going?" We're talking about meaningful relationships that give others permission to really know us and speak into our lives.

So who in your life knows your story, your struggles, and your secrets? Are you engaged in a discipleship track? If not, what are you waiting for?

Hardship? Heartache? God said it from the very beginning, so we can trust it to be true: going it alone is "not good." But sharing your life with others is! Make it a priority.

Ecclesiastes 4:8-12; Romans 12:9-10; Hebrews 10:24-25

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Am I intentionally seeking out healthy relationships with genuine disciples with whom I can share my story, struggles, and secrets?
- Am I engaged in a discipleship track? If not, what is holding me back?

PRAYER TO PRAY

Father, I know I am in danger if I am alone. I don't want to be isolated, and I know from Your Word that You don't want me to be either. Help me find people around me who will build up my faith. Give me the wisdom and courage to step toward those relationships that will bring me joy and healing. And help me be the kind of person that builds others up as well. In Jesus' name, amen.

DAY 12

THE GLORY OF GOD

Whether you've witnessed it in the mesmerizing colors of an intricate sunset sky or felt it through a simple act of kindness or maybe found it in the expanse of a breathtaking landscape view, we've all had glimpses of a unique beauty that exists in the world around us. This somewhat invisible force can seem intangible and mysterious, yet the Bible speaks clearly about what's actually happening in these moments. The world is simply glorifying its Creator—it can't avoid it. It's what all of nature was designed to do, now and for all of eternity. It's what you were designed to do.

Though we were designed to worship God with our lives, there's a very real spiritual opposition to that purpose at play. There is a voice that whispers to us, trying to convince us that we deserve some measure of that glory—lead the life you want to live, achieve the things that will make you look good, and do what it takes to make yourself happy. As long as you keep following your heart, everything will eventually get better, right? Well, not quite.

It sounds good on the surface, but the reality is that glory belongs to God alone. When we listen to that voice and try to take it for ourselves, we exclude ourselves from the very purpose we were created to fulfill. Though He won't force you to give Him the love and honor that is rightfully His, neither will He compete when you decide to position that glory elsewhere.

Until we understand that the purest form of our purpose is to simply put glory in the right place, our lives will not make sense. When we can truly say in word and action, "Not my will, but Yours be done," that's when we are on the right track to our life-giving purpose.

Romans 1:20-25; Romans 5:1-11; Matthew 5:16

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Where might I be misdirecting glory in my life?
- In what way am I not open to God's purpose for my life because I'm distracted by my own pursuit of glory?

PRAYER TO PRAY

Lord, I am in awe of how good You have been to me, though I deserve nothing. You are holy and perfect in every way, and I can't think of a better way to use my life than to glorify You. I ask You today to use me for Your glory above all else. Help me to see where I am misdirecting glory to the wrong places and teach me to align my will with Yours.

In Jesus' name, amen.

DAY 13

YOU ARE NO ACCIDENT

Long before you were conceived by your parents, you were conceived in the mind of God. He thought of you first. It is not fate, nor chance, nor luck, nor coincidence that you are breathing at this very moment. You are alive because God wanted to create you! Ephesians 1:4 says, “Long before He laid down earth’s foundations, He had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of His love.”

In Psalm 139:15–16, David declares that God’s eyes were fixed on us not only when we were in the earliest stages of being formed in our mothers’ wombs, but even before we were conceived. This means there isn’t a single human being on the earth who was a surprise to God, and that includes you!

You are the crowning glory of the creation of God, and as a result, you have an inherent dignity, worth, and value. When you realize God is the one responsible for your life, you are accountable to God to make Him the focus of your life, so that through Him and in Him, you can discover its meaning and purpose. Nothing in your life is arbitrary. It’s all for a purpose. He has a purpose for your life. He wants to use you! He wants you to be a significant part of His plan!

Colossians 1:16; Ephesians 1:11-12

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- What is stopping me from accepting that God has a divine plan for my life?
- Am I focusing on God to discover my purpose?

PRAYER TO PRAY

Lord, I am so glad that You knew me and called me even before I was conceived in my mother’s womb. According to Your Word, I am no mistake; therefore, I ask You to help me start looking at my life with respect, esteem, and honor. You called me, and You have an awesome plan for my life. I ask You to help me uncover that plan, so I can get started on the road of obedience toward fulfilling what You brought me into this world to do! In Jesus’ name, amen.