

GOD'S CHILDREN

Funny thing about being old; you lose track of your age, but remember events in your life as vividly as if they happened this afternoon.

There were twelve of us. Twelve people who were right there, front row. For three years. We were taught by Jesus. Deep theological insights, for sure. But instead, I'd like you to think about the in-between times. All the small moments. Regular moments. Forgettable moments, that I will never forget.

Watching the in-between moments day in and day out, you know what I learned? How to be God's child.

Disappointed? Theology is important, but Jesus' whole life revolved around family. Yes, Jesus the son in relationship with God the father. But also, Jesus' family here on earth.

Of course, we all knew his mother, Mary. We all knew the story of Jesus' miraculous birth. All the stories...Moms love the stories of their children. Mary was no different. Jesus loved his mom. He put Mary into my care for the rest of her life.

It was a moment you would... you'd never forget, I'll just put it that way. The culmination of his life, his ministry, all the miracles, her smart, loving, and beloved son... she watched as the life drained from him. She was right there. We were horrified, powerless. So confused. But Jesus...Jesus in that moment of crisis demonstrated what he deemed as important. Family. He made me Mary's son, and Mary...my mother. He's in excruciating pain, Jesus is dying, and he's taking care of...us?!!! A moment that is...well, it defies description.

With Joseph, it was a different case. He had died before we met Jesus, none of us knew him. What we did know about his earthly father we learned through Jesus. Come to think of it, I guess the only way we came to know his heavenly father was through Jesus, too.

Jesus bar Joseph... *Son of Joseph*. From the minute you were born until you minute you died, you were called by your given name followed by your father's name. English Bibles don't really clue you in to this, but our very names identified us with our fathers.

Jesus was God, living on earth, and he grew up in the most mundane, normal way. Provincial, backwoods...Galileans had a reputation and it wasn't a good one. "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" (Good laugh) That was Nathanael's response when Philip told him he'd found the one Moses wrote about and the prophets foretold... Jesus bar Joseph from Nazareth. When a Galilean cracks a joke about another Galilean village...you know it's bad.

Jesus' childhood stories were no different than ours. Village stories. Learned his father's trade, learned the scriptures, followed the cultural blueprint. Luke summed up Jesus' childhood: He went to Nazareth with his parents, was obedient to them...and Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.¹

On one of our early trips back to Jesus's hometown, the people there were taken aback by his words, by his actions. A man they had known since childhood would speak with such authority and expertise? This caused offense. Their response? "Isn't this the carpenter's son?"²

Yes and no.

Interestingly, when Jesus taught about the kingdom family, he didn't give us long lists of what to do and what not to do. That's what the Jewish people were used to. A simple look through the law of Moses and all the laws added as written in Deuteronomy clues you in to that. It gives us a summary of "what to expect" from the one Moses wrote about in the law. But no, Jesus preferred to point us to well-known scriptures, or concepts and stories to get his point across.

Jesus distilled all the commandments into two: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" and "Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

In other words, God's children love him. It's their mindset, it's their emotion, it's their very actions. And God's children love all people, just as God loves them. And God really loves them.

¹ Luke 2:51-52

² Matthew 13:55

Sermon on the Mount, very famous, and of course at the time, we just thought of it as another ‘teaching time.’ But listen “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”³

Jesus makes it *my* obligation to do something life-giving, loving, and helpful for other people. It’s not enough to simply “avoid doing harm to them.” It sounds a lot like a healthy family response, would’t you agree?

Children learn how to be a child in their respective families. And it’s not always healthy. What families do, or accept as normal can vary widely. And you learn, early on, what you can do, what you can’t do, and what you can get away with. Kids are smart, they see the dance. If it’s a healthy family, then they probably grow into healthy adults. Able to pass on that family culture. Unfortunately, the converse is true. And growing up in a dysfunctional environment, watching and learning those transactions, you run the risk of passing those on.

So, maybe you come from a healthy family, maybe you come from a dysfunctional one. But either way, how do you learn to be God’s child? I was an eyewitness to God’s only son. But believe it or not, you can walk, and listen, and learn from Jesus almost like I did. Read the stories and letters of Jesus and the early church. And the Old Testament, too. Spend time in prayer, listen, focus on God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

As far as the “other” moments, I spent them with Jesus and the other 11 disciples. But good news, you can do that, too! Spend time...spend your life with God’s family! Living out life, overlapping in seemingly simple ways. How? A big one for us. Eating! From running into town to get food, picking grain walking through the fields, Jesus even barbecued breakfast for us on the beach once. Now that’s a vivid memory. Everyday life is where you develop deep, individual relationships. Receive or give specific guidance on being God’s child. And of course, who doesn’t love a home-cooked meal! Don’t let culture rip you off from the treasure of inviting others to your table, in your home...I know, easier said than done with Americans.

Which brings me to one last thing, around the world there’s an entire family of God that you’re a part of. Every week, you can join them in honor of the Father. All of God’s children loving him as an entire family at church. Yes, it’s nice when the music is how you like it, or the sermon, or the coffee and donuts after, in some churches. But the simple

³ Matthew 7:12

act of attending church with all of God's people. It's both a big moment and regular moment rolled into one.

Yes, I'm old. Very old. But still, I am a child. And I spent my long lifetime learning to be God's child. I hope you will, too.