

Scripture

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[0 : 00] Okay, hi everyone. Welcome to church. My name is Angela. I'm one of the pastors here and I'm so happy to be with you this Sunday. So happy to share and continue in our new sermon series.

Just a quick little note about me. For those of you who don't know me super well, I am named after my mom's mom. Her name was Angela, actually. For most of her life, she thought her name was Angelina until she found her birth certificate and then realized it was just Angela. So that's what I am, Angela. I'm named after her and I had a really close relationship with her until she passed away.

My dad's mom was also there throughout my childhood, but I don't have many memories of her from that time in my life. I'm told by other family members who have a much better memory than I do that she was quite cold.

And for all of my childhood and young adult life, there really wasn't a strong relationship or even understanding on my part of who she was. I knew that she was my grandmother and I knew that her past was complicated, but the way that that translated on the surface to me was that she was cold and distant.

And you know, if she would have passed away when my grandfather did, I probably would have remembered her that way. But something incredible happened when she was in her 90s and I was in my 20s.

[1 : 21] We became best buds. And we didn't do it by moving forward. We did it by looking back. Last week, Pastor Anthony started us in a new sermon series centered around rebuilding a broken faith.

And I really like that title because there's such great imagery in the word rebuild. It indicates that whatever was there before, even regardless of how broken it was, it is still worth going back to. It is still worth reinvesting in. And he specifically talked about baptism. And baptism is this wild thing Christians do to publicly state that our hearts are in pursuit of God and also that we are being added to the family of faith that surrounds us and the family that came before us.

So today we're going to continue along that thread and discuss the family that we join when we become followers of Jesus and specifically the family of God that came before us, our scriptural family.

I know family is a loaded word. Those six letters alone can cause a rush of emotions that run the spectrum of amazing to hellish. I know. Families are messy.

[2 : 29] My family right now is in a very fruitful season. But wow, it has not always been like that. It hasn't. And during those painful seasons, I would have stressful conversations with my family.

And then I'd go out and walk my dog Rosie around the neighborhood. And I couldn't help but look at people, all the people I was passing, and be like, that person and that person and that person. Most likely all have some form of family that they have to communicate with. And they're all probably just as messy as mine. We are all so messy. We all have mess. And all the counselors and therapists who support us are nodding their heads in agreement right now.

I know. We bring it to you every week. But hopefully in between the seasons of messiness, the sweetness also pops up. And we share and cherish and store those moments in our heart to cling to when the mess returns.

For the few who have no idea what I'm talking about because they don't know of any mess in their family, I say, get ready. Because humans are messy and it will come up.

[3 : 32] Saying that reminds me of when I was little and I thought my family was perfect. That is until I had the pleasure of overhearing my parents' entire divorce talk from start to finish.

I was like, excuse me? What word was that? I've never heard you fight before. What? So much mess. And some of us feel shame about our stories.

The layers of complications and shortcomings that come with them are honestly sometimes too much for us to embrace at all. But why is it still so important for us to know our family, despite shortcomings, despite hurt, despite pain, and know our family history as much as we can?

Why is it still important despite the mess? A few reasons, I think. One, understanding. When we know our families better, we understand that perhaps our grandmother was cold to people because when she was 18, her mother told her she needed to leave Lithuania and to stay with her aunt in Chicago just for the summer.

But that just happened to be the summer of 1940, and she just happened to be on the last commercial boat out of Italy during World War II. Turns out my great-grandmother didn't send her to Chicago for a fun summer.

[4 : 41] She sent her there to save her life. A few years later, back in Lithuania, Russian soldiers seized my family's property and sent my great-grandmother and my great-uncle to a work camp in Kazakhstan.

My great-grandmother died on her way there, and my uncle served 10 years of hard labor. For what? We're not sure. My grandmother never saw either of them again. I might be pretty cold, too, if that was my origin story.

Another reason that we connect or reconnect with our family history or our families in general are, you know, reasons to make sure that we correct things before we get into a relationship with a significant other, or really, we probably should before we even have close friendships with people. Figure out ways in which we don't want to be what we've learned. It also helps us know about our genes, for better or worse. Here's picture proof on your screen that if I didn't have those last few years with my grandma, I would never know that my ability to throw daggers with my face alone came from her.

Even genetic disorders and diseases are things to know from our families, right? Ancestry.com is making some solid cash by connecting people to all the mysteries of our DNA.

[5 : 54] But I think most of all, knowing our family history creates for us internally a deeper understanding of our own identity. Something we all long to understand while we walk this earth.

And here's the thing. Everything I just said about families shocked no one. Absolutely no one.

Those are well-known reasons we all connect or reconnect with our family and its history. We all know these things to be true about our biological or adopted families, but why don't we ever think about them with our faith family?

When we decide to follow Jesus, we join an earthly family and a heavenly family. We have the ability to connect here with our earthly faith family through Christian community like church. And we have the ability to connect with our heavenly faith family through the stories of the people found in this Bible.

Just like our biological, adopted, or married-into family history is a part now of ours, so too is the family history of Scripture. As much as we would like it to be sometimes, the kingdom of God is not just us, the Trinity, and maybe a few cute animals.

It's many of us. And it's funny to me, too, because there are so many sermons, so many sermons about how to create and keep a godly family. I mean, just Google it.

[7 : 11] They're everywhere, and I'm sure we've all heard them. And with the amount of sermons on the Internet about godly family structures and habits, you would think there has to be a specific Scripture about white picket fences in there somewhere, too.

It's not there. The picture that's painted sounds perfect. But none, none of the sermons I've ever heard are connected to stories of people to actually follow in Scripture, to follow a godly family.

Scripture gives us a lot of instruction about godly families, not examples of godly families. We have Proverbs about them. Proverbs 22.6, Train up a child in the way he should go.

Even when he is old, he will not depart from it. Proverbs 20.20, If one curses his father or his mother, his lamp will be put out in utter darkness. We have laws throughout Scripture about family. Do not, in Leviticus 18.11, do not have sexual relations with the daughter of your father's wife born to your father. And just to make sure they understood what that means, she is your sister. Exodus 20.12, Honor your father and your mother so that you may live long in the land of the Lord your God.

[8 : 17] Ten Commandments. And we have teachings about them too. Like the Apostle Paul in Ephesians, when he's talking to the church in Ephesus, in Ephesians 5.22, telling wives how to behave in marriage.

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church, his body of which he is the Savior. Now, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Now, I love, love Mason Paul, but I find it hilarious any time he gives marriage advice. Any time. That's the equivalent of someone who got married before they were legally able to rent a car without an age waiver giving a sermon about singleness.

Please tell me more about finding your spouse at the age of 22. You have so much to teach. No, stop talking. Right? Please. Please. So we have laws, proverbs, and teachings on godly families, but I can't find sermons on these godly families in Scripture actually acted out.

Thousands of people are mentioned in Scripture. Thousands. And we still can't find an example of the godly family that is preached and taught about in churches all over the world, sometimes on a weekly basis. I mean, Job was probably the closest to that as a godly father and husband, but then the devil was able to get free reign to destroy his life for a bit.

[9 : 41] So that's most likely why we don't use that to talk about godly families. And then, can we just please, please, for the love, stop talking about Adam and Eve when we talk about godly families.

Every time I hear them in connection to what it's supposed to be like, I'm like, so you don't know what happens after they leave the garden, do you? You stop reading? Their life sucked.

And on top of that, one of their sons killed the other son. That's the godly family we're supposed to follow? Mm-mm. Come on. So what we're actually left with is a lot of mess, with a lot of teaching surrounding that on how not to be messy.

And I say these things not to push us away from our scriptural ancestors, but to pull us closer. The Bible is not a rule book for moral living. It's not a 10-step guide to better life. It is a living, breathing love letter from our god to his people.

And we would never look at our own family history like a 10-step guide to fix something. Ever. Because for better or worse, we know the impact of those stories. We know that they run deep. We know that those stories impacted our upbringing, our mental maps, our identity.

[10 : 51] We can't just look at stories from our own family as narratives from a far-off place and expect to understand our families, just as we cannot look at scripture as a collection of stories about strangers and expect to understand our God.

Like the families in scripture, some of our stories are painful. But they're still ours. Many families don't like to talk about the painful parts of their history for fear of hurting themselves again or hurting others.

So we bury them. But that's not what God does. Ever. He wanted us to know everything. He wanted us to see behind the curtain. To see the generations of people who also maybe tried really hard and maybe also had the best of intentions but still fell short.

God is so ashamed of Jesus' earthly family that he lists them at the start of the gospel. Matthew is the first book of the gospel, and it starts with the genealogy of Jesus. Because God's like, I know y'all stopped reading as soon as the Old Testament hit Leviticus, so I'm going to let you know where Jesus came from.

And it lists, according to biblical scholars, I only count 38 generations, but everyone else counts 42, so I'm going to go with 42.

[12 : 06] 42 generations are listed before we get Jesus. And you know what it includes? You know what that list includes? It includes a murderer, and most likely a rapist, King David.

It includes a powerless woman named Tamar. It includes a prostitute who aided the Israelites named Rahab. It includes an outsider who was not a Jew named Ruth.

It includes a horrible father and husband named Abraham, who we credit to most things within Scripture. Just a bunch of sinners. That's what it includes.

These lists, and there are many genealogy lists throughout Scripture, and they're there with purpose, because they're not just there because they think, you know, it's cool that Jesus' family is rough around the edges, right?

That's not what God had in mind. These lists are presented to us to remind us that if he wanted them in this, he wants us to. That's the point.

[13:04] If you have ever been told you don't belong in the family of God, it's a lie. That's it. That's all it is. It's a lie. This shows us that the historical pieces of our faith, our faith family, are very, very important, and that it includes real people.

The Son of God came to earth. That alone is wild. If I were God and sent Jesus to walk the earth, I would just be like, ta-da, he's here. But no, it was important for Jesus to be born into a family, a poor family from the wrong side of town.

It was important for him to come as a baby and be raised by a family within a community of imperfect humans. It was important for him to know where his family came from. Every step mattered.

And they mattered because even when humans mess it up, and we do, and when we go astray, Scripture shows us how despite our wild hearts, God's glory will still be revealed.

Which means there's also room for our name in that story of God. God's like, here, this is the true story of my big, messy family.

[14:13] Want in? That's how it goes. The invitation is always for us. And if we all actually read the stories in Scripture, we'd be a lot more confident about God's love for us and purpose for our lives.

I think we often avoid connecting with people in Scripture for two polar opposite reasons. Either we think they're too holy to relate to, they're too othered, or we think they're too broken to learn from. Well, they're both holy and broken, but so are we. So what's our excuse now? We also often view this book as a collection of things and people that are separate from us instead of things that are deep within us.

And when we look at Scripture from the point of it only to be acts that happened in the past, the story is over. That's it. Done. Complete. No.

When we decide to follow Jesus, we become a part of the ongoing story of God. The story is not over. When we wake up every morning and say yes to God to do it again, we are also saying yes to God's family because no one is a Christian on their own.

[15:18] Since I picked on Paul earlier, I want to highlight also why I adore him so much. He loved the church as a collective unit. He did. He saw the beauty of how our stories wrap up into the biggest story of all.

Paul says it so beautifully to the people in Ephesus who he was encouraging to be of one heart, both Jew and Gentile, as new Christians were forming there. In Ephesians 2, 18 through 21, he says, For through him we both have access by one spirit to the Father.

Now therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and the members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And this is it, everyone. This is why so many stories of failure enter into the pages of our Bible.

Because the biggest story of all is that it's always, forever, all about Jesus. When we connect with stories in scripture, we find comfort in our failure and energy for our faith.

[16:21] We read and read these stories like family archives to remind ourselves that it is forever and always about his glory, not our achievements or failure. It turns out our scriptural ancestry DNA lays out a love story of pursuit and heartbreak over and over again, death and resurrection.

That is the heart of the Christian life, no matter how many times we have to do it. And always remember the invitation to this family is from God to us, not the other way around. We are invited into this big, glorious, messy family.

And one note on our current messy family that we have here. Not in this room, of course.

Everyone's great. I mean the messy family of Christians around the world. You know that rule where you can talk about how dysfunctional your family is, but then the second someone outside your family starts talking badly, you defend them with your life?

I've noticed that I have never extended that protection rule to Christians who think differently than I do. I know tensions right now are really, really high within the church, within the world.

I know that divisions seem to be getting starker, and I get it. I am angry too every time I see Christians saying they're being persecuted for not being able to be in person and services or holding revivals where we should be holding, you know, mornings for people.

[17 : 45] I get it. I'm preaching to myself here too. But the more we say we're not like that Christian, that Christian, or that Christian, I fear we're going to end up being so divided as a people that no one is going to know what any of us stand for anymore.

And no one's going to want to pick up their crosses because we've lost Jesus in the chaos. Turns out Christians today are still just as messy as they were in Scripture. I don't have any real wisdom on this. It's just something that pulls at my heart, and it's usually right after I've said, I'm not like them.

Hebrews 10, 24 through 25 says, I think we started dividing on things that were important and then continued this trend to make every difference and division.

And again, I have no wisdom. I just know that the story of God is bigger than any single one of us, and we're all in need of him now more than ever. So in closing, how do we do this?

How do we go back, right? We go back to the place that needs rebuilding. That's what we do. We go back to the start and embrace the mess. We go back to the stories we've overlooked. Yes, that also means Leviticus.

[19 : 01] I fully believe that when we go back to these stories, the great cloud of witnesses of former faith leaders is watching us and saying, yes, learn, find comfort, find joy, find family here. We also commit to stay there and to better understand.

When we do our Discover classes, we do a personality assessment that connects us to people in Scripture so that we can see our characteristics in them and they in us.

To connect us, to stay there. And then we move forward together. And I think when we fully embrace the messiness of Scripture, we'll be better suited to embrace the messiness of our earthly Christian family.

Individualism is not in the fabric of Christianity. It's not. This faith is worth rebuilding, even if we have to do it over and over again. Soon after my grandfather died, my grandmother changed.

In her 90s, she became funny and playful and started sharing everything she could about Lithuania with us. Always talking about it as if she had just come from there.

[20 : 05] We'd be driving and she'd look at trees and she'd be like, ah, there's many trees here. Not many trees in Lithuania. I'm like, what? All the time. And then she started getting really saucy, like assuming that everyone wanted to date her.

And she'd ask me if I wanted her to come with me to the night establishments, which I assume meant bars, I hope, to pick up guys. But I couldn't be mad if she liked them instead of me.

She didn't even like me calling her Graham because it felt too old when she was 92. All signs point to a form of dementia that caused her to go back to a place in her mind where her Frankie, my grandpa, didn't exist.

Most likely because she couldn't face living without him. And so for the last years of my grandmother's life, she lived as if she was the hottest new import fresh off the boat from Lithuania. Outside of better flirting skills, I didn't learn anything life-changing from her.

But my life is forever changed because I finally got to know her and know more about where I came from. And above all else, know, really, truly know how much she loved me.

[21 : 06] This picture was taken two days before my grandmother died. She's one of the lucky few whose first and last moments were experienced in the comfort of her own home. And by the time she died, we were done rebuilding with her.

We had managed to rebuild right in the place that was broken. The lives that didn't connect now seem like they were born to be together. And the Bible gives us the stories of the people of God in the same way.

And the more we connect with them, the more we get to understand how giant God's love is for us. And the longer we sit with them, the greater the chances we're all going to find out that despite our differences at heart, we're all actually just a bunch of wide-eyed 18-year-olds in a new land hoping that God has incredible adventure in store for our lives.

Please pray with me. Lord, I thank you for every story in Scripture. I thank you for the hard ones. I thank you for the ones that I want to throw my Bible across the room after I read them.

I thank you for the ones that bring our hearts comfort and joy. I thank you for the ways that you continue to speak to us. And I thank you for the ways that you invite us into this story as well.

[22 : 22] This is all about you and your glory, Lord. I have nothing but praise. I love you. Amen. Amen. Amen.