

Building the House of Love  
Families

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## 1 Peter 3:8b-15a (The Message)

**8-12** Be agreeable, be sympathetic, be loving, be compassionate, be humble. That goes for all of you, no exceptions. No retaliation. No sharp-tongued sarcasm. Instead, bless—that's your job, to bless. You'll be a blessing and also get a blessing.

Whoever wants to embrace life  
and see the day fill up with  
good, Here's what you do:  
Say nothing evil or  
hurtful; Snub evil and  
cultivate good;  
run after peace for all you're worth.  
God looks on all this with approval,  
listening and responding well to what he's asked;  
But he turns his back  
on those who do evil things.

**13-18** If with heart and soul you're doing good, do you think you can be stopped? Even if you suffer for it, you're still better off. Don't give the opposition a second thought. Through thick and thin, keep your hearts at attention, in adoration before Christ, your Master.

### Building the House of Love - Families

Over the last few weeks, we've been doing a sermon series called Building the House of Love based on the book of 1 Peter. We have been building God's house of love--that is we've been working to build up our spiritual lives. First, we packed up all our things, and we moved out of the old house of fear, and we moved into God's house of love. Then, we learned that the walls of the house are walls built of holiness -- that we are called to live holy lives--to be like Christ. Last week, we learned that there is an important foundation for the house --that Jesus is the very cornerstone of God's house -- and that upon that cornerstone we as

God's people have become living stones in God's house. We have this special identity, we are God's own people who are invited to actually be a part of the house -- to live with Christ as the most essential foundation of our lives. And because there are many rooms within God's house, today we think about the people who occupy the house -- your very own families -- because your family is welcome in this house of love.

As we think about families and how we might live out our faith, it seems to me that a lot has changed in our family lives over the last few weeks. In fact, it seems to me that the very definition of "family" seems to have shifted. There is an old sitcom called "Leave It To Beaver." You can probably even find it still running somewhere today, because it is iconic. For that era of the 50s and 60s, it probably portrayed the image of an ideal family. The perfect family. A suburban family with a nice house, a mom who stays home to take care of everything--she even wears a dress all day, a dad who leaves every day with his briefcase and his hat and returns in time for a home cooked meal -- and there are two loving children. And any problems that arose were wrapped up and tied with a neat bow in 22 minutes. I think a lot of us might imagine that is how our families ought to look. But the truth is that life is not a sitcom, and our families don't look like "Leave it to Beaver." And honestly, for that I am thankful.

Because I have realized that our families are unique as can be and that is a blessing.

These days our families consist of parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, dogs, cats, fish and birds. Our family consists of neighbors, best friends, church people, neighbors and co-workers --we even have our own unique quarantine families these days. During this quarantine, I think we've developed a whole new appreciation for the gift that God has given us in the people we call "family."

And not only has our definition of family shifted, the way we interact has changed. I was fascinated by an article I read this week called *Cornavirus Reshapes American Families* written by Erica Pandey in Axios.

<https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-family-revival-00bb56ee-26e4-4c64-a0f7-380f13437b14.htm>

ml I wonder what you think? I wonder if this virus really is reshaping our families? So please,

comment freely with your thoughts. What are you doing now in your family that you didn't before? The article I read said it like this: It used to be scarce and hard-earned, but suddenly family time is abundant in the era of shelter-in-place. For the first time since the early 19th century, many parents and kids — and even grandchildren — are all under the same roof round-the-clock. And if past periods of emergency are any guide, this enforced togetherness could deepen our relationships for years to come.

The long-term view is that while cooped-up families may now be **powerfully sick of day-to-day whining and bickering**, sociologists say that — historically speaking — **enduring hardship together builds stronger connections**.

The writer reported that contrary to what we might think, the U.S. divorce rate plummeted during the Great Depression and the 2008 financial crash. And one sociology professor predicted we could expect the same during this pandemic, saying: “When society is facing a tremendous challenge or there’s a big uptick in suffering, people orient themselves in a less self-centered way and in a more family-centric way,” Several families told the writer they are growing closer as they're forced to ride out the pandemic as a clan. They’ve experienced a sense of bonding, they have spent less time on electronics and more time together. So, what about you?

A lot of this rings true to my experience and to what I am seeing you all posting on social media. I have heard this same kind of response from families I know, and I am witnessing things I did not before this virus hit. We are connecting more with our families -- we are learning, playing and having family fun in whole new ways. Games and puzzles are making a huge comeback. We are hiking and reading and playing

outside together.

The article says: For many families, the current situation "forces a total re-evaluation of work-life balance." So I would ask you to think about that -- how has this virus changed your family life and are you reevaluating what your life will look like post-covid19? What are some new things you are doing? Do you hope for some of the changes to be permanent?

I am beginning to hear that this pandemic has caused families to reflect on their priorities

- to reconsider the activities they were involved in before. Some have said they are prioritizing their faith in the life of their family in a whole new way. Some are hoping to hold onto this renewal of family life and also the renewal of faith within the family. I wonder if we will ever go back to the busyness of yesterday?

However, we face a lot of family challenges these days -- it is stressful living in this new way. Some of you are home by yourselves because you've been forced to stay away from your family to limit your exposure to others--- I've even seen stories of grandparents who aren't yet able to see their newborn grandchildren. My mom who lives with her two dogs and a cat is having to limit her interaction to only a few people. And the other side of that coin is that some of you are home with people you normally wouldn't be sharing space with. And many of us are spending much more time with those we are used to living with. So no matter what your situation is, there are many new challenges and stresses. The Axios article says: "Forcing multiple generations to live in the same space can test our patience. People with young children struggle to balance caregiving with work, and adults who have moved back in with their parents are figuring out how to recalibrate the relationship."

And so I wonder if the walls of your house might be closing in on you some. I wonder if you might need some words that might help you to cling to your faith and to love your family with Christ's love. I hope today's scripture from 1 Peter will help you to keep Christ as your

cornerstone in your family relationships.

Now, the early Christians that Peter was writing to would have also been facing stress and challenges, both within their families and in their communities in general. You see, 1 Peter was a letter written to several churches in Asia; it was addressed to Jesus followers who were Gentiles -- they weren't Jewish people who had decided to follow Jesus. They were people who were part of what was an entirely new way of life for them. They were trying to figure out what it meant to live in the house of God, so to speak - they were learning who Christ was and what the resurrection meant to them personally. They were learning what it looked like to live **in** the world, but to also follow after Jesus. They must have faced resistance from their friends and family about this new way of life. They must have feared being persecuted for their beliefs and their faith. And Peter writes to encourage them to keep their focus on Christ -- to keep Christ as their cornerstone even when the going got tough.

It is in the text for today that we see what one commentator calls "the marks of the Christian life." (The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters of James and Peter, William Barclay, p. 224). In other words, this scripture describes the characteristics or the qualities of people who are following after Jesus. Really these marks of the Christian life are a description of the way that followers of Jesus are supposed to love one another -- and to love one another so deeply that those who are Christians shine like a bright light among the community - - drawing attention to God by their words and deeds. It seems to me that these words are really the perfect reminder for us today of how we might build our very lives upon the foundation of Christ's love. These are the qualities that we want to strive for -- this is how we as individuals want to show God's love to our own families and the world.

You will notice in this scripture that these marks for living are very practical - the advice from Peter relates to how we speak to one another and how we act. Our words and deeds should reflect Christ's love to one another.

**8-12** Be agreeable, be sympathetic, be loving, be compassionate, be humble. That goes for all of you, no exceptions. No retaliation. No sharp-tongued sarcasm. Instead, bless—that’s your job, to bless. You’ll be a blessing and also get a blessing.

The Message version of this scripture says: be agreeable. Be agreeable and not retaliatory. As a mom, this was my mantra or years - - stop that fighting! Right? Be agreeable. One Bible version says “have unity of spirit,” one says “be of one mind,” one says be “like-minded.” Now, Peter is certainly not saying we cannot disagree or that we cannot have our own opinions. There’s an old saying that we can disagree without being disagreeable! What Peter is saying is that we ought to be unified and agree about our overall purpose -- we ought to be agreeable that Christ is the foundation of our house. We ought to be unified in our faith and in striving to love as Christ loved.

The text says, “**be sympathetic, loving, compassionate and humble.**” The mark of the Christian life involves noticing the needs of others around us -- like Jesus did -- and then humbly putting our own interests after those of others.

And then the text turns to something very important. It addresses the way that we use our words. It says no sharp tongued sarcasm, instead be a blessing. It says:

Say nothing evil or hurtful;

Snub evil and cultivate

good;

**run after peace for all you’re worth.**

Imagine what it might be like to live in a household like that! This house is one of compassion, sympathy and unity. This household is one of peace -- not chaos. This household is one of humility and not egos; filled with people who seek to give and not to get. This household is one where we have the goal of blessing one another and receive immense blessings in return.

This household is one ruled by the same kind of reckless love that God pours out on us.

You see it is that amazing grace of God that really empowers us to love others in this way that Peter writes about. I have a friend who tells the story about her father attending a three day spiritual retreat called the Walk to Emmaus. And she says that the experience transformed her dad so thoroughly that when he got back, he wasn't the same person. He was loving, caring and compassionate in a way he hadn't been before. When her dad experienced God's love, it transformed their family life, and it paved the way for a new way of living for them all even into their adulthood. And do you think it might make a difference for the next generation of that family and the next and the next?!

You see when each of us experiences God's love in our lives, it transforms us, and then that love has the power to transform the lives of our family through us, and then the ripple effect of God's love has the power to transform generations of our family to come, and then even to ripple out further and further to transform our community and our world!

And so, I want to focus your attention on one place these ripples might lead. Because alongside the news that the coronavirus is transforming our families in ways that could be good for us, I found news that the coronavirus is causing extreme suffering in our families, too.

People are sick, suffering and grieving. Unemployment is skyrocketing. The shutdown of the economy is having real-life effects on the people we know and love. When people lose their jobs, they may lose their health insurance. Hunger is increasing, food banks are stretched thin. Those who were without adequate food and shelter before are now really suffering. And so I ask you, too, would you practice having the eyes of Jesus. I ask you to put on the compassion of Jesus and seek to be the hands and feet of Jesus. I ask you to consider how we might be reckless in opening the doors of the house to all those around us who really need the hope you might be able to share.

Friends, the thing is .....if we want to live in the house of love, we aren't just automatically imbued with this amazing love for one another are we? We don't just say yes to Jesus one day and then we are able to live with compassion and love and in peace. We don't just automatically gain the compassion of Jesus for the people in most desperate need. It takes using all the tools we can find to build up this house of love--to develop our spiritual lives it takes discipline and it takes focus, and it takes the power of God!

So, would you this day seek out the power of God's love in your life. Would you be intentional every day with spiritual disciplines -- would you work on building up those walls of holiness in your life ----- prayer, scripture reading, would you engage in acts of kindness and works of justice--these are the ways we develop loving and compassionate responses to stressful situations that we encounter. I am praying that we might be so transformed by God's love that it is evident in the way we love our families and that the ripples move out further and further for the healing of our land.

So this day, God of amazing grace, would you fill us with your love and empower us with your Spirit. Teach us to be agreeable, compassionate and humble. May we embrace life and use both our words and our deeds **only** for good and **not** for evil. May we run after the peace of Christ for all we are worth. And Holy God above all else, through thick and thin, I pray that we would keep our hearts at attention and in adoration of you. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.