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You Were Made for God's Family

1 John 4.18-21

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Everything that's made or created has a purpose. Whether it's a car, a phone, a computer, a pen, a piece of paper, a tool – everything created by people is made for a purpose. The same is true of you and me. You were made for God's family. **Ephesians 1:5** says God, “*Destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will.*” God wants a large family. God wants lots of children. God wants you to be part of the family of God. The Bible we've been journeying through for more than a year is basically the story of God building a family. **1 Peter 2:17** states, “*Love the family of believers.*” That's what God wants us to do. God wants us to learn to love our spiritual family because it makes us more like God **because God is love.** As God's children, the Lord wants us to learn to get along together. Parents want their children to get along. We're also preparing for eternity which we'll hear more about next month from the Book of Revelation. In heaven we're going to love God and we're going to love the other believers who are there. It's going to be a place of love. So, God wants us to start learning how to love other believers now.

**1 John 4:18-21** puts it clearly, “*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.* 19 *We love because he first loved us.* 20 **Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.** 21 *The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.*”

We've seen that in practice this week on Martha's Vineyard by the members of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church. We're to love other believers and the Bible tells us how to do that. Paul wrote to his younger companion in ministry Timothy (**1 Timothy 3:14-15**), “*I am writing these instructions to you so that...you may know how to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God.*” The household or family of God is the church. The church is a family. The church is not a building; it's not an institution; it's not an organization; it's not

a business; it's not a club. It's a family. People often say, "*I'm going to church*" as if church is a place you go to. That's not correct. Church isn't a place you go to.

**Church is a family you belong to.** There's a significant difference. Today we're going to talk about three levels of fellowship in God's family. We're not made to go through life on our own. The truth is we need each other.

The first level of **Fellowship is Membership, Choosing to Belong.** That means we find a church family and choose to get connected with it. **Ephesians 2:19** says, "*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God.*" **The Christian life is not just a matter of believing, it's also a matter of belonging and you must choose to belong.** When we're born, we became part of the human family, but we choose to belong to the family of God. Some people say, "*I'm a Christian, but I don't belong to any church.*" That isn't possible, it doesn't make sense. The church is where we live out what it means to be a Christian. It's like saying, "*I'm a soccer player, but I don't want to be a part of any team.*" It doesn't work, there's no game to play in. It's like saying, "*I'm a tuba player, but I don't want to be part of a band.*" Tuba solos sound funny. A Christian without a church family is an orphan. God meant us to be part of a family.

Paul says in **Romans 12:4-5**, "*For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.*" The word "*members*" is mentioned three times in one sentence. The word "membership" was originally a Christian word; it comes from verses like this one. Today it's used for being a member of every kind of club imaginable. But being a member first referred to being a member of the Body of Christ. Just like your hand is a member of your body, that's how closely, tightly, and interdependent we are as members of the Body of Christ.

People today go church shopping, which is fine if you're a seeker, or new believer or a new resident of an area. However, if you want to grow, if you want to see God working in your life, you need to commit to being a part of a body. As

followers of Jesus, we attach ourselves to a family of believers and say, “*I want to be part of what’s going on here.*”

Jesus loves the church. Jesus wants us to love the church as he does. Now you’d never say to someone, “*I love you; I just can’t stand your body.*” How would you feel hearing that? The church is Jesus’ body and we’re to love it. The Bible also describes the church as the bride of Christ. Can you imagine someone saying to you, “*I love you, but I can’t stand your wife.*” The church is the bride of Christ and because Jesus loves the church, the family of believers growing and serving together, we need to have the same kind of love for this body, and we express that love by choosing to belong.

The symbol we use to express that choice, that desire to belong to God’s family is called “**baptism.**” **1 Corinthians 12:13** says, “*For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body* – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were *all made to drink of one Spirit.*” Do hear the oneness – “one Spirit, all baptized into one body, one Spirit?”

Baptism is a public way of expressing, “*I’m a part of the family of God and I’m excited to belong to this group of believers.*” **Romans 6:3-4** says, “*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*”

Baptism is a public way of saying, “*I am dying to my old self-centered way of living; I’m rising to walk in a new way of life.*” Baptism is a visible symbol of the commitment of a person’s heart that you’re not ashamed to tell the world you belong to Jesus. Some of you may wish to take the step of being baptized because it’s something you’ve never chosen to do. Please speak with one of the pastors if you’re feeling led to make that decision and to take that first step of choosing to belong to God’s family and make public your commitment to Jesus.

A second level of being a part of a family including God’s family is **Learning to Share.** We’re created in God’s image, so **we’re made for relationships.** Genesis says, “*It is not good for man to be alone,*” and it’s not so

good for women either. Life is not a solo act. We all need friends. **Acts 2:44** says, “*All the believers met together constantly and shared everything with each other.*” To develop friendships, we need to meet and share together. I feel blessed to have some friendships that go back to my elementary school days as well as ones that are more recent. Having long-term friendships may depend somewhat on where we live, but we choose to develop friendships by making time for them at each stage of life. Friendships require making time and getting together. Until this is a priority in our life, we’re not going to develop any deep friendships.

**Learning to share** in the family of God means we share lots of things – including our **experiences**. We learn from each other. It may be wise to learn from experience, but it’s much wiser to learn from the experiences **of others** because we don’t have time to make all the mistakes ourselves. If you learn everything in life personally by trial and error, you’re going to go through a lot of problems you don’t have to and just about the time you figure it all out, you’re dead. There isn’t enough time to learn everything on our own. We can learn from the experiences of others. We’re all ignorant, just on different subjects. Some of you may not know as much about the Bible as I do, but you wouldn’t want me to put the electricity in your house or to knit you a sweater. We can learn from and share with each other, and we all win.

In addition to experiences, **we’re to share our homes**. **1 Peter 4:9** says, “*Be hospitable to one another without complaining.*” We’re to share or open our homes because you can’t fellowship in a crowd like we have on a Sunday morning. We can worship, learn, and celebrate in a crowd, in fact, it’s more fun with a crowd, but we fellowship in a small group or one on one. For the first several hundred years of Christianity folks met in homes, there weren’t buildings like this one, and that was the fastest period of growth for the church. This is why we put such a strong emphasis on being in a small group.

Not only do we share our **experiences and our homes**, we also are to share our **problems**. When we share a joy it’s doubled and when we share a problem we cut it in half. We “*weep with those who weep and rejoice with those*

*who rejoice.*" In a group sometimes we laugh together, sometimes we shed tears together. I passed a billboard that said, "**There's hearing, then there's listening.**" We don't have to fix everyone's problem, we can share in them just by listening, and by giving someone a little focused attention. This level of fellowship isn't going to happen unless we get into a small group that meets regularly. **Hebrews 10:25** reminds us, "*Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another.*" The primary purpose of a group is to encourage each other.

**Another aspect of being in God's family is Partnership. Partnership is doing my part.** Partnership is simply realizing, "*I've got a contribution to make; the family of God needs me.*" God didn't lead you to Brewster Baptist so you can sit and soak in a spiritual spa. God brought you here to contribute to what God is doing. God brought you here to serve, that will be a theme in October, but it's an aspect of fellowship and loving others.

In every family there are family responsibilities – we divide up the chores and being part of the family, we all do our part. Paul says in **1 Corinthians 3:9**, "**For we are God's servants, working together.**" **58 times the New Testament says we're partners with one another** – serving, loving, praying, and even putting up with one another. This is love in action. Love is a verb. In God's family the church **we share our heart, and we do our part.** Each of us needs to find where we fit, where our niche is and do our part by serving in a ministry as long as God gives us the health and strength to do so. We all have a part to play in the family of God and we get more done together than we could ever accomplish on our own. Even for our people who are homebound and unable to be with us in person, you can call, text, email, send notes, and pray with and encourage others, and so stay connected with the family of God. And whatever we do, we remember we're doing it for and to Jesus.

Fellowship is about growing deeper together and **loving other believers like family.** **Romans 12:10** says, "*Love one another with mutual affection, out do one another in showing honor.*" The word for "fellowship" in the Bible is the Greek word is "koinonia" and the basic root means being committed to each

other as we are to Jesus. That's the deepest level of fellowship. Being as committed to each other as we are to Jesus. **1 John 3:16** tells us, "*We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.*" The deepest level of fellowship is sacrificing for each other. While we don't face persecution for following Jesus as some of our brothers and sisters in Christ do in other parts of the world, we can sacrifice for each other by standing by one another when someone is going through a crisis.

There are people here who have walked through the valley of the shadow of death or illness in recent years who could share how the love of good friends in this church has helped them through. I've been with many people when they're dying. No one I've been with has ever said, "*Let me see my diploma one more time. Let me hold my phone one last time. Let me see look at my bank statement for the final time.*" What people say in a moment like that is, "*Call my family and friends.*" In our last moments we talk about and want what matters most to us.

The sooner you figure out that what really matters in life is knowing God and loving family and friends the better your life will be. Don't wait until the last moments of your life to begin to fellowship as God intends because life is all about love. Loving God is called **Worship**. Loving each other is called **Fellowship**. We want BBC to be known for our love. We want people to say, "*That's the place where they love God and each other,*" because that's what Christianity is all about, loving God and loving each other.

How do you know if you're in God's family? **1 John 3:10** says, "*Anyone who does not love other Christians does not belong to God.*" As I shared at the beginning, **1 John 4:20**, says, "*Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.*" **1 John 3:14** declares, "*We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another.*" **That's the proof.** God's family the church is a lab for learning how to love.

When it comes to God's family and fellowship, where are you at today? Have you made it to level one – choosing to belong? Have you committed

yourself to membership in God's church and being baptized as a public expression of your commitment to follow Jesus? If you haven't done that then you know your next step – please speak to one of the pastors so you can be part of the next group of people who do that at BBC.

Our second step is learning to share with a small group of other folks, and we begin to do our part. We find a place to give back and contribute to the family of God. We find and fulfill our family responsibilities. The deepest level is **devotion**. Are there are other believers who know you're devoted to them, that you'll be there for them in a crisis? We choose to be a part of God's family, if you haven't made that choice, I hope you will soon because it's life changing. We become God's children through faith, as Paul says in **Galatians 3:26**, "*For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.*" The one thing that remains the same once you've made that choice is you are a child of God, which can't be taken from you, that remains true always.

Let's pray, Loving God, we thank you for the opportunity to be a part of your family. We thank you that we don't have to do through life isolated, lonely, and disconnected. Thank you for creating the Brewster Baptist family for all of us. You may want to pray this in your heart with me:

"Dear God, I want to be a part of your family and I want to learn to love my spiritual family just like you do. Forgive me if I have been treating it too casually. I want to grow in the levels of fellowship so today I'm choosing to belong. I want to learn to share and make time to develop real friendships. I want to do my part in the family of God. I want to learn to love other believers like brothers and sisters. Teach me the meaning of real love. In your name I pray, Amen."

### **Questions for Discussion or Reflection**

1. When you hear the word "family," what words, images, or memories come to mind for you?
2. Some people have positive associations with "family" and others do not, but what does it mean to you that God loves you and wants you to be a part of God's family?

3. 1 John 4:20 declares, *“Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.”* Why do you think this is true?
4. What do you do, what can you do to help yourself to love people you find difficult to love?
5. Why is it important for you to choose to belong to the church?
6. What are some of the things we learn to share as members of God’s family?
7. Being in God’s family is a partnership and we all have a part to play. What are you doing, what could you be doing to help strengthen God’s family at BBC?