

Jesus-Centered Family on Mission with Him  
JCFoM Week 4  
1 Thessalonians 2:1-12  
1/29/23

### Introduction

**1 Thessalonians 2.** [*quite a bit of set up to do*] **Pray.**

When you take our membership class here at Citizens, one of the things you'll hear us say is that when you join our church, you're not joining an organization, you're joining a group of people, a family.

And that is because we believe at our core the picture given to us in the Scriptures for what and who the church is meant to be is not an organization, a set of programs, or a once a week worship service.

We believe, as we'll explore here in part 2 of our vision series – **Church is a Family.**

And for us, that means two really key things:

- **We share our lives**
- **We share our hearts**

### Strong Group vs. Weak Group

*We'll explore that first part, what it means to share our lives, in just a minute, but first, let me talk a little bit more on what it means to be a part of God's family.*

The Bible teaches that because of what Christ has done for us through His life, death, and resurrection as our Great High Priest and King of kings – we are not only brought into relationship with God, but also relationship with God's people – His Church.

And we're told, in the Scriptures, the Church is a number of things. It's described as:

- A Living Temple – The place where God's Spirit dwells.
- The body of Christ – Arms, legs, eyes, ears - all meant to work together in unison for God's glory.
- The Bride of Christ – Loved by Christ, sought after and pursued by Him.

**But one of the clearest and most often used pictures in the Scriptures for the people of God is that of a family.**

In fact, *the most common word used in the entire New Testament, over 300 times, to describe followers of Jesus is the Greek term "adelphoi" - translated "brothers and sisters".*

**Church, the people of God, is a family.**

The apostle Paul says this in Ephesians 2...

**Ephesians 2:19 - 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household [family] of God.**

Or consider the shocking words of Jesus in Matthew 12...

**Matthew 12:48 – 49 But he replied to the man who told him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” 49 And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! 50 For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”**

To put your faith in Jesus means you are brought into relationship, not only with God as your Heavenly Father, but with the church as your brothers and sisters - as your family. And throughout church history and the Scriptures, that identification or belonging in the big C global Church family of God is lived out through our participation with the little c local church family of God.

### **What is a Family to Jesus**

**But what’s important for us to realize is that there can be a disconnect between what Jesus and Paul mean and what you and I hear when we think about this idea of “family.”**

So for some of us, we come from very broken families. Families marked by suffering, turmoil, grief, and pain. The idea of family is not only not enticing to us, but actually a bit scary and something we’re not so sure we even want. And I want to be clear – when the Scriptures talk about the people of God as a family, they certainly don’t mean the worst or most broken versions of family in our society today.

**BUT, it’s also important to note Paul and Jesus don’t mean the best versions of family in our society today, either.**

When Jesus, in Matthew 12 says that followers of Christ are his family, he isn’t thinking about modern western concepts of family. He actually means that we are to relate to Him and to one another as an ancient Jewish family. Which is incredibly different.

**You see, Jesus is speaking to a collectivist culture. Communal culture. Sometimes called a strong group culture or society.**

Here’s how Biblical scholar Bruce Malina would describe this type of community in his commentary on Matt 12...

**In a strong group society, the person perceives himself or herself to be a member of a group, and responsible to the group for his or her actions, destiny, career, development, and life in general. [...] The individual person is embedded in the group, and is free to do what he or she feels is right and necessary, only if in accord with group norms and only if the action is in the group’s best interest. The group has the priority over the individual member.**

Is that not quite a bit different to how a lot of us living in modern America think about ourselves and the groups and even the families we belong to?

Well that’s in large part because we are not culturally part of a strong group society. We are what is considered an **individual or weak group society**. We see ourselves primarily as individuals, and only secondarily or occasionally as being a part of a group.

And this is why I said Jesus doesn’t mean the best versions of our families either. Because in our culture, even the most communal and vibrant of families probably wouldn’t function like that quote we just read – they would still in some way, shape, or form probably focus on how to best support the individual dreams and desires of each member. We might hear, say, or think something like – “My family is great because we’re so supportive of the dreams and aspirations of one another.”

That's not what Jesus has in mind. To Jesus, the family of God is not a supportive religious group which exists to help you accomplish your project self. The family of God is not primarily designed for the individual benefit of each member. It's meant to function best as all members strive and give themselves away for the health of the whole thing.

**Now chances are, because we don't live in a strong group society, to a lot of us this mentality may sound pretty odd, if not a little oppressive.** Some of us may feel like it sounds suffocating or can't imagine belonging to a group that might stifle or infringe on our individual freedom and autonomy.

And some of that feeling isn't completely unwarranted – there are some distinct ways strong group culture can go poorly, but it's also worth noting that weak group cultures have some pretty significant downsides as well.

For example, I don't think it's any coincidence that the most individualistic societies to have ever existed also tend to report the highest rates of loneliness and anxiety to have ever existed. Now certainly there are complex factors that contribute to both of those issues – loneliness and anxiety – but it's certainly not hard to see how our weak group society might contribute.

Think about it – Some of the biggest decisions humans make in life are things like what to do for a career or work, where to live in the country or the world, and who we're going to spend our lives with. In a lot of strong group societies, these are decisions that have historically been made together with family, if those decisions aren't just made on your behalf by the group.

And by contrast, in America a lot of those decisions are made in total isolation. Maybe we'll reach out to a parent or confidante or someone specific, but ultimately we feel the full weight of those decisions on our own shoulders and we feel the weight of being defined by them, rather than being defined by the family we belong to and the norms and expectations of our strong group culture. Which means we live in a culture which prides itself on individual autonomy that keeps us free of the burden of relationships while also putting the entire weight on our shoulders for crafting and creating an identity, a self. Could that not contribute in some ways to excessive rates of loneliness and anxiety?

Now, my goal today is not to host a debate on strong group culture vs. weak group culture. Both sides have strengths and both sides have weaknesses.

**I am simply pointing out that when Jesus and the New Testament authors talk about church being a family, they are referring to a strong group cultural family. They are saying that we should have the level of commitment and care and priority towards our church family that an ancient Jewish family had towards their biological family.**

In case you think it doesn't sound like an uncomfortable idea, I'm going to demonstrate how uncomfortable and strongly worded the idea is by reading the same quote we read earlier about strong group thinking, but replace the word "group" with "church." Here we go...

**In a strong [church], the person perceives himself or herself to be a member of a [church], and responsible to the [church] for his or her actions, destiny, career, development, and life in general. [...] The individual person is embedded in the [church], and is free to do what he or she feels is right and necessary, only if in accord with [church] norms and only if the action is in the [church's] best interest. The [church] has the priority over the individual member.**

Right off the bat, let me say this: if that makes you uncomfortable, you are not alone. In one aspect or another, I think all of us can think of a way we really don't like that idea.

Personally, as a raging introvert, I think it would be easier some days if the Bible said something like, “to be a Christian you need to make a private decision for Jesus, and as far as relationships with other Christians, try to be nice and hang out with people who are pretty similar to you when you feel like it.”

**But to follow Jesus, we have to wrestle with the actual ways of Jesus as given to us in the Scriptures and not what we wish the ways of Jesus were as determined by our cultural norms.**

**AND we believe the ways of Jesus are not only the right way to live, but the best way to live. The way that, though not without difficulties and pain, leads to flourishing with God and others.**

And the way of Jesus is that as we learn to center our lives on Him, we also center our lives on His people. That is what we’re after when we say family.

But how does that get out of the theoretical and into our lives?

### Sharing Our Lives

**Well that brings us to the first part of being a Jesus-Centered Family – namely we share our lives.**

The way of Jesus is to be a part of the family of God. Meaning *not* – let’s all learn to care just a little bit more about each other and think about some good church things we can participate in. But rather – that we would radically re-orient our lives to intertwine with those around us in God’s family. To see ourselves primarily as a part of the group, and not as individuals participating as long as it stays beneficial to us.

And this is the very thing Paul talks about in **1 Thessalonians 2:8**. One verse that I want to dive deep into for the rest of our time together.

**8 So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.**

**Context** – The apostle Paul is writing to a church he planted in the city of Thessalonica. You can go back and read the story later, Acts 17, but Paul and his missionary coworker Silas, plant this church and it creates such an uproar of chaos in the city that those who don’t follow Jesus rise up and start attacking the church, and eventually it gets so dangerous that the church is like - Paul you have to leave. Your life is being threatened, this is not going to go well, we’ll be ok - get going.

And 1 Thessalonians is one of two letters Paul writes back to this church, basically just all about how much he cares about them and misses them and prays for them.

Now in chapter 2 in particular, Paul spends time recapping his ministry when he was there in the city.

**And verse 8 really is the hinge point of the chapter, and this line “also our own selves” or you might have it translated “also our very lives” is the hinge point of the verse.**

Paul says we came to you, and certainly we brought the gospel, we brought that to every city – we preached Jesus, we pointed you to Him but we also shared with you our very lives. We intertwined our lives with you.

- We ate together on a regular basis.
- We attended the temple consistently together to worship and to pray.
- We lived the day in, day out reality of our lives together.

- When it came time for me to leave, we made that decision as a group altogether.

We shared our very lives.

For many today, church is a place where they only spiritually intertwine their lives with others. You know what I mean? Like my group knows my spiritual life – my sin, my struggle, my prayer life – and don't get me wrong, that is awesome, and it's next week's sermon, but Paul says we shared **not only** the gospel, but our very lives.

The boring stuff. The mundane stuff. The lame stuff. We shared that too.

- I didn't just ask you to help me fight sin, I also asked for your help with filing my taxes.
- We didn't just study the Bible together, we also ate together, worked out together.
- I didn't just get your wisdom on spiritual practices, I also got your wisdom on where we should buy a house, what I should do for work, what our school plan for our kids should be.

Because that's what a family does. We intertwine our very lives.

**This is the way of God's family that we want to live into. That we would be able to say to one another, in our church, in our groups – I've shared with you my very life.**

I think a really helpful way to paint this picture for us is through a term I'd love for us to start using as a church known as – **"Refrigerator Rights."**

**Mom + Dad.** Think about it this way, this might not be true for you, but it's true in our house – if my mom and dad come to visit and they're thirsty or hungry, they don't ask me if they can get something out of the fridge. They're not like - "hey do you mind if I grab a soda?" No, what do they do? They go in, open up the pantry and grab a snack. Open up the fridge, grab a drink. Go into the cabinet, and make themselves some coffee.

Why? Because they're family. And in our family, if you're an Olson that means you have full rights and privileges that come with being a part of my family – they have refrigerator rights. Help yourself. You're in the family.

That's the posture we're going for as a church. You come to my house – don't knock. Come in. Take your shoes off. Help yourself to what's in the fridge and pantry, hang out with my kids – we're family.

**That's what we're aiming for...and by God's grace, we've seen some of this happen over the past 2 years:**

- **Holidays** – Christmas and Thanksgiving together. "Hey if you can't go home for whatever reason, come to our house and we'll be each other's family."
- **Care** - We've done more meal trains for people because of babies, covid, grief than I've ever seen in my entire life. ("We're coming to watch your kids so you can go on a date, pick the night.")
- **Living** - We've had people in our church invite others to come and live with them, no rent, no timeline on it – just come be a part of our family, let's share life together.
- **Rhythms** - Folks have bought houses in the same neighborhoods, close by, organizing rhythms with each other.
- **Vacations** - We've had a number of folks go on vacations together, travel together.

**Just trying to say – man this is an all of life thing. That's what we're after.**

And if you're new or you've been around for a little bit but you're kind of dipping your toe in, feeling it out, let me just with all of the welcome in my voice – **that's what we want to invite you into. We want you to have refrigerator rights in our church. We want you to intertwine your life with us as well.**

**We're a Jesus-centered FAMILY on mission with Him. We literally started our church to do this – to revolve our lives around Jesus and each other and invite others to do the same.**

- We didn't start Citizens to be your landing zone for Sunday mornings.
- We didn't start this church to create a great program for your kids.
- We didn't start this church because we wanted another place for bible study.

***We started because a group of us wanted to revolve our entire lives around Jesus and each other and invite others to experience that as well.***

### Heart Postures

**But that's a tall order...so the question becomes how? How do we start to live into this? I think Paul in 1 Thessalonians 2:8 is helpful.**

In this one verse, Paul gives us three heart postures we need to share life together as a family. So I want to just briefly address these 3 heart postures and a really practical first step you can take towards each one.

#### **Heart Posture #1 – Love**

**So, being affectionately desirous of you...**

This can also be translated as yearning for or longing for. Paul loves this church. Cares so deeply for this church.

The first heart posture we must take towards one another if we're going to share our lives as a family is the most basic posture of love.

What does that mean? **That means I must think you're more important and more valuable than I am.**

The Scriptures put it this way in **Philippians 2 – 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.**

The first step towards sharing life together is that I have to love you. At its most basic form we see this in marriages, right? What happens in a marriage - two people love each other and commit to loving each other. When you make those vows it's a declaration essentially of you over me. I'm now giving myself away to care for, serve, and love you. And out of that mutual, self-sacrificing love a life is built. A home, a family, a shared way of being.

That's not unlike what we're going for as a church family. That we, in the context of covenant membership, would also say to one another – because I love you, I'm not giving myself away to sacrifice for and serve you– and out of that mutual self-sacrifice a family is built.

Now, here's where some of the hiccup comes in. When I say we love one another that first means we learn to die to ourselves, see one another as more important than we are...

But it also means that I don't just love the people that are easy for me to love. I think sometimes it can be easy to brush this off and sort of quickly just say - "Yeah, I love my church." When what we mean may be that we love our friends within the church.

But here's the reality – this is Paul Washer, not me so thank him for the conviction – **"You love your church to the extent to which you love its most difficult member."**

### ***Do you want to know if you love your church family?***

- Do you love that really annoying guy who never stops talking about his one unique hobby he and he alone enjoys?
- Do you love that member who is desperate for care and it seems like drains the energy out of every room she walks into?
- Do you love that person who hurt you? Who made that off-handed comment about you to someone else?

### **Sharing our lives requires self-sacrificing love for each and every member.**

That's the first posture, what's the first step toward that posture?

#### **Next Step #1 – See and Receive Christ's Love**

The first step towards growing in love towards God's people, is to see and receive Christ's love for you.

- The first step towards loving that really difficult guy, is to see and receive how Christ loves you when you are really difficult.
- The first step towards loving the person desperate and in need of care, is to see and receive how Christ loves you when you are desperate and in need of care.
- The first step towards loving the person who hurt you, sinned against you, is to see and receive how Christ loves you when you hurt Him and sin against Him.

We see how much Christ has loved us, AND how much Christ loves the Church, His bride. And that spurs us on, shapes our hearts, and grows us in love for one another.

#### **Heart Posture #2 – Intentionality**

### **8 So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready...**

Some translations – we were "eager" or "resolved". It was set at the forefront of our minds that we were going to share the gospel and our lives with you.

**Time.** I remember early on in ministry, sharing with a mentor of mine about my struggle with time. I felt like I had so much on my plate, I didn't know how to handle all of my responsibilities, be a good pastor, a good husband, good friend and a healthy human with spiritual practices and hobbies and just all the responsibilities of being a human.

And so I just asked him – how do you find time to do it all? And I remember he said something so helpful. He said – **"Tim, life is busy. And I have always found time for what I most value."**

Listen, life is only going to get busier for you. That's the theme of my life. Every year is inevitably busier than the previous year. You cannot go back to college. Where you had lots of free time, a loose schedule, and lived 2 minutes from all of your closest friends. That's not the wish dream to take away from this sermon.

That's not the goal. We all have responsibilities, jobs, friendships, families – life is busy. It won't stop being busy. So in the midst of that busy, let me just encourage you – **church as family is not going to just happen.** If you just let life go by, you won't blink 5 years later and suddenly be a part of a robust, flourishing, interwoven lives church community.

That's not how it works. This takes time, effort, energy, sacrifice, and intentionality. Paul says we were resolved to do this. We were eager, ready, looking for opportunities.

### **Next Step #2 – Schedule and Sacrifice**

We've got to look at our calendar. We've got to take the effort and energy to make the plans, and we've got to be willing to say "no" to other good things if we are going to learn to live life with one another.

**Soccer.** I'm feeling the tension of this right now. We signed Harper up for soccer this spring. She met the age requirement by a week, so we're like - LET'S DO IT. First organized sport ever, I'm so excited. But her games are on Saturdays. And we've got some Citizens events and some Community Group events already on the calendar this spring. So she will miss 3 out of the 8 games. (And that's not even like a pastor brag, that's CG stuff I don't have to be at for my job, but want to cause we want to intertwine our lives with these people). Because we've decided right now, church family wins out. 100% of the time, every time.

#### ***What about for you?***

- Maybe your kid can nap at 2pm, instead of 1pm. Or go to bed a little bit later than usual so you can be there.
- Maybe you can't go back home to see your family twice a month, or spend every weekend traveling to the mountains or the beach.
- Maybe you need to go to work earlier so you can get off in time to make the trivia night with your CG.

Maybe for some of us, this looks like adding nothing new, just doing what you're already doing but with other people.

- You like to go rock climbing at Inner Peaks. Intentionality for you could look like inviting others from our church to go with you.
- You're a busy mom, but someone has to go buy the groceries. Maybe invite another woman in your CG to go grocery shopping with you.
- My job is crazy. Ok. Can you get 45 minutes for lunch? Invite someone to pack a lunch and meet you at your office and eat in your cubicle with you.

Don't think you have to invent a bunch of new things or add a bunch of stuff into your already packed schedule. Look at what you're already doing, and invite others in our church family to it with you. That's how we start intertwining our lives together.

### **Heart Posture #3 - Patient Commitment**

This one was new for me, I hadn't seen this before studying for this sermon. Look at the end of v8...

**8 So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.**



Notice – the Thessalonians didn't start as very dear to Paul. They most likely started as strangers. And then slowly over time, as they shared the gospel and they shared life together what happened – they **became** very dear to Paul.

For some of us, we give up on a church family, for the same reason the world gives up so quickly on dating relationships – we think it's supposed to be love at first sight. I just need it to click, and we have to be instant best friends, and the first night together we have to have that magical moment where we look at each other and it's like we've always been friends.

If that's you in the room, I know January is often this time where folks are reengaging with church or exploring life with God - let me just encourage you if that's what you're looking for consciously or subconsciously as you visit churches you're in for a let down. Because either it won't happen (that instant click) or it will and then you'll be really let down later when they in fact prove to be what we all are...broken people in need of a savior.

That's not life. That's not how it works 99.9% of the time. Relationships, especially the older you get and as the responsibilities we just talked about pile up – **TAKE WORK.**

Patient commitment. Growing over time to love one another.

### **Next Step #3 - Get off the Fence**

Stop the endless scrolling of life. That's netflix, right? Scroll for an hour because you can't commit to something to watch. Leave that for the streaming service, don't do that for your church family.

Land somewhere.

And if I can speak directly into something I think some of us in the room need to hear – Your unwillingness to put down roots in a place and with a people is directly impacting your ability to feel like you're a part of a family.

If you always live with an escape plan – I can leave this church, I can leave this city, I can leave this relationship, I can leave this job – whenever I want if it gets too difficult or is no longer beneficial – one foot in, one foot out...as you're TRAINED TO DO by our culture. If you live that way – you will never not be lonely. Can I say it straight – you will never experience friendships, community, or church family like you were created for and like your soul, if you're honest, longs for.

**That comes with the risk of staying put. I think in our day and age of mobility – perhaps the more courageous move is not actually to leave, but to stay.** I'm not saying CLT has to be your long-term home. That'd be great if it was. Please do that.

But what I am saying, and I give this encouragement a ton – is land somewhere. Make somewhere your forever home. This constantly always looking over the fence to see if the grass is greener is harming the people trying to intertwine their lives with you, and is hurting you.

Your walk with Jesus. Your knowledge of His grace.

**BECAUSE, if you're a follower of Jesus, Jesus is not half-committed to you. He's not half-committed to His Church. His people.**

He gave everything for us. And He will never leave or forsake or abandon or walk out on those who are His.

We rest in that grace. We rest in that promise.

And it moves us to treat Christ's Church the same way he treats it.

**With self-sacrificing, intentional, patient and committed love.**

**Pray. Communion.**