

Series: Family Matters
#6 God's Forever Family
Genesis 1:24-31; 1 Peter 3:7

Our society is increasingly becoming a society of options. We speak more today of pluralism than we ever have in our history. Many of the ideas we have as a people, many of the written things that we hold dear, were written when America was 90 percent Protestant, white, and without almost any minorities. We've become more pluralistic.

This pluralism reaches beyond ethnic distinctions and descriptions of religious beliefs. There are those that say the church is a subgroup in our society, like going to Pennsylvania and taking pictures of the Amish.

I don't know about you, but one thing I don't want to be is antiquated. I don't want some busload of tourists pulling up in front of my house or this church, to take pictures, like I'm part of something outdated or obsolete. I don't like the idea of people asking the question, "**Is the church relevant?**"

In Matthew 16, Jesus looked at Peter, someone very much like us, and said, "***It's upon the profession of faith, the belief system, the foundations of your life, and other lively stones that will come after you, that I'll build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.***"

I'm concluding our series on Family Matters today with a message entitled, "**God's Forever Family.**"

The family is the basic unit of society. Man didn't think up the family, God did. In fact, there was a family before there was a church. He made a man, and he made a woman, and joined them in marriage, and he said, "Be fruitful and multiply."

It's very interesting that in the Bible, God uses family terms to express spiritual truths. God is called "our Father," we are called "his children," and the church is called "the family of God." Jesus is the groom, and the Church is His bride. Even in salvation, we are born again...adopted into God's family.

When we come to Christ, God sends the Holy Spirit into our hearts to give us new life and the assurance that we are God's children. That same Holy Spirit within us

cries out “Abba, Father.” The word “Abba” comes from an Aramaic word that little children would use to speak to their fathers in an intimate, personal way. In English you might say “Dad” or “Daddy” or “Papa.”

Christ set us free from the slavery of sin with the purchase price of shed blood when He died on the cross. Then he brought us into His family and gave us “full rights” as his own children. The concept of “full rights” means that no matter how badly we may have sinned before conversion, there are no second-class children in God’s family. God has no stepchildren, or grandchildren. We come in as members of the family with full rights and privileges. Our standing isn’t based on our performance. Our standing is based on God’s grace.

God says despite all sin, suffering, sorrow, sadness, and all our faults and failures; I still choose to use the family even in all its brokenness, including the Church, which is God’s forever family.

1. I believe in the church because it's our only institution that deals with eternity.

The church is the only institution in our society dealing with the ultimate issues life, death, eternity, judgment, forgiveness. A thousand political problems are very important. But if one deals with those and does not deal with issues like, "Where will I spend eternity? How will I please a holy God?"—if one has no answer to his sin problem or the problem of his soul—then he has missed the point.

2. I believe in the church because it gives worth and dignity to mankind.

Psalm 8 has a very interesting phrase: *"What is man that thou art mindful of him?"* Then it goes on to say, *"Man is a little lower than the angels."* We live in a society that doesn't think of man as a little lower than the angels. We live in a society that thinks of man as a little higher than the animals.

3. I believe in the church because it provides a moral compass.

John Wesley preached the gospel of Jesus Christ in England. He preached mostly to the poor and to the miners, and a great movement of God arose among common folk. But a few influential people of power were saved, among them a young dandy who had inherited his place in Parliament. That young dandy named William Wilberforce came to know Christ as Savior, the Word of God penetrated

his heart, and he became convinced of the ugliness and the sinfulness of slavery. For 50 years he stood in the British Parliament to condemn the ugly sinfulness of the British Empire and its wholesale interest in slavery.

Two weeks after he died and 25 years before Abraham Lincoln pronounced the Emancipation Proclamation in this country, the British Parliament voted to end slavery as a result of one Christian man and his friends.

4. I believe in the church because it provides a loving community.

The church is a place where I can find community, healing, and love. We can belong to lots of things, but the church of Jesus Christ is an extended family. When a person's life becomes unglued and the effects of this culture destroy a person, where can he go to find forgiveness, love, and understanding? God Forever Family...the church... the Body of Christ.

The church has provided motivation for the most lasting, valuable, and selfless efforts of mankind. Schools, hospitals, orphanages, colleges, and relief agencies are the result of Christian efforts. These came when men and women, moved by God, decided to change the world.

5. I believe in the church because it has produced long-lasting, selfless contributions to humanity.

Barbara Tuckman's great historical account, [The Distant Mirror](#), records that in one twelve-year period during the Dark Ages, one third of the population of the entire earth from Moscow to Cairo died of the black plague. Who were those men in little brown outfits picking up the dead and caring for the sick? Saint Francis who went out in the name of Jesus to alleviate that great suffering.

I believe in the church. Attending and being a vital part of the church of Jesus Christ is not just something quaint that we do who are hanging on to our outdated traditions. It's not some irrelevant singing and reciting of ancient religious phrases.

Being part of the church is being part of something that Jesus Christ started, and He said, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Aren't you glad to be part of something that has stood for over 2,000 years, that makes an eternal difference?

Now as I said, the church is Gods' Forever Family. It's supposed to be a loving community of followers of Christ, but if you've read the bible, you know that being an active member in church is like any family; it can be messy. It reminds me of the little poem I heard. **"To live above, with saints we love, that will be glory. To live below, with the saints we know, that's quite a different story!"**

Turn with me to Genesis 29. I want to read about a messy family situation and show you it applies to God's Forever Family...the Church...the Body of Christ.

Beginning with verse 16, ***"Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. 17Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful. 18Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, "I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel."***

19Laban said, "It's better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me." 20So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.

21Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to make love to her."

22So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast. 23But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and Jacob made love to her. 24And Laban gave his servant Zilpah to his daughter as her attendant.

25When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me?"

26Laban replied, "It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. 27Finish this daughter's bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work."

28And Jacob did so. He finished the week with Leah, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. 29Laban gave his servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her attendant. 30Jacob made love to Rachel also, and his

love for Rachel was greater than his love for Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years.” (NIV)

Jacob thought he was marrying one person, but he got stuck with two, the Rachel he wanted and the Leah he wasn't expecting. When he said “I do” he got two!

There are lots of stories in Genesis that are puzzling, but Genesis 29 – WOW!

Have you ever wondered how Laban thought he was going to get away with this? I mean it's a ridiculous scam because unless Laban made Jacob go blind somehow, eventually Jacob is going to find out that this is not Rachel.

The morning comes, "...behold it was Leah." Jacob is livid. He runs to Laban and says, "What is this you have done to me? Why have you deceived me?"

I think Laban rehearsed his reply. He says, "Jacob, you must not be from around here, because we don't put the younger over the older." Immediately Jacob knows that Laban is doing to him exactly what he did to his own father and brother. Just as Jacob deceived Isaac into believing he was Esau, the oldest, so now Laban deceives Jacob in the dark by supplanting the younger for the older.

This is so clear that there's a medieval rabbi that comments on this passage, and he imagines Jacob and Leah having an angry exchange in the morning. Jacob says to Leah, "I called out 'Rachel' in the dark, but you answered. Leah says to Jacob, "Your father called out 'Esau' in the dark, and you answered. Why did you do that to him?" For the first time, Jacob the deceiver, knows what it's like to be lied to, deceived...exploited.

If you are married, you know what it's like to be Jacob. When you said I do, you were expecting Rachel who would share an amazing life with you; a Rachel who will love you like no one else can; a Rachel who will offer warmth and affection; a Rachel who will love you unconditionally; a Rachel who greets you with a kiss in the morning, and a kiss goodnight. When you said I do you got the Rachel you had dreamed about. **If you are sitting next to your spouse, it's a good time to say “amen!”**

But, like Jacob, when you said *I do* you got two. You not only got the lovely Rachel you wanted, you got Leah you didn't expect; a Leah who does not always agree with you; a Leah who will give you the silent treatment; a Leah who spends money

you don't have; a Leah who complains about you; who you don't understand and who doesn't understand you; a Leah who will drive you nuts, and make you mad.

When you said, "I do," you not only married the Rachel you wanted, but the Leah you weren't expecting. This is not a good time to say 'amen.'

Every couple comes to this realization and, because of it, ends up quitting or co-existing. Then there are those couples who learn to love not only Rachel but the Leah side of their spouse, and their marriage becomes beautiful life!

TRANSITION: Even if you're not married, if you are a part of the church of Jesus Christ then you know what it's like to be Jacob.

When you said "I do" to God, you got Rachel—you got the beautiful, perfect Christ; who forgives our sins and heals our wounds, who lifted us out of the swamp, and placed our feet on solid ground; who says "Come to me and I will give you rest,"; who gives us purpose and meaning; who loves us with an everlasting, unconditional love, and promises to never leave us or forsake us.

If you have been reconciled to God, you have married Rachel, the Christ, you have always wanted!

But, when you said "I do" to God, you also got the Leah you didn't expect—you got the church family; that will disappoint you at times; who appears more sinful than sanctified, full of quirky people, that like things you don't like, whose interests are vastly different from yours, people who major in the minors and minor in the majors; a Leah that seems at times too traditional, too contemporary, too Progressive, too Conservative, too restrictive, too simplistic, or too intellectual; a Leah that rubs us the wrong way, a Leah that makes us wonder if getting Jesus is worth enduring the church.

Let's be honest, it feels a lot like God has pulled a Laban on us! All of us come into relationship with God expecting only Rachel, but we get Leah, too! Who in their right mind would say "I do" to the mess, the risk, the failures, faults, and flaws that come with the church?

If ever there was a church that made one wonder if getting Rachel was worth enduring Leah, it was the Corinthian Church.

Here are just some of the issues that Paul points out in his first letter to the Corinthians: claims of spiritual superiority over one another, suing one another in public courts, abusing the communion meal, lack of faithful giving, sexual misbehavior, and some in the church were teaching that there is no literal resurrection of the dead (chapter 15).

By the end of 1 Corinthians, you can sense Paul's frustration. ***"If anyone does not love the Lord, let that person be cursed! Come, Lord! 23The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. 24My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen."*** (1 Cor 16:22-24, NIV).

Paul's Corinthian correspondence exists for those of us who have had horrible experiences in our marriage to the church. We read about the Corinthian church and think, **"My church is not that bad. Sure, we argue about worship style, decorations, meeting times, but no one is sleeping with his stepmother!"**

Today's church, God's forever family, has more in common with the Corinthian Church than we care to admit.

They say if you enjoy sausage, don't watch it being made. It's gross! If you want to enjoy the church, don't watch disciples being made. It's messy, and ugly.

If you want to be happy in church, then learn to tolerate Leah like Jacob did.

Some people in a marriage just co-existence with their spouse. You pay the bills, share the household chores, and even raise the kids, but there's no intimacy.

There are some Christians like that...they sneak in during the worship and sneak out during the closing song. They avoid people, critique things about the church they don't like, say "no" to using their gifts to serve others. People like this have an untapped potential. **Withholding intimacy means you will become more like Leah and less like Rachel.**

The church is full of people like this. When I say the church, I'm referring to believers everywhere. They haven't physically left church but internally they have checked out. They have been let down, disappointed, discouraged, and offended.

Who can blame them for checking out, no one wants an ugly bride.

Like it or not, when we say “I do” to God, we get the Christ we want and the church we didn’t expect. They are a package deal, two for one!

One day Christ stood at the altar waiting for us to join him there. The musicians didn’t play “Here comes the bride” they played “Here comes the sinner.” This was an arranged marriage by Father God who paid the dowry with the Christ’s blood.

Verse 17, "Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel was lovely in form and beautiful."

Bruce Walker in his commentary says Leah's name means "cow." She grows up in the shadow of a younger sister who is gorgeous.

The statement that she had “weak eyes” (vs 17) seems to portray Leah as a homely girl. If we are to take the word *rak*, which is rendered “weak”, in its normal sense, then, we must think in terms delicacy not defect. In contrast with Rachel, who may have had fire or a sparkle in her eyes, Leah had gentle eyes.

In connection with the word *rak*, we could conclude that the disposition of Leah was one of gentleness and tenderness, while Rachel seems to have had a more fiery and aggressive temperament.

Leah is the unwanted one. Leah is the rejected one. She's the girl that no one invited to the prom. That’s why it's Leah more than Rachael that’s really Jacob's soul mate because they both grow up in the shadow of another favored sibling. They both know what it is like to be rejected and ignored. They both look for love to save them.

The biggest turning point in our text is when Jacob goes to bed thinking it's Rachel and he wakes up to Leah.

Derek Kidner in his commentary on Genesis says this about that verse. He says, "'In the morning, behold, it was Leah.' This is a microcosm of our disillusionment experience from Eden. In other words, we're being taught that in all of life, in every event, in every aspect there will be a constant disappointment if we seek anyone or anything other than God.

Look at verse 31 and following, as to how Leah deals with her lack of love. Every time she has a son, she chooses a Hebrew word in naming her son that expresses her longing for Jacob. Her first son she names Reuben, which comes from the

Hebrew word "to see." She says, "I gave my husband a son, maybe now I'll be visible. Maybe now he'll see me."

The second son she named Simeon which comes from the Hebrew word "to hear." She's saying, "Maybe now my husband will finally hear me. Maybe now I'll have a voice. Maybe now when I talk to him, he will listen to me."

Her third son she names Levi, which comes from the Hebrew word, "to attach or cleave." She says, "I've borne him three sons, I'm being the perfect wife, and maybe now my husband will finally love me."

Leah is in utter hell because the person that she has put her hope in, the person she has trusted with her heart is not only in the arms of another woman, that other woman is her sister. Leah's soul is in prison.

Right up to this point she's always saying, "If my husband...if my husband...if my husband..." Then the fourth kid comes along and...bam!

The Bible says she conceived again, and she gave birth to a son, and she named him Judah. Judah's name means praise. She said, "This time, this time, I will praise the Lord." The chapter closes with the line, "***Then she stopped having children.***"

That is a beautiful line, because it tells us that Leah finally arrives at this place where she says, "I no longer need children to have significance. I no longer need the love of my husband Jacob to be loved. I don't need to work hard to have an identity and value. I don't need to look like Rachel to be seen. That's freedom.

All her life she's been looking to Laban, Jacob, Rachel, her culture to get her sense of worth and identity. This time she looks up. She realizes something better than her father, her husband, or her kids. When she takes the deepest most passionate desires of her heart, and places them on the Lord, she is free!

Through Jesus we can put on a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair! We can exchange a spirit of heaviness, loneliness, and sadness....

Praise unlocks the jail of depression. Praise sets our spirits free. We can't change our circumstances. But praise puts our circumstances in the right perspective.

At the end of the book of Genesis there's a prophecy that tells us who Judah is. It says the scepter will come through Judah. The King will come through Judah. From this baby, Judah, came Jesus! From this time of her life when she determines to praise the Lord, she was included in the lineage of Jesus Christ, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

It means God looks down and He sees a beautiful, gorgeous, stunning woman, and he sees an ordinary woman. He looks at the girl that everyone wanted, and then He looks at the girl that no one wanted, He looked at the girl who was unloved and unlovely, and He says, "I choose you."

Jesus, unlike Jacob, knew exactly what he was getting into when he married us. ***"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"*** (Rom. 5:8). The unconditional, gracious, unmerited love of Christ for us makes us more lovely, and more Rachel-like.

Key Takeaways:

1. Loving the Church, our forever family, is what makes us more like Christ.

Paul writes to the Ephesians, ***"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless"*** (Eph. 5:25-27).

And the thing that we learn from Christ's love for us and through us is that when a Leah like us is loved and loved well, despite all the reasons not to love her, Leah becomes beautiful, the Leah becomes more like Rachel.

I wish the church were more Rachel than Leah. But tolerating her, criticizing her, rejecting her, hating her, is not the answer—loving Leah is the answer.

2. Learning to love the church, will not only bring out Christ in her, but it will also bring out Christ in you.

Love is a Commitment, not a Ceremony. Commitment means faithfulness to each other.

It's been said of the difference between love and marriage:

“Love is holding hands in the street.

Marriage is holding arguments in the street.

Love is dinner for 2 in your favorite restaurant.

Marriage is a Chinese take-out.

Love is cuddling on a sofa.

Marriage is sleeping on a sofa.

Love is talking about having children.

Marriage is talking about taking care of children.

Love is going to bed early.

Marriage is going to sleep early.

Love is losing your appetite.

Marriage is losing your figure.

Love is sweet nothing in the ear.

Marriage is sweet nothing in the bank.

Love is 1 drink and 2 straws.

Marriage is "Don't you think you've had enough!"

Marriage is a sanctifying grace. It is the hammer God uses to chisel us into the image of Christ. The hardest thing about being a Christian is the church, so we tend to think of the church as a curse not a grace.

In the church, you fellowship with broken and hurting people, just in different ways than you. In the process of learning to love people we don't like, we become sanctified. Remember, Christ did not come to make us happy but to make us holy, so that holiness becomes our greatest happiness.

3. Loving our Forever Family enables us to experience a more intimate union with Christ.

The more we learn to love the church, the more we experience Christ. Just so you know, the great love chapter of the bible, 1 Corinthians 13 is right in the middle of

Pauls' letter to this Leah-like, messed up church. You can't keep the church, at arm's length and experience intimacy with Christ. It never works!

The more you love, not tolerate, but love church the more of Christ you get. The more you love the church the more of Christ you experience. There is a direct relationship between my level of love for the church and my level of intimacy with Christ. ***"Christ loves the church and gave himself up for her"*** (Eph. 5:25). If you mess with my bride, my wife, don't expect intimacy with me! Won't happen. If you find yourself starving for intimacy with Christ, try loving who Christ loves, try loving the church.

Conclusion – Experiencing the Gospel

Paul wrote that difficult Corinthian congregation a second letter called, you guessed it, 2 Corinthians. He begins the letter highlighting the promising potential of Christ within the body of people called the church. Then, Paul gets reflective realizing the sober truth he knows all too well about that Corinthian Church. They don't always live up to that promising potential.

What Paul writes next is so liberating because it is so true. Here's the verse that will save your marriage to this beautiful, messy, risky thing called the local church, God's Forever Family: ***"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us"*** (2 Cor. 4:7).

Paul sees a huge contrast between Christ the treasure, and the bare earthen vessel, the church. God decided to deposit his most precious treasure in "us."

In Isaiah, it says Jesus had no beauty or majesty that we should desire Him. The word it uses to describe Christ is the same word used to describe Leah, not Rachel. In other words, Jesus came as the un-Rachel. He came as the One who would be rejected, lonely, constantly misunderstood. He is in fact the ultimate seed of Jacob and Leah because he was rejected not by an earthly father but by His Heavenly Father, as He took upon Himself our sin.

When you say "I do" you get two—Christ and the church, the beauty and the beast, the treasure and claypot, and we need to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and love others as we love ourselves.