

# Familyfied by Discipleship (12:46-50)

Good to see you guys this morning. If you have a bible, turn with me to **Matthew 12**. If I haven't met you before, my name is Kent, and I'm one of the pastors here. I missed you guys a lot the **past two Sundays**—my family and I went on vacation to the beach and had a great time. We have a five year old and a two year old, so it wasn't *restful*, but it was *fun*. There weren't any *boring* moments, we'll put it that way. So on the way *back* from the beach, we dropped our kids off with my parents (**Grandparent camp**) and came back to Knoxville kidless for the week, and that's when Ana and I started *our* vacation. But all of it was great.

But I'm excited to be back here with you this week continuing in our **Matthew teaching series**. If you're here for the first time this morning, we've been working our way through the gospel of Matthew, really, since last August on and off. And right now, we're in a section of the book that really focuses in on people's various *responses* to Jesus and his ministry. When Jesus shows up on the scene and starts talking about how life works in what he calls the kingdom of God, people respond in all sorts of ways to that.

And **so far**, we've mainly been looking at **negative** (or at least sub-par) **responses**. We've looked at people that struggle to believe in who Jesus is, people who respond by rejecting Jesus or even outright *opposing* him in a variety of different ways. But *today*, we'll shift gears briefly and actually get a glimpse at **the right response** to Jesus and his message. In this passage, Jesus lays out for us what it looks like to respond *correctly* to his kingdom, and what the implications are of doing so. What does it look like to *receive* the kingdom of God, and what happens when we do that? That's what today is about.

And the good news is that **it's relatively simple**. If you've been with us for much of this series, you know we've been covering larger chunks of verses each week. Today we're covering five verses and five verses only. And in those five verses are really just one big idea. But that one idea contains some pretty groundbreaking, paradigm-shifting sort of stuff. So let's dig in together and see what we can learn.

Pick it up with me in **chapter 12, v. 46**:

*[46] While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his **mother and brothers** stood outside, wanting to speak to him. [47] Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you."*

So Jesus' family—namely his mother and brothers—show up and want to *talk* to Jesus about something, so they send someone in to go and let him know. Now, **in the version of this same passage** we find in the gospel of *Mark*, we get a little additional *detail* about *why* this happens. It tells us the reason Jesus' mom and brothers come to talk to him is because at this point in the story, they think he's out of his mind.<sup>1</sup> That's a direct quote from *Mark*. Jesus is saying all kinds of things, traveling from town to town—but perhaps most significantly if you remember the past two Sundays, he is now directly *challenging* the religious establishment. Saying things like they don't know how to hear from God or walk in relationship with God. In an ancient honor/shame society like this one, that is *crazy talk*. And it's likely bringing all kinds of dishonor and disrepute on Jesus' own *family*. So they come to talk to him because they think he's off his rocker.

And if they thought he was crazy *already*, I wonder what they thought about **his response** to them. Look with me at v. 48:

*[48] He replied to him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?”* Now you've got to think this is an awkward moment for the guy who told him his family was there. Like if you're him, you're going “does Jesus want me to *explain the concept* of biological family to him? Surely that can't be my job. But thankfully, Jesus saves him—v. 49: *[49] Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here (right here, around me) are my mother and my brothers. [50] For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”*

So Jesus turns this interruption from his family into **a teaching opportunity**. He says that he considers everyone who “does the will of [God],” to be his *family*. **So the “right response” that we alluded to earlier—the proper way to respond to the in-breaking kingdom of God—is to “do the will” of God.** That's it. That's the whole thing. And *by* that, what he means is *aligning our life* with the things *clearly taught* in the Scriptures. **He's talking about using our money and resources like the Scriptures teach us to use our money and resources. He's talking about approaching sex and sexuality like the Scriptures teach us to. He's talking about going about relationships and friendships the way the Scriptures teach us to. In a word, he's simply talking about discipleship to Jesus.** “Doing the will” of God is about ordering our lives around Jesus and the way he says to do life.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Mark* 3:21, and then 31-35.

And Jesus says that **if you respond** in that sort of way, **you are his family**. **Doing things God's way, means you are God's family**. Now, just for clarity, when he says that, he doesn't just mean "I'm closer to these people than I am to other people." That might be how we are tempted to read it. **After all, that's what we would mean by that language. We all the time say that somebody is "like family" or "like a brother or sister" to us. And what we generally mean is "I'm really close with that person. I'm closer with them than I am with other people."**

**But in the society Jesus existed in**, you didn't talk like that, really ever. The only people you said were "like family" to you were...*your family*. Your biological family members were the *closest relationships you had*, and no other relationship was on par or even *comparable* to that. **We know from history that many people then were closer to their mother, father, and siblings than they were to their own spouse. So for Jesus to say that these people were not only like his family, but were his family, would have created anything from shock to outright offense from the first century ears that heard it. But Jesus says it just the same.**

And **in the rest of the New Testament**, the biblical authors take this language from Jesus and run with it. This idea of followers of Jesus being family is *all over* the rest of the bible. The *most common* word used in the bible to refer to followers of Jesus isn't the word "Christian," or even the word "disciple." It's the Greek word *adelphoi*, translated into English as "brothers and sisters." So **evidently, when we talk about what it means to follow Jesus, we are necessarily talking about belonging to God's family.**

One bible commentator actually pointed out that we as Christians have **all kinds of theological words** to talk about the *individual* aspect of becoming a Christian: we are "saved," we are "justified," we are "sanctified," we are "redeemed." But he said we don't really have *any words* to talk about the *interpersonal* aspect of it. And in the bible, **that part is just as important**. So this morning, I would like to propose that we add a word to our theological vocabulary—you ready? Henceforth and forevermore, when we follow Jesus, we are also "familyfied." **We are made into a family by our discipleship to Jesus. Familyfied.** I really think it's gonna catch on, you guys—if somebody has a connection to the Miriam-Webster dictionary, let me know. I think we could make something happen.

But that said, we *do* see have this idea of family **built-in to one of the primary metaphors** for becoming a follower of Jesus, and that's the metaphor of **adoption**. Ephesians, Romans, Galatians, and plenty of other places describe becoming a Christian as us

being *adopted* by God the Father. And when we get God as our *Father*, we also gain a bunch of new brothers and sisters. That's how a family works.

And **inversely, we don't get to** claim God as our Father and *not* claim other followers of Jesus as our brothers and sisters. That's just not how it works. And *yet*, that's what many Christians—especially here in America—have attempted to do, at least functionally. We say things like “yeah, I love Jesus—I'm just not big on the Church. My relationship is really just between me and God—I don't really participate in the whole communal, institutional Church thing.” But that logic makes zero sense from a biblical perspective. To put it as directly as I know how to put it: **there is no category in the bible for a follower of Jesus who is not in deep relationship with other followers of Jesus.** “Occasional church attender” is not a category in the bible. “Regular church attender” is not a category in the bible. **In the bible, you have followers of Jesus who actively belong to a church family, and then you have non-Christians.**

And **my concern is that many people**, especially here in the Bible Belt, have tried to create a new category of Christian that is nowhere to be found in the Scriptures. We've created a subset of Christianity where you attend church on the weekends, you get your spiritual shot in the arm from the sermon or the music or whatever—and then you go about the other six days of your week with little to no interaction with the other followers of Jesus who are a part of that church. And we've tried to convince ourselves that that is a faithful way to follow Jesus. The problem is that it *isn't*. If you were to take that approach to church and try to find it in the pages of the New Testament, you wouldn't be able to. In fact, it would look a lot more like a non-Christian than it would a follower of Jesus. Because **in Jesus' teaching and in all of the New Testament, to belong to Jesus is to be a part of his family.**

Now, before we move on, I do just want to **acknowledge briefly here that “family”** may be a **difficult** metaphor for quite a few of us in this room. Quite a few of us, when we hear the word “family,” it's not *pleasant* memories or ideas that come to mind. It's painful ones. And at some point in the future, I want us to do an entire teaching or series on our families of origin and how to process and deal with and heal from hurt that may have occurred there. And I'm not going to go into detail on all of that today.

But I will say this: **often, the reason** those experiences can be so painful is because **they are examples of our family being the exact opposite** of what a family was **meant to be**. Instead of your family being a place of safety and healing and comfort and grace, it somehow became a place of danger and hurt and pressure and condemnation.

So as we wrestle through the teachings of Jesus this morning, if that's you, I would just plead with you to see that **the problem at its core is not actually the concept of family**. The problem is *expressions* of family that are the opposite of what it was meant to be. And **in actuality, if that's you, you might understand even better the necessity of a good, loving family—because you know the pain resulting from its absence**. Does that make sense?

Okay, that said, **here's what I want to do**. For the rest of our time together this morning, I want to try to drill all this down into some practicals and specifics as much as I possibly can. We've got this overarching *concept*—that belonging to Jesus means belonging to God's family—but I want to talk about what some hands-level *implications* of that are. What does it mean, then, to *function*—to *operate* as God's family? I think we can say that it at least means three things. First, **being family means...**

## Committing to being together

If we are going to embody life together as God's family, we're going to have to commit to **being physically present with each other on a regular basis**. For instance, take a look at this glimpse we get of the early Church in [Acts 2:44-47](#):

*All the believers **were together** and had **everything** in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. **Every day** (how many days? **Every day**) **they continued to meet together** in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and **ate together** with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

Did you catch **how many times the word "together"** was used in that passage? They met together, they ate together, they had everything *in common*. I love that in the first verse it just says "they were together." In other words, when people thought about the earliest followers of Jesus, they thought "oh yeah—those are those people that are *together* a lot." It also says that the early Church was together, one way or another, *every single day*. Now, I'm not gonna sit here and require that all of us see each other every day—I realize that might be near impossible, and there are probably some cultural reasons that that was a little *more* possible back then than it is now.

But **here's what I will say**. If, at a bare minimum, **we can't make it a priority to have quality time with other followers of Jesus once a week outside of *this* time, there's**

**just no way for you to embody what Jesus has in mind for his people.** If our approach to being around our LifeGroup, for instance, is “yeah, I’ll be there as long as there’s not something else happening I’d rather do,” that’s just not going to work. If our mindset is “yeah, I’ll hang out with them if they’re doing something *fun*,” that won’t work. ~~Remember: it’s about the who, not the what.~~ If our mindset is “yeah, I’ll be there as long as it hasn’t been a stressful week for me so far,” that won’t work either. I don’t know about you guys, but I’ve got two kids and both me and my wife work outside the home. If I only went to LifeGroup when my week wasn’t stressful, I would be at LifeGroup like once a **year, tops**. **For us to be the *family* God has called us to be, our commitment to one another is going to have to be a little stronger than just “yeah, if I feel like it.”**

But I do want to make sure you see *why* that is. **That’s the *what*, here’s the *why*:** **relational *intimacy* in a relationship is almost always proportional to the level of *commitment* in a relationship.** If you want relational *intimacy out* of a friendship, you have to put a certain level of *commitment into* that friendship. **It’s really easy to see this within a *marriage*:** if you got married, and you said to your spouse, “hey, I’d really love to do this whole marriage thing with you. I’d like to be really *close* to you relationally. But I’d also like to keep my options open in case someone better comes along. So let’s have a ‘for now’ kind of marriage.” What do you think would happen to the level of *intimacy* in your marriage as a result of that mindset? Not great things, right? And that’s because **the level of *intimacy* of a relationship is directly proportional to the level of *commitment* in a relationship.** If you want meaningfulness *out*, you have to put some commitment *in*.

So **when it comes to *community*,** if you want to maintain a very loose level of commitment to other followers of Jesus, and just be around them when you feel like it or when you don’t have something else better to do or when you’re not stressed out, you can totally do that. But as a fair warning, that is going to negatively impact the *meaningfulness* of those relationships. **You can’t treat people in your life as if they’re **expendable**, and then expect to experience meaningful friendship with them.** But if we can put commitment *into* our relationships and friendships, we will get *meaningful* relationships and friendships *out*. Not instantly, but eventually, over time, as we persist in those relationships. And that looks like committing to *being together*. Does that make sense to everybody? Okay, the next two will be shorter. Second, **being family looks like...**

## Having Healthy Expectations for Each Other

If we are going to continue becoming the type of family God has called us to be, we are going to need to have healthy *expectations* of our community. And sometimes that's tough. Because **a lot of us have a tendency to idealize human relationships**. One of the easiest ways to see this is when it comes to our perspective on *romantic relationships*. A lot of people *functionally believe* that finding the perfect person to marry will meet all of our relational needs and will make us permanently happy as a result. And then, for those of us who *get* married, we find out fairly quickly, "oh wait—that's not exactly what this is." (Some of us realize it a lot quicker than others, but we all eventually realize it.) Marriage is *great* in a lot of ways, but it's not *that*. And so when those expectations aren't met, we either become disillusioned, or bitter, or *we end up crushing our spouse* under the weight of our expectations. Because nobody can live up to those ideals perfectly.

Now, you may never have thought about it this way, but **sometimes we have a similar tendency when it comes to our spiritual community**—when it comes to relationships with other followers of Jesus. We want to connect with others effortlessly, we want them to push us and challenge us but not push us *too hard* or challenge us *too much*. We want them to reach out to us at just the right times and in just the right ways, but not lay any expectations on *us* in return. If we're honest, we want them to meet all of our spiritual and relational needs, whatever those may be. And if we're not careful, we can begin to crush our *community* with *those expectations* too. A guy you might've heard of named **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** puts it this way in his excellent book *Life Together*:

*Every human wish dream that is injected into the Christian community is a hindrance to genuine community and must be banished if genuine community is to survive. He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter...*

That **quote gets me every time**. Because *I do that*. I think a lot of us do. We want our Christian community to be this perfect thing that meets all of our needs and all of our expectations. And often, when it *isn't* that, if we're not careful, we grow bitter and frustrated towards it as a result. And sometimes, we let that bitterness and frustration go unchecked and it ends up destroying the community we're apart of, because everyone lives in fear of not meeting our expectations. So what Bonhoeffer is saying is that **if you**

want the community around you to *thrive*, you have to get just as good at loving the *community*, as you are at loving the *ideal* of community you have in your head.

In other words, we **need healthy expectations** of our community. The people in your community are sinful & flawed people (just like you are), who desperately need the grace & forgiveness of Jesus (just like you do), and will probably do a very *imperfect* job at loving people (again, just like you do). So if you go into a community expecting them to do perfectly what no one has ever been able to do perfectly, that's not gonna go much of anywhere. **Instead, we should go into a community expecting them to be imperfect people who are learning and growing just like we are.**

They very well *may* **forget to call or text** when they said they would call or text. They very well *may* **say something that is insensitive to you. They might do something that is unintentionally hurtful to you.** But listen: if we understand *ourselves* correctly, we understand that *we* are capable of *all the same* shortcomings *they* are, and God has grace and compassion for *us*. So why would we not show that same grace and compassion towards them? **If we can manage to do that, we'll find that over time, our community becomes what it should be, and what it can be.** But it has to start with healthy *expectations* when it comes to our community. Finally, **being family looks like...**

## Navigating Conflict Well Together

Here's the reality: **when you** start to **spend large, frequent amounts of time with** someone, you are *going* to experience *conflict* with them. It's just going to happen. **Think back to the family metaphor: has anybody ever experienced conflict with their family? Anybody ever have a fight with your siblings? Maybe just once or twice in your life? Maybe once or twice a day? Yeah. Okay, why is that? Well probably, it's because of how well you know them. How much time you've spent around them. There's history there. There's annoyances and idiosyncrasies. And there's just more opportunities to get annoyed with each other, because you're around each other more. And that's usually how it works: as a general rule, the more time you spend around someone, the more conflict is going to happen.**

So, in light of that, do you think **if we are truly sharing life together as a church** family, we might occasionally have some conflict to work through? I would *think* so, right? So we say this a *lot* around City Church, and some of you are probably tired of us saying it by now. But we're gonna *keep* saying it until it stops being surprising to us: **the mark of a**



healthy church is not the *absence* of conflict. It's not. In fact, **you show me a church that never experiences conflict with each other, and I will show you a church where no one *knows* each other very well.** If we ever *stop* experiencing conflict at City Church, *that's* when I will be very worried. Because that means we're not truly sharing life with each other.

And I say this because **so many people come around a church**, and at the first hint of any conflict or tension between them and someone else in the church, they *panic*. They go "oh no—this must not be where we're supposed to be." And they quietly fade off into the background, or leave and go to another church. And the devastating thing about that is that working through conflict is one of the primary *means* God uses to grow us. One of my favorite quotes is by a guy named **Joseph Helleman**, who wrote a fantastic book called *When the Church Was a Family*. He says this:

***Spiritual formation*** (which is just a fancy way of saying "becoming more like Jesus") ***occurs primarily in the context of community. People who remain connected with their brothers and sisters in the local church almost invariably grow in self-understanding, and they mature in their ability to relate in healthy ways to God and to their fellow human beings. This is especially the case for those courageous Christians who stick it out through the often messy process of interpersonal discord and conflict resolution. Long-term interpersonal relationships are the crucible of genuine progress in the Christian life. People who stay also grow.***

**I wonder sometimes** how much *growth* I've *forfeited* in my life by trying to go around or away from conflict rather than *through* it. Have you ever thought about that? And at the same time, I think about some of the most meaningful friendships, meaningful relationships in my life to this day. And nearly every single one of them are relationships where I have experienced conflict with that person, and we've worked *through* it. I think Joseph Helleman is onto something there.

Our relationships with each other are the **ones that God wants to use** to *grow* us, to *establish* us, to *mature* us. These are the relationships that God has put in our lives for our own good, to make us more and more like him. **So the mark of a healthy church isn't the absence of conflict—it's how conflict gets *dealt* with.** Do we go around it? Or do we work *through* it? **Do we *abandon* a relationship at the first sign of conflict or tension; do we try to *ignore* it and pretend like everything is okay when it's not? Or do we *navigate through* it, having faith that the Holy Spirit who is alive in each of us**

**will help us get through it together as a church family?** That's what we're going for. Being family means navigating conflict *well* with each other.

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So I **don't know where all of this hits you** today. Maybe for you, you're realizing you need to put a little more effort, a little more emphasis on being *together* with other followers of Jesus. Maybe you need to think through how to prioritize that sort of time more than you are now. Maybe the most practical step of application for you is to finally sign up for that LifeGroup. Or maybe for you, you need to do some reflecting and adjusting of the *expectations* you've put on other followers of Jesus. Maybe you need to apologize for expecting them to do perfectly what no one can do or be perfectly. Or maybe there's conflict between you and another follower of Jesus—there's tension, there's frustration, there's distance—and you need to stop navigating *around* it and instead work *through* it. You need to deal with the conflict with the power of the Holy Spirit guiding you.

But whatever it is and whatever you need to do, let's remember that **God has made us a family**. *When Jesus went to the cross, he didn't just reconcile us to God—he reconciled us to each other. And he made reconciliation possible with each other.* So whatever efforts we put in to that end are undoubtedly worth it. We're **going to sing some songs** here in a bit. But can I just encourage you not to stand and sing if the Holy Spirit is prompting you *first* to obey? To repent? If something needs to happen *there, that* is the more urgent thing. That's the step you need to take. And I'd encourage you to do that as an act of worship.

Let's pray together.