

February 10<sup>th</sup>

**Vision Sunday #2: Family First**

**“What Should It Look Like?”**

This month we are taking a look at the vision for CrossPoint Church and we’re starting with – Family First. We say that we are a family first church, but what exactly does that mean? What does it mean to be a family in the context of the church?

We all have our own ideas of what family means. We would like to think that everybody here would talk about family and share happy memories and good times with people they love who also love them. Many of us can share about favorite holidays or vacations or times where that crazy uncle made everybody laugh. For some of us family means love, acceptance and people who will be by our side no matter what. For many of us family is a good thing.

The reality, however, is that families can be messy. They can be tricky. They can actually bring us anxiety and bad memories just as much as good ones. Not everybody has had a good family experience; in fact for some people the worst experiences of their lives came from family. Some of us think about abuse, pain, neglect and incredible loss when we think about family. For many of us here today family has not been a good thing.

We don’t get to choose the families that we are born or adopted into as children. Sometimes we wish we could have and sometimes we are thankful for the ones we were given. When we talk about the church family it is very different. We are choosing this family, it isn’t chosen for us. We are looking at this group of people and saying that we want to share life with them, we want to be in community with them, we want to be part of this family.

**We choose to be a part of a church family. (Acts 2:42)**

There is an old saying that we all know and some people believe that we understand backwards. “*Blood is thicker than water*” we are taught means that biological family is more important than anything else. It means that no matter what we stick with our family – we are able to overlook their mistakes, we always back them up no matter what – they carry more weight in our lives than anybody else.

Some people believe that this was the original meaning, while others argue that maybe it was not the meaning at all. There is scholarly debate about which meaning was first, but many have come to understand it to mean that the “blood of the covenant” is thicker than the “water of birth”; it was a way for Christians to say that their devotion to the family of God is a choice they make that is a stronger bond than even the bond of their natural family. It is stronger because it was a choice they made, not something that was out of their control. Now, it’s not to say that they will join the church family and leave their natural family behind – not at all. What they are saying is that the blood of Jesus bonds them together in a way that is even stronger than they way that nature bonds a family together. The power of the forgiveness and love and grace that they choose to be a part of as a Christian brings together people from all walks of life and all backgrounds and is much bigger and stronger than simple biological connections. It is a choice that we make to be a part of something bigger.

So, when we choose to be part of the church family what does that mean? In a healthy family dynamic what does it mean to be a part of any family? It means that we love each other, we support each other, we are a source of hope and encouragement for each other. It means that we always have each others backs, it means that we give wise council to each other. It means that we are all on the same team, the same side and that there is a bond between us that can't be broken – blood is thicker than water. In a healthy family putting your family first means that everybody belongs. The goofy niece, the silly uncle, the clutzy cousin, you – everybody belongs.

**Family First means that everybody belongs. (Matthew 12:49-50)**

In the church family that means the same thing – everybody belongs. No matter who you are or what baggage you carry with you there is a place for you here at CrossPoint. If you've been a believer for 50 years or you don't know what you believe – there is a place for you here. If you come from an awesome family or a broken family or you don't have any family at all – there is a place for you here. If you've lived a pretty clean life or you lived most of your life struggling through it – there is a place for you here. If you are rich or you are poor, or you're somewhere in between – there is a place for you here. If you're white, or black, or Arabic or Asian or anything else – there is a place for you here. If you're here than you belong and we have a place for you.

We're going to look at a short passage today that is pretty well know and unpack it a little bit. In Matthew 19: 13-15 we read this:

*“One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could lay his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him. But Jesus said, “Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children.” And he placed his hands on their heads and blessed them before he left.”*

There are a couple of things going on here in this passage that I think we need to be mindful of as a church family. First, the disciples didn't think that the children were important enough for Jesus to be bothered with them. They felt that He had much more important things to do with the adults to be wasting His time with the kids. Jesus wasn't thrilled with them, in fact in Mark when this story is told it says that Jesus was angry with the disciples! What can that mean for us as a Family First church? It means that in the Kingdom of God your age doesn't equal your importance – in fact, quite the opposite, as Jesus says if we want into His Kingdom we had better start acting more like the kids!

**In God's Kingdom everybody matters, starting with the smallest ones. (Mark 10:13-16)**

There is a second thing going on in this exchange that is important for us to understand as we think about being a Family First church community. Before the disciples could even turn the little kids away the parents had to have first brought them. In the First Century it was customary for parents to bring their children to Rabbi's and other respected religious people and ask for them to pray over their children. These parents saw something in Jesus, saw the Spirit of God in Him, and decided that they needed this man to pray for their children. These parents knew the importance of Jesus and brought their children to Him.

Well, today we don't physically have Jesus here to bring our children to see Him and be prayed for by Him. Thankfully, God knew what He was doing and had a plan for that – and the plan is you! The plan is me! The plan is each and every one of us in this church family. We can bring our children here to see Jesus, to meet Jesus and to know Jesus. We can also play our part in making sure that all of the children that God brings to us are able to meet Him. Just as Jesus wouldn't let the disciples turn the kids away we cannot turn them away either. For us, here at CrossPoint, it means that we take our children's ministry very seriously. We don't provide childcare for anybody above age three – we provide ministry for kids ages four and up. We don't just babysit so mom and dad can go to a service, we teach Biblical principles and truths and build a foundation for a faith that we hope they will carry for the rest of their lives. Family First also means making sure that the youngest people in our family are given the same importance and value from our church family as they are from Jesus.

In the life of any family we all have our role to play. I know that in my family, for example, it is the role of my kids to make messes and the role of Julie and I to clean them up 😊...every parent in this room is nodding their heads because you know exactly what I am talking about! Seriously though, in every healthy family each member has to take on a job in order for the family to function. There has to be somebody who grocery shops, somebody who cooks, somebody who does the dishes, somebody who takes out the trash, somebody who cleans the bedrooms, somebody who does the laundry...in my house somebody who hunts through all the bedrooms for cups once it gets to the point where we're all drinking orange juice out of bowls in the morning...everybody has to do something for the family to function. It is the same in a healthy church family.

**Family First means everybody has a job in the life of the family. (Ephesian 4:11-16)**

Here at Cross Point we also have to learn to function as a church family where everybody plays their part. Think about it like a nuclear family living together in a house. The church staff are sort of like the parents – they have baked in responsibilities and have to make sure that everything is working and functioning. It is their responsibility to show the other family members what needs to be done and to give them guidance and the resources...but not to do all of the work. The volunteers are like the kids in a family, not in the sense that they are subordinate to the parents/staff, but that they have to do their part in carrying out tasks in order for the family to function – the parents simply cannot do all of it themselves and it all be done well; just like in a family at home in the church family everybody has to play their part.

We can teach our kids how to sort the laundry, run the machines, fold the laundry and put it away. We take care of buying the detergent and dryer sheets, we pay the water and electric bills and we may even help them carry the baskets when they get really heavy – but they do the laundry, it is their role to play in the family. The church family functions the exact same way. In Kids' Quest the staff and I equip the leaders with the materials, answer questions and make sure they have all of the supplies they need for their class – but they teach the class. That is their role, it is the volunteers that make this whole

thing work and who are laying a foundation of faith in the lives of your kids. It is their work that keeps this family functioning.

The church family is a little bit different, however, than your home family in that we always want to make this family bigger. You likely have a stopping point in the size that you want your family to be...2 kids, 3 kids, some people in this church 6 kids...whatever number there is a limit. Well, in the church family we want to always add to our numbers, we want to always be growing, there is no limit to the size of this family; the bigger the better! What this means for all of us is that we have to make sure that we are willing and able to do our part in the work of this family so that we can be who we want to be for all of our new family members.

In the last year we have almost doubled the number of children from infants through 5<sup>th</sup> grade that attend here on a Sunday morning. The program is growing, the number of families choosing to be a part of this church family are growing. This is something that we should all cheer for and be excited about, and for the most part we are! The problem we are running into is this: even though we have almost doubled the number of kids here on a Sunday morning, we actually have a few less volunteers working with them than we did a year ago. We have more kids and less adults! If you had three more kids show up to be a part of your family at your house this week and none of them took on any of the responsibilities of the family you would be in trouble! You'd have way more cooking, cleaning and planning to do but still have the same number of people to do it!

I know it can be uncomfortable to sit in a service and have the preacher tell you something that feels negative; I want to be clear that I am not being negative – this is a positive. Around the country churches are seeing less and less people attending, families are not coming and kids are not coming. Here at CrossPoint we actually have MORE kids coming! That is amazing and we need thank God that He is opening those doors for us; but with great things comes great responsibility. God has given us more kids in this church family to love and to teach and to show the light that we have inside of us through Jesus. This is a privilege and we need more members of this family to step up and take on the role of working with our kids.

If you just cannot work with kids, if it is not your skill set, that doesn't get you out of a job! We need more people helping with our student ministries. Our middle school and high school aged youth need people they can look up to, talk to and hang out with. If you don't think you can work with young people of any age then our hospitality ministries, our missions ministries and our ministries to the community all need more people to be involved. Please do not hesitate to talk to me after this service about any of these areas. There is one thing that we know for sure – nobody in the family gets to do nothing; everybody has a role to play and a job to do.

The final thing that I want to talk about today in regards to Family First is this – in a healthy family everybody as a voice. Nobody is more powerful, nobody is more important and nobody has to keep their feelings and thoughts to themselves.

**Family first means there is a place for every voice to be heard. (James 1:19)**

In every family there are issues; none of us have a perfect family and this goes for church families too. I am not talking about church politics here – that is a whole other topic – but I am talking about the ways that we grow and learn and develop spiritually. We aren't all the same and we all come at these things

a little bit differently. The way that I work through a topic may not be the same way that you work through a topic. I may have doubts and questions that you'd never have. I may look at a passage and a principle from a whole different direction than you will ever look at it from. In some church families that is seen as a negative thing, but not here; here at Cross Point everybody gets a voice. Everybody gets to work through the things that God is doing in their lives.

Now, on a Sunday morning in a service we can't have a dialogue back and forth and wrestle with these questions and issues. We can't say "Well what about...?" or "Have you ever thought about...?" It just wouldn't work. That is why we encourage everybody who calls this their church family to find a small group, we call them LifeGroups, to engage in. It is in these groups where we can wrestle with each other through the things that God is doing in our lives. These are places where our voice can be heard and where we can both grow spiritually and help others to grow spiritually.

We have groups that meet at all different times and groups of all different kinds: just men, just women, couples, young adult, topical...and we are always ready to support new groups to get started. If you have another family or two that you connect with here within the larger church family and you'd like to start a small group please just let me know. Just like we talked about before, we will equip you, train you, lead you and make sure that you have everything that you need to get started.

My pastor at the church I grew up in used to say this about sermons "they are a talk to start other talks" – and I love that! Every week one of our staff members provides a very easy-to-follow discussion guide based on that week's message for small groups to use. Leading a small group or starting a new one is easy – if you can host you can lead. If you can get people together in a home or a room in this building then you can have a small group using the LifeTalk that we provide each week. All of the prep work is done for you – we want to make it as easy as possible for your voice to be heard in this family!

Family first – it means that you chose to be here; it means that you belong no matter how small you are; it means that we have a place for you and that you have a role to play here; it means that your voice counts here at CrossPoint.

There are so many amazing things happening here in this church family – God is moving! Today, as we close out our time together, I want you to consider what role God has for you to play in this family. What is it that He is calling you to do here? Like we said, everybody has a job, everybody has their part to play in the function of this family. I also want you to consider where you are letting your voice be heard in this family. Are you in a LifeGroup or a class? Where are you both getting to grow in this family and playing your part in helping others to grow in this family?

God has a place for you here, we have a place for you here. You aren't here by accident, you are here to be a part of something big and something great – if you're ready to be a part of this family.