

October 26, 2003 by Steve Brandon



The Family of God

Matthew 12:46-50

1. A Simple Exposition
2. A False Assumption
3. Some Pointed Application

This morning we will be looking at verses Matthew 12:46-50. With my first point "A Simple Exposition" I plan on taking the text and bringing it to light. It isn't a difficult passage to understand, and it is not a lengthy passage either. But, there are some gems for us to behold. With my second point "A False Assumption" I plan on addressing an error that some fall into with respect to this text. Finally, with my third point "Some Pointed Application" I plan on shifting my attention to how this text is relevant to your life and challenging you to apply it.

This is our sixth and final message from Matthew 12. This entire chapter has been about Jesus Christ facing opposition. The Pharisees sought to trip Him up by accusing Him of things that He would do on the Sabbath (verses 1-14). The Pharisees accused Him of casting out demons by the power of Satan (verses 22-24). The scribes joined in this act in verse 38, requesting yet another sign from Jesus. Beginning in verse 46, we even find Jesus' family opposing His ministry. Let's begin reading in verse 46.

While He was still speaking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him. And someone said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You."
(Matt. 12:46-47)

Imagine with me, this auditorium on Sunday morning packed with people. It is so crowded that it is standing room only. People are sitting around the stage. People are standing in the hallways. We have opened the door to the band room. We've come to the point in the service when the word of God is opened and expounded for all to hear. People are attentive. Now, imagine that outside this auditorium, a red car pulls up. And Barb (my mother) walks out. She wants to talk to me. But, the crowds are so big that she can't even get in the building. So, she gets as far in as she can and taps someone on the shoulder and says, "I'm Barb Brandon, Steve is my son. I would really like to speak with him. I can't quite get in. Could you pass this message along to Steve?" So, the guy turns back toward the front and taps the next guy on the shoulder and says, "Hey, Steve's mother is outside. She wants to speak with Him. Pass it on." So, the message gets another person, who relays the message to the person in front of him, and so on. Finally, the giant game of telephone ends when John Iversen stands up while I am still preaching, and says to me, "Excuse me, Steve, your mother is outside and wants to talk to you." So, I look outside the window and sure enough, there is my mother, waving her hand to me and requesting that I come and speak with her.

This isn't too far off from what took place in Galilee some 2,000 years ago. The place was crowded. Jesus' mother and brothers came. They couldn't get to Jesus. So they had the crowd pass their message along. What a strange situation. You can think of many other ways in which my mother or Jesus' mother could have done things more politely. She could have waited until I was done. She could have patiently worked her way in the door waving her hands until I could see her in the back. Even the message itself could have said, "When the service is over, I'd like to speak with you." But the message was that Mary wanted to speak with Jesus, and Mary wanted to speak with Jesus NOW! Have you ever been interrupted at a bad time? This was a bad time for Jesus to be interrupted.

We don't know why Mary and Jesus' brothers were attempting to speak with Jesus. But, we do have some clues about what was happening.

Clue #1 - This entire chapter is about the opposition that Jesus faced to His ministry. It is reasonable to assume that both Matthew and Mark record this story in this context because Jesus' family wasn't too thrilled about His ministry.

Clue #2 - We know that Jesus' family wasn't believing in Him during much of His earthly ministry. In John 7, we have a recorded testimony of Jesus' brothers mocking Him and his ministry. They did this because His brothers were not believing in Him (John 7:5). In fact, to the best of our knowledge, it wasn't until after the resurrection that His brothers believed that He was the Messiah. It is reasonable to believe that they were seeking to admonish Him and put some sense into Him. Perhaps they thought he had gone crazy. Jesus said, "A prophet is not without honor except in his home town, and in his own household" (Matt 13:58)

Clue #3 - Jesus' reaction to His family gives us a clue. This is found in verses 48-50,

But He answered the one who was telling Him and said, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, "Behold, My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother."

In His answer, Jesus seems to disown his family. He said, "Who's my family? They aren't my family. You all are my family." The implication seems to be that in their seeking to interrupt Jesus, they are not doing God's will (verse 50).

For these reasons, I believe that Jesus' family came in resistance to Him and to His ministry. As Jesus has done in every encounter in this chapter, He turns the situation into a teaching moment. When the Pharisees accused His disciples of picking grain on the Sabbath, Jesus taught the priority of compassion, not sacrifice (verse 7). When the Pharisees accused Jesus of healing on the Sabbath, Jesus taught that "it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (verse 12). When Jesus was accused of ministering in the power of Satan, Jesus taught on what Satan was really like (verses 25-37). When the scribes and Pharisees demanded another sign, Jesus spoke of what unbelief does (verses 39-45). And this moment is no different. Jesus' family was seeking Him, so Jesus taught about the nature of God's Family.

The interpretation of this passage is fairly easy. Jesus is teaching His disciples that the family of God is different than our earthly families. Our earthly families are formed physically, when mothers and fathers produce children, who live together with them under one roof. But, the family of God is formed through obedience. Look at verse 50, "whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother." The obvious question here is this: What is the will of the Father? It is simply doing what God wants you to do. We can sum it up using two words: **(1) Believing** and **(2) Responding**. In Luke's account of this same story, Jesus said, "My mother and my brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it" (Luke 8:21).

1. Believing

The will of God is that you would believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ. You would see your sin before God and willingly confess it. You would embrace Jesus as "the only name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). This is the first part of "doing the will of God": believing in the gospel. It is believing that "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). It is believing that God is totally sovereign over the affairs of men. It is believing that my heart is rebellious toward the creator of the universe. When you think about the things that thrill you most, you will find that it often isn't the things of God! It's your toys. It's watching your teams on television. It's your treasures in the bank. It's your time at the cabin. These have become your gods. Rather than loving the Lord with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength, you have loved the creation with all you heart, soul, mind, and strength. As such, you have clearly rebelled against God. Believing in the gospel is believing that Jesus died a substitutionary sacrifice for my sins, that you might receive eternal life as an undeserved, gracious gift of God. This is the riches of the gospel of grace.

Let me give you a picture of the gospel. Imagine in your mind a man standing with a slab of stone raised high above his head. Upon that stone is written the words of the decalogue, the 10 commandments.

You shall have no other gods before Me.
You shall not make for yourself an idol [and] worship them or serve them.
You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.
Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
Honor your father and your mother.
You shall not murder.
You shall not commit adultery.
You shall not steal.
You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
You shall not covet.

The man, whose name is Moses, is ready to break it over a man's head. This man is frail, weak, and helpless. His clothes are tattered. He is malnourished and has little meat on his bones. His skin is dirty. He stinks of the sewer. This man has tears in his eyes and has a look of despair on his face. But, Jesus comes, and wraps His arms around this hopeless individual. Jesus has his back toward Moses in such a way that when the stone slab begins its descent upon this man, it will land squarely on the strong shoulders of Jesus. The slab shatters on the shoulders of Jesus. Jesus is slightly bruised, but in a short time, his bruises are healed. The poor, hopeless, despairing man is freed from the danger of the law's crushing blow. He says, "Jesus, you saved my life. I love you! I will go where you will go." He embraces Jesus in love and follows Him wherever Jesus leads. This is a picture of the gospel. To do God's will, we need to believe this. To do God's will is to hear the word of God.

2. Responding

But the will of God is greater than just believing the gospel. The will of God is responding to this good news. Listen to Romans 12:1, 2. Perhaps these words are very familiar to you. But notice the connection between God's mercy to sinners and our response to Him and how it relates to the will of God. Paul writes,

I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, [which is] your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:1-2)

Do you see the connection between believing the gospel and responding to the gospel and the will of God? The will of God is all about us living holy, obedient, and God-pleasing lives. "This is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:3). But, you need to be careful, it isn't holiness. It isn't that God is pleased with us because of all of our efforts to be good people. You need to keep everything in perspective. It is understanding and believing in the incredible mercy of God. From there, it is responding with a living-holy-sacrifice type of commitment. It is a non-conforming-to-this-world type of life. It is being-transformed-by-the-renewing-of-your-mind type of attitude. It is always a response to God's merciful working in our lives first.

The Pharisees were pretty good at commitment. They were committed to performing their prayers at the stated hour. They were committed to attending the services in the synagogue. They were committed to fasting twice a week. They were committed to giving alms and performing "holy sacrifices.". The Pharisees were also pretty good at separating themselves from the world. The word "Pharisee" comes from a Hebrew

word meaning, "to separate." From the start, the Pharisees separated themselves from the world for the purpose of being "not conformed to this world." But the Pharisees didn't understand "transforming the mind" and the "response to God's mercy." They thought that they deserved it. They thought that God owed it to them. This attitude is seen well when Jesus told the story of the Pharisee, who stood up and prayed, "God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax gatherer. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get" (Luke 18:11-12). These Pharisees were not doing the will of God, though they looked pretty holy. They weren't (1) believing and (2) responding. They were (1) working and (2) attempting to please. There is a big difference between the two. We don't live lives of sacrifice, so God will accept us. We don't keep from conforming to this world to show our goodness before God. We do these things because of "the mercies of God" (Rom. 12:1).

A few weeks ago (October 4, 2003), I delivered a message to the men who attended our Men's Exposition Conference from the book of Titus. My message was entitled, "Why are Christians to live holy lives?" Every single one of my six points flowed from God's grace that has come to us.

1. A holy life is consistent with our profession (Titus 1:16).
2. A holy life is "fitting for sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1).
3. A holy life makes God beautiful (Titus 2:10).
4. A holy life is what grace teaches (Titus 2:11,12).
5. A holy life is the goal of our salvation (Titus 2:14).
6. A holy life is our careful concern (Titus 3:8).

In every one of these cases, the life of a Christian is a life of responding to what God has done for us. A response of obedience is consistent with our profession of faith (point #1) and is what is appropriate for us (point #2). God transforms us to live lives that ultimately give Him greater glory (point #3). When God's grace is embraced, it teaches us to live holy lives, rather than sinful lives, which presume upon His forgiveness (point #4). When Jesus died upon the cross, He had a plan in mind: to purify us as people zealous for good deeds (point #5). Finally, those who have believed God are those who take special, careful precautions in how they are to live (point #6). What is the will of the Father? It is believing and responding.

In Matthew 12:50, Jesus said, "whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother." Those who do the will of God are considered to be family. This is one of the great realities of the Christian church. Though we come from different places geographically, though we come from different experiences educationally, though we come from different backgrounds economically, though we come from different customs culturally, though some of us are old and some of us are young, though some of us are strong and some of us are weak, there is a tremendous unity in the body of Christ. We are considered family. I can do no better than repeat what J. C. Ryle wrote,

"True Christians, above all, are called 'a family' because there is so strong a family resemblance among them. They are all led by one Spirit, and are marked by the same general features of life, heart, taste, and character. Just as there is a general bodily resemblance among the brothers and sisters of a family, so there is a general spiritual resemblance among all the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. They all hate sin and love God. They all rest their hope of salvation on Christ, and have no confidence in themselves. They all endeavor to "come out and be separate" from the ways of the world, and to set their affections on things above. They all naturally turn to the same Bible, as the only food for their souls and the only sure guide in their pilgrimage toward heaven: they find it "a lamp to their feet and a light for their path." [Psalm 119:105] They all go to the same throne of grace in prayer, and find it as needful to speak to God as to breathe. They all live by the same rule, the Word of God, and strive to conform their daily life to its precepts. They all have the same inward experience. They all are, in varying degrees, acquainted with repentance, faith, hope, love, humility, and inward conflict. No wonder they are called 'a family.'" (Practical Religion, "The Family of God").

Paul picked up on this teaching of Christ and repeatedly identified those to whom he wrote as "brethren," which could easily be translated, "brothers" (adelphoi). I counted this week and more than 90 times does Paul refer to those in the church as "brothers." He wasn't referring to the Jews with these words, as is often the case with this word in the Bible. He was referring to the gentiles in such places as Rome, Philippi, and Thessalonica. He considered them family, because they were doing the will of God. They had received the message of the gospel. They had believed the message of the gospel. They had responded in obedience to the message of the gospel.

Paul labored in his life "to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles" (Rom. 1:5). Obedient faith is the will of God. Those who have believed are considered to be "brothers" and "sisters" in Christ, even from among the Gentiles. The church has responded accordingly. Our culture doesn't do this quite so much, but I know that other cultures do. In the Philippines, everyone is called with a title, "Brother ... (so and so)" or "sister ... (so and so)." There are some people over there who I have only heard about. Here are their names: Brother Mario, Brother Bobot, and Sister Juliet. I never hear about "Mario" or "Bobot" or "Juliet." It is always, "Brother Mario" or "Brother Bobot" or "Sister Juliet." That's how they refer to themselves. It is a good practice. It reminds them of the truth that Jesus is getting at in these verses: the church is a family.

The apostle Paul wrote a letter one time to a young pastor, named Timothy. He refers to the church as the household of God (1 Tim 3:15). In chapter 5 of that letter, Paul gave him some very good advice, "Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity" (1 Tim. 5:1-2). What was true of Timothy ought also to be true of us. You look around the church and we are a family. Men, you are all brothers. Women, you are all sisters. And all of you should treat the other men in the church as brothers. And all of you should treat the other women in the church as sisters. Now, of course, you ought not to take this too literally. My son (who is eight years old), has been in a kissing mood recently. He especially loves to kiss his 10 week old, little sister. At dinner last night my wife said, "I hope that you don't do this to everybody. Do you?" Of course, he doesn't. There is an intimacy in the family that will never exist in the church. It shouldn't. Paul said to treat "the younger women as sisters, in all

purity." A real brother and sister can get away with things that those in the church cannot. A healthy church is a healthy family.

But, the church isn't just any group of people that get together and have a close unity. The world is full of organizations that put forth a front of unity with close relationships. On college campuses there are fraternities and sororities. In these organizations, they refer to one another as "fraternity brothers" and "sorority sisters." In the business world, we have Kiwanis Clubs and Rotary Clubs, which often foster close friendships between people. This even happens at the local bar. When people come to the same bar every afternoon after work, relationships begin to develop, as everybody knows your name. People can experience close friendships at these locations. I have a friend who is into flying remote controlled airplanes. Throughout the summer, he has flying competitions every weekend, which takes him to different parts of the country. At these competitions, he sees the same people year after year after year. When you speak with him, you get the sense that these are his greatest friends. They love being together. They fly remote-controlled airplanes by day. And by night, they drink beer together.

But the church isn't an organization of people in the world. The church is the "household of God." This was the point of Jesus at the end of Matthew 12. Jesus said, "Whoever does the will of **My** Father who is in heaven, he is **My** brother and sister and mother" (verse 50). Catch this: when people love God and serve God, they become part of the God's household! God is our Father. Jesus is our brother. This is what it means to be a child of God. Hebrews 2:11 says that Jesus "is not ashamed to call [us] brethren." This ought to blow your mind away -- that the God of the universe comes into the flesh and calls us His brothers and sisters. I know that some of you have brothers, which, you have a difficult time acknowledging them as brothers. When you introduce them, you cringe at the thought that they are your own flesh and blood. They have done things you have found to be shameful. They have been unfaithful to you and to your family.

And it is no different with God. Your sin has offended an infinitely holy God far more than any brother or sister can offend you. He has every reason to cast us off as unfaithful children. But, this isn't God's character. The Bible describes God as "compassionate and gracious, and slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth" (Ex. 34:6). Jesus describes God as a caring and kind and merciful and loving Father, who runs after and willingly embraces His prodigal son (Luke 15). And His compassion is most demonstrated when He would take wretched sinners, and reconcile them to Himself through the cross of Christ. And when God reconciles sinners, they aren't kept at arm's distance. Rather, they are embraced and loved and brought into God's family. But, He is not ashamed of us, because He has sanctified us. He has made us pure and righteous and holy. "He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one [Father]" (Heb. 2:11).

So inclusive is God's acceptance of a sinner that they become "children of God" who are "heirs of God." Jesus is the Son of God. As the Son, He is expecting an inheritance. But catch this: we, as children of God, have Jesus as our brother. As such, we are fellow heirs of the inheritance that Jesus will receive! Read Romans 8:17 if you don't believe me. We are fellow heirs with Christ. This gives you a taste of what it means to be a brother or sister of Jesus Christ. This gives you a taste of what it means to be a member of the household of God.

2. A False Assumption

Now, it may appear as if Jesus here is denying His earthly family. It may appear as if Jesus is saying that His mother and His brothers didn't matter anymore. You could easily and falsely conclude that Jesus no longer had regard for His earthly family, but focused His intention entirely upon His eternal family instead. Such an assumption is wrong. One of the most tender scenes in all of the Bible is when Jesus was dying upon the cross. Jesus looked down upon His mother, Mary, who watched Him die. One of His very last acts before dying was to insure that Mary would not be neglected when He left this earth. John was standing next to her and Jesus said to Mary, "Woman, behold, your son" (John 19:26). Then, Jesus said to John, "Behold, your mother" (John 19:27). We are told that "from that hour [John] took her into his own household" (John 19:27). Jesus cared for His earthly family.

Some readers take this text and so strongly stress the spiritual bond within the church, that they have removed their family members from their lives, as if they are no longer important. This especially takes place on the college campuses of our land. Cults are notorious for this, as they move their "converts" to live with them, away from their parents. I have seen others view the church without regard for parental authority. They think all of the children of the church are answerable to all of the adults of the church, because we are one big family. If this were the case, why don't we all just go in together and purchase a big hotel, where we all can be moms and dads and have lots of children? I have seen youth groups who have taken upon themselves the responsibility of the spiritual development of the children of the church. In order to keep the group, "a youth group," parents were not encouraged to be involved.

But Jesus' teaching here doesn't deny the responsibility that each of us have to our earthly families. The Bible is clear that fathers have authority over their homes, managing their household (1 Tim. 3:4). The Bible teaches that mothers are to love their children and to be workers at home (Titus 2:4), and children are to be obedient in all things to their parents (Col. 3:20). The New Testament refers back to the book of Proverbs as applicable to our situation. All of the instructions given to parents then apply now. The truth that we see in this passage of God's family, (where all in the church are treated as family), ought never to override our earthly families.

There is often a danger in "youth groups," where the group is seen as surrogate parents, teaching spiritual truths to children that the parents need to be teaching. We have been throwing the idea of "youth group" around to those in our church with children in their home. From the feedback that I have heard, we are planning to head down the path of formalizing our "Keepers at Home" group as our "youth group" for our girls. We are in the process of beginning a corresponding group for the boys called "Contenders for the Faith" as our "youth group" for our boys. The thing that excites me about these programs is that they are very heavy on parental involvement. Mothers are with their girls, teaching them the skills they need to be a woman, who someday will be a "Keeper at Home." Fathers are with their boys, teaching them the skills they need to be a man, who someday will be a "Contender for the Faith." These programs keep the parents involved.

Let me give you a vision for our church. We are a family of families. Rock Valley Bible Church is a family, which consists of families. There are things that take place at Rock Valley Bible Church that mimic the families in our homes. And there are things that take place in your homes that should mimic Rock Valley Bible Church. You might even say it this way if you are careful: we are a church of house-churches. Don't get me wrong. I am not advocating involvement in the house-church movement, which is sweeping across our land, which I don't believe is Biblical. However, I am saying, that spiritual activity ought to take place in the home in a similar way to what takes place in our church. Think of our church service. There are elements of our service that never change. We always worship God in singing songs of praise.

We always pray to God. We always read the word of God. We always teach from the word of God. My heart is this: These things ought to be happening in your homes. In this way (and in this way only) are your homes little churches. Fathers, you are the pastor of your home. By this, I simply mean that you are the spiritual leader in your home. You are the one who is responsible that a regular church service takes place in your home, that your family worships God together, that your family prays together, that your family is taught the word of God. Now, every family is different. Ages are different. Family schedules are different. The make-up of the home is different. Some have no children in their home. Some have their parents in their home. Some have only one parent in their home. Every family is different. However, the family is the primary incubator for spiritual growth.

In a rightly functioning Biblical home, children are taught of the Lord. When children are small, they learn what wise behavior is. They learn what foolish behavior is. They learn of the discipline of the Lord, as the rod is administered for their foolishness. They learn that obedience isn't optional. They learn the gospel of grace, that belief in Jesus is the only way to God. As children grow older, they learn what responsibility is, with duties around the house. They have parents who can enforce the rules within the house. They learn how to have a servant's heart, willingly helping others in the home. They learn how to handle conflicts in their relationships with their brothers and sisters. They learn how the gospel of grace ought to affect their lives, as they are instructed and encouraged to extend grace and mercy to each other. As children begin to leave the home, they learn that the world is a hard place, filled with much sin and devastation. They learn that there are different world philosophies, each of which will attempt to persuade them away from the gospel of Christ. They learn of the privilege of growing up in a Christian home, where peace and harmony and good-will are the norm, rather than fighting and bickering and hatred. As children begin to establish their own homes, they learn that they are a lot more sinful than they ever thought themselves to be, as they see their selfishness exhibited in front of their spouse. They learn that their parents were a whole lot smarter than they thought that they were. They learn that they need to trust the Lord in building their house, because it is a whole lot more difficult than they ever imagined it to be. My point is this: **the home is the primary incubator for spiritual growth.** Spiritual growth will take place in the home far more than it can take place in the church.

You can put on a show at Rock Valley Bible Church. You can easily fake the pastor out. You can even fake everyone out. You can give me a show of what you want me to think you to be. But, in the home, the rubber meets the road. There is no show about it in the home. If you have a love for God, it will be demonstrated in the things you watch on television, in the things you read, and in the things you like to talk about. If you have a servant's heart, it will be demonstrated in the things you do to help and serve others around the home. If you have a desire for holiness, you will quickly confess your sin, that is so apparent to all in the house. In your homes, is God on your mind? In your homes, do others see you as a servant? Are you humbly helping others in the home? You will sin against those in your home far more that you will ever sin against those in the church. They see your sin. Do you? Do you confess your sin to those who live in your home?

If you are these things at home, you will be these things at church. But, if you are not these things at home, you can easily fake it at church. You can come to church this morning with a smile on your face. And no one would ever suspect that you just had a major fight in your home this morning. You can come to church with your Bible in your hand, as if it was your prized possession. And no one would ever think that you didn't read from it once this week. You can come to church and close your eyes and wave your hands when the music plays. And no one would know that television is your god at home. When we come to the end of the service, you can easily help put up a few chairs, or clean a few counters. People think you to be a great servant, not knowing that your wife does all of the housework, as you sit as king of your house surrounded by your servants at your dinner table. "Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant" (Matt. 20:26). This is demonstrated far more at home, than it is in the church. What is my point? It is this: **the spiritual maturity that is expressed in the home is crucial to the spiritual maturity of Rock Valley Bible Church.**

As a church, we will do everything that we can do to cultivate your homes spiritually. We encourage you to have a regular time of Family Worship in your home. Read the Bible together. Pray together. Sing together. We encourage you to speak of the Lord in your home. We encourage you to display the fruit of the Spirit in your home. Anything that we do with the children of the church will always be done with the intention to help the parents raise their children. We will never be a replacement for parents. We can't do it. Fifteen minutes a day with you and your children reading the Bible together will accomplish more than we could ever hope to do as a church. We are a family of family. We are a church of little churches. That is a vision for our church.

Getting back to our text this morning, it is a false assumption that Jesus' words would ever eliminate the central (and more important) role of family life. Hilary Clinton wrote a book entitled, "It takes a village." She took the title from the idea is that it takes a community to raise a child. To raise our children, we need huge governmental programs. Some might be inclined to bring this into the church. To raise our children, we need to have all of the parents be involved in the lives of all of the children. And I say, "not so fast." The father is the head of the house. The mother, in submission to the father, helps to raise the children. The children are to honor their father and mother. The children are to learn the truths of God from dad and mom at home. "You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up" (Deut. 6:7). One of the tragedies of life today is that many homes don't have fathers. Many homes don't have mothers. Certainly, in this, the church needs to help. But we never replace the authority of mom or dad. As a church, we help under the authority of mom and dad.

3. Some Pointed Application

I want you to think about your family. Did you love those in your family this week? I thought about this question in my family. Let me show you a few symbols of love...

I have with me some rubber band guns. A few weeks ago, my son gave a 2x4 piece of wood to a man in the church. On the wood was outlined in a certain shape, and the man was able to cut out the shape for us. Last week the man gave us a rough outline of a pistol and a sander to finish off all of the rough edges. So, last Sunday afternoon, my son and I were outside putting on the finishing touches to his rubber band pistol. It has notches at the end of the barrel, where a rubber band can be placed. It has some clothes pins which pinch the other end of the stretched rubber band. These clothes pins act like triggers. He liked his pistol so much, that he asked for a rifle also. We spent about an hour together on Wednesday afternoon making a rifle for him as well. These guns are symbols of love.

One of the things that I try to do with my children is read to them. After our family worship time, I often read to them 15-30 minutes. In a week and a half, we are going to go see their cousins in a theatrical play in which Robin Hood is acted out. So, we began reading Robin Hood this week. It demonstrates my love to them by taking of my time to input into their life.

Monday is my day off. Nearly every Monday morning, I ask Yvonne, "What projects do you have for me to do?" (That's an act of love, in an of itself). Then, we normally discuss what types of projects I should prioritize that day. Mondays are also special days for my children. I try to spend extra time with them on Mondays. For the past few Mondays, SR has been wanting to go to the BMX track, which is west of town, across the street from Lockwood park. (Those of you with older children, if you haven't been there, it is a pretty fun place). It has a starting gate on a big hill, which allows the bike riders to pick up some speed as they head for a bunch of hills. It has a series of hills, three asphalt embankments, and a finish line. So, we went to the BMX track this past Monday. It is clear across town and takes almost 30 minutes to get there. (Taking them is an act of love). I sat in the middle of the track and enjoyed the outdoors with a book. Carissa and SR went around and around and around the track. (I did get a chance to race SR. I tried my hardest, but lost the race. I sat down exhausted from the race. He's getting pretty good.) After an hour and a half there, (which was an act of love), we finally left for home. When we got home, Carissa said, "Did anyone pick up my pants that I left?" She had worn shorts underneath some long pants in case she got too hot riding around. She had taken them off outside and left them on the track. Being a thirty minute trip, I wasn't too excited about returning to the BMX track (an attitude which wasn't an act of love). After we ate a quick lunch, we did take the thirty minute trip there and found them right where Carissa had left them. We then took the thirty minute trip home (which was an act of love). Our Monday morning spent at the BMX track quickly turned into an all day affair. So, my daughter's pants became a symbol of love this week.

I'm sure that you all could hold up symbols of love this week that you demonstrated to your family. Perhaps it is a dish that represents your cleaning up after dinner each evening. Perhaps it is a shirt that represents the wash that you do each week. Perhaps it is a wastebasket that represents the garbage that you take out at night. Perhaps it is a lawnmower that represents the lawn care that you do. Perhaps it is a book, that you are reading to your wife. Perhaps it is a wall that you painted. Perhaps it is a clean child that you bathed. Can you think of some symbols of love from your actions this week? If you can't, then be convicted of your sin. If you can, I take you to the next reasonable application: this church. Are there symbols of love that represent your acts of love to this church? It is a little harder to come up with these, since we aren't around each other all the time. But, they should exist. Can you think of any? Perhaps it is a meal that you make for a family in need. Perhaps it is a sponge that you use to wipe the counters after church service. Perhaps it is a note of encouragement that you send to a family member. Perhaps it is something that you let another church member borrow (like a sander or a post hole digger or a pair of crutches or a car). Perhaps it is a bunch of apples, that you bring to the church to enjoy. Perhaps it is a phone call that you make to a discouraged member of the church. Perhaps it is money that you give to help a needy family.

I want to share with you one symbol of love that I have witnessed in this church. I have a pair of hair clippers here. From time to time, we, as a church, have enjoyed camping (and picnicking) together. There have been times in which these clippers have been pulled out to give a few of our gentlemen haircuts. These are a symbol of love.

Rock Valley Bible Church is a family of families. You should be loving those in your family with tangible expressions. You should be loving those in the church with tangible expressions. Are you?

I finish up with two verses: 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10. Paul had spent three Sabbaths in Thessalonica, and then, was run out of town. He didn't have an opportunity to teach them much beyond the simple truths of the gospel of Christ. Yet, the Thessalonians embraced the gospel of Christ, by turning from their idols to serve the living and true God (1 Thess. 1:10). God was the one who taught them....

Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more. (1 Thess. 4:9-10)

As I think about Rock Valley Bible Church, I have been amazed that the love demonstrated among the brethren here. It hasn't been false love. It has been a genuine, sincere love that you have had toward one another. In fact, I know of one family in particular that has come to this church and has never seen a church body express love toward one another like this. I know, as a pastor, there is no way that I could ever generate this love. No amount of teaching could ever persuade you to behave this way toward one another. God taught the Thessalonians to love one another (1 Thess. 4:9) and I believe that God has taught you to do this.

My family moved up here two and a half years ago. here were ten families in the church. God has built our church slowly, which isn't a bad thing at all. It is God's timing. As families have come, they have been incorporated into the church. Their lives have been mixed and entwined. They have a commitment to "do life together." This is a church -- a family of families. Perhaps you have stayed apart. Perhaps you have kept at arms length from Rock Valley Bible Church. If so, I would encourage you to be with those in the church.

As a pastor, I believe that I can say with Paul, "Excel still more." I say, "Rock Valley Bible Church, excel still more in your love for one another."

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For more information see www.rvbc.cc.
