

The Remnant Family

Introduction

Well we have once again come to a New Year. I have the same New Year's Resolution every year. I have never actually succeeded at it so it seemed a bit foolish to change to something else.

My New Years Resolution? I resolve to do whatever the Holy Spirit directs me to do. Feel free to use that one too if you like.

With my New Year's Resolution set for the rest of my life, I spend this time of year reflecting on stuff. Spending time with God looking over the relationships in my life....my wife, my children, my family....those I work with...those I disciple and those who disciple me...The Church Family here at Remnant.

I am always drawn to the idea of families at New Year. I was blessed to grow up in a Christian home with supportive parents and tolerable.....no great siblings. I have led our family under Jesus' guidance and now appreciate adult children and the new experience of Grand Children.

One of the greatest blessings that I am very thankful for is that everywhere I go I am surrounded by family. At home, here at church and the people I work with at SMH. I spend a great deal of time thanking God for those He has surrounded me with. They make me a better person.

But some have no such fond experiences with family. For many the idea of family brings pain, abandonment, and the last thing you would ever want is a reunion.

Perhaps looking back over your family you haven't felt love, nurtured, encouraged and supported. Perhaps the closest thing that you have to a family today is right here...this church family.

You are a born again, child of God now in God's family here at Remnant. But your church family will let you down too. It is inevitable. Put two people together both of whom have a sin nature...even if they are saved...and you will eventually have conflict. Every authentic family has conflict.

Conflict means that something is important to you...important enough to argue and fight about it. Even as imperfect as churches are....even as imperfect as we are....God chose the family as a model of our relationship.

No matter what family you were raised in, no matter what circumstance you experienced...good or bad...no matter what your earthly father, mother, and siblings were like....no matter what your family...husband...wife...ex's...children. Good bad or indifferent....God has brought us all here...for this moment...to embrace this family...The Church at Remnant.

So if the idea of family is horrible for you, I want to ask you not to check out right now. When we compare our family to God's Book....all of our families are dysfunctional. Our families may have shaped us...but they don't define us.

Maybe you have used your family and your background as an excuse too long. At some point we must forgive and move on. If we don't, we will never engage in the family that God has made available to us.

I want to encourage all of us to set aside our pride, stop feeling sorry for ourselves, and move beyond excuses to focus on solutions.

This year we can begin with a new focus on our church family. I want to look today at 6 characteristics of a healthy church family and 3 things we can do in 2024 to grow in love for Christ and thus for each other.

So what does an authentic biblical church family look like?

Characteristic #1: Biblical Families Love Deeply

Many of you grew up in families where love was not expressed. "I Love You" was not said often or ever. Not real touchy....no hugs..no cuddling as a child. Not a lot of appropriate affection... perhaps physical and or sexual abuse. Let me share with you what healthy families look like...what your church family strives to look like.

Healthy church families express love naturally... It is a "just showing up" kind of love. not based on performance but expressed no matter what. Not to try to manipulate to get something from you or to use you... It is love expressed even if we disagree...Deep love celebrates YOU... Deep love celebrates the uniqueness of our church family. Deep love loves you exactly as you are.

I learned quickly in my family that each child was unique. You couldn't cookie cutter your love of them...each one loved a bit differently... Sometimes I loved in the way I chose and not the way they needed. It happens, we are not perfect biblical models of family, but we strive to be.

Proverbs 10:12 (ESV) 12 Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.

You and I will not be the perfect parent, daughter, son, brother, sister, husband or wife.... we are all flawed and we still express it at times. But love brings grace for our mistakes.

Colossians 3:12–14 (ESV) 12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Mistakes are easier to overcome if we are all bathed in Love. Love covers a multitude of sins. Love thinks the best intentions of people..not the worst. The first characteristic of a healthy biblical family is that they love as best they can unconditionally and they love deeply.

Walking into this place should feel like coming home. A just showing up kind of love....The second characteristic?

Characteristic #2: Biblical Families Forgive Unconditionally.

Some of us grew up in a family of well trained and well seasoned grudge holders. They taught how to stay mad and get even. They learned to us the mistakes of others as power. They are taught that they win by never forgiving and never forgetting.

Some grew up in families with conditional forgiveness.... when they apologize I will forgive... when they change I will forgive... when they make it right I will forgive... When I get even I will forgive. When I decide that they deserve it I will forgive.

How do you know if you have a problem forgiving? If you bring up hurts from the past and act as if it happened yesterday. If you are bringing up things from years ago, you have not forgiven. If you bring up mistakes your spouse made early in the marriage, you have issues.

Take the forgiveness test. If you want to know if you have forgiven someone look at your arguments with them. If you are using events of the past and pulling them out like ammo to prove how right you are.... you have un-forgiveness in your heart.

Colossians 3:12–13 (ESV) 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Ephesians 4:30–32 (ESV) 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Paul told the Corinthians that love keeps no record of wrong.

Jesus told us that he who have forgiven much...loves much.

Maybe there is an absence of love in your family or your church family because you have yet to forgive. Maybe to find the love that you so desperately desire if to finally say "I forgive you" and actually mean it and then do it.

Unconditional forgiveness is something that we don't deserve but yet we give and receive it because Christ loved and forgave us. Biblical Churches forgive one another unconditionally.

Characteristic #3: Biblical Families Create Traditions

The entire Old Testament is about God creating traditions. Altars were not built for God but rather for us. So that we could remember the time that God intervened. God knows that we live fully when we remember events that deeply impacted us together.

It is important that families and church families create traditions. You can't get time back but you can always create memories. You cant' get time back but you can have stories to tell.

Six years ago last weekend...Ashton Mennonite and Remnant merged. Our first service together was Christmas Eve. People told me that churches could never merge...too many egos...to many obstacles...I still have vivid memories of that first service.

People still sat in church groups...not split down the middle but close. The music was different for both groups. Ed and I did the best to bring everyone together, but we knew it would take time. We were learning to be together as well. That night was for many the first exposure to the length of my sermons and for some a really great sleep.

It is hard to look back and think about how separate we were back then. And yet the journey of our church...left behind the them and us...and began creating traditions of our own.

Families need shared experiences... they need memories to be shared...they don't have to be big... just stuff that we did together.

Your family and our church family at Remnant have values that were shaped more by shared experiences than by any words we shared. Biblical Families Create Traditions... and...

Characteristic #4: Biblical Families Pursue Authenticity

A healthy family is not somewhere you go...it is something that you experience. A place where you are loved even though you are messed up....a place where you are loved and we know you are not perfect. A healthy family is a place where you know that you will not always agree but you love anyway.

A family where you can admit your sins and failures and not lose love.

James 5:15–16 (ESV) 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

There is something supernatural that occurs when we love and forgive one another when we could have chosen to have and attack...when we speak to one another rather than about one another.

Isaiah 1:18 (ESV) 18 "Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

Proverbs 28:13 (ESV) 13 Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

Conceal your sins and you will lose mercy... the mercy that is promised in this passage comes only on the other side of confession. The grace that you need...is on the other side of authenticity.

Biblical church families put down the mask.... stop pretending we have it all together and share our impressive dysfunction with one another.

We not only believe, but we know that we are a group of messed up people who are being transformed by the truth of God's word. Some tell me that they are offended by our sign out front... that Christians are not messed up.... I tell them that Biblical Churches pursue authenticity and that authenticity begins by understanding who we are in the presence of Holy God.

Characteristic #5: Biblical Families speak truth in love

Maybe you have been wounded in the past. Your family nailed down truth but missed truth in love. You are afraid that if you share truth that you will lose love....because that has been your experience.

We have learned to fake it... we can't speak truth in love, so we speak some truth in sarcasm.... anger... manipulation... resentment...Lots of boldness...not much love.

Ephesians 4:15–16 (ESV) 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

We are to speak truth in love. Speak without offending...Listen without defending....let me repeat that... We are to speak without offending and listen without defending.

When we all trust Jesus enough to share truth with one another in love....transformation takes place in our hearts. We become different people... people who are learning to love the way Jesus did...unconditionally

Truth soaked in love shape and mold us to be like Christ. Biblical families speak truth in love.

Characteristic #6: Biblical Families give generously.

My generosity is always connected to God's Grace. The more I am aware of all that I have received, the more generous I become.

People who walk around in life feeling like they are owed something... like they are entitled.... like God owes us something we think we deserve...those people are not generous people.

Our world does not teach generosity...instead we are bombarded with self love, selfish actions, self preservation and loving oneself. We are told to take care of ourselves first. That we deserve it all. Jesus was a radical teacher...He had a different idea.

Luke 6:38 (ESV) 38 give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."

Jesus knows that you cannot outgive God. I say all the time, if God can get it through you...He will get it to you. God gives to you so that you will receive it and then give it to others. You and are to be rivers of giving not reservoirs of hoarding.

Biblical Churches Give Generously.

I am passionate about this because no matter what family you came from...it is never too late to embrace God's family in the church. For many, we are the only safe family experience people have had.

We at Remnant are passionate about our church family. We want to experience the community that God desired for His people. We want to love and be loved by others because of who we are in Christ not because of who we are.

We knew when we merged six years ago that we could remain divided. We needed to change the trajectory of our church community. We couldn't just go home and keep doing what we had been doing. Some wanted to ignore it but we forced them to engage...some couldn't and left...but to get where God desired for us to go, we couldn't just expect things to one day get better...we had to be working on community and love.

If you or I don't do the hard work of loving people we will just get better at hiding our unhealthy practices...you will get better at pretending that you are healthy. But you and I had and have the opportunity to continue to shape this church the way God wants it shaped.

So where do we start?

1. Be Intentional

You will not just drift into spiritual health. Your spiritual growth demands work. Great marriages, families, disciples and church families don't just happen. They are the result of moment to moment surrender and focus.

Healthy churches are not a spiritual gift or a unique blessing given to some and not others. You must be laser focused on doing things God's way...You have to be so intentional to pursue and obey His truth.

When we are intentional about pursuing God's plan then the blessings follow. We seek first the kingdom and all things are added.

Great churches don't just happen and they are not defined by size or the charisma of the Pastor. Great churches are great at being intentional.

Calling someone and telling them that you are praying for them and love them. Going to someone and telling them when we are wrong. Asking someone or a lot of someone's to forgive you.

Being intentional about clearing our relational scorecard. Choosing to immediately forgive someone even if they never ask for it. Being intentional about changing the tone of your voice and aligning it with God's voice in your heart.

Being intentional means to choose to stop faking it and have some honest conversations that are way over due. Being intentional about giving generously of your time, talent and treasure.

We become a more biblical church when we are committed to be intentional about everything.

The quality and foundation of our church family will be determined by the choices we make intentionally and not the ones that are made for us.

Step One we must be intentional

2. Be Committed

We must be committed as a church to do the hard work of cleansing our hearts. We have to trust Jesus to help us finally clean out that part of our hearts that we have walled off.

That part of your life that you never thought you would have to talk about. Things you thought would go away when you were married... Things you thought you would leave behind when you moved out or left your last church. To have the church family you have always desired, God may take you back to your own closet and clean it with you.

It is hard work but it is so transforming and freeing. You will know that you are only carrying what God wants you to carry. You can leave behind all the emotions and fears that you have hoarded and never wanted to deal with.

Many clench tightly to the baggage of alcoholism, drug abuse, sexual abuse, sexual addictions, greed, materialism, verbal abuse... the baggage we carry and be enormous. Yet Jesus tells us.

Matthew 11:27–30 (ESV) 28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

We need to trust Jesus to lead us through a true cleansing of our heart. We may need the help of pastors, elders or trusted believers or counselors... but the promise of freedom is from God Himself.

You can have the biblical family that you have always pretending to have.

3. Be Accountable

The Biblical Church that we desire begins with us. Who you are at work, who you are at church, who you are at home..is the same person.

When each of us choose for ourselves to love deeper...the church is able to love deeper. As you extend your grace to others the church can extend grace to others. As you create

traditions the shared traditions and story of Remnant grow. As you live generously, our church can be more generous.

The church that we call family is only as authentic as those people individually. When people come here, they are looking for authenticity. People who are intentional, committed and accountable to their Lord.

Not perfect people....messed up actually....but trying their hardest to surrender and be transformed by God's truth.

Tomorrow is New Year's Day....Yes the Longhorns are playing...but I want you to imagine this room one year from now.

Imagine what we would all experience next year if we all applied these biblical truths to our families at home, the family that is our community, the family where we work and the Remnant family where we worship.

Remnant is entering our seventh year. If God allows us to celebrate here one year from today, when would you want your church family to be?

Imagine what we would all experience Spiritually if we all loved more deeply.... forgave more unconditionally.... developed more traditions and memories... Lived more authentic lives... Spoke truth with more love... Giving far more generously...

What would you give to see that happen? Would you give up your pride? Your right to be right? Would you be willing to be more humble so others can be lifted up?

Imagine what would happen here if we all did that.... Change here begins with a change in you....and me... all of us have work to do to make Remnant the Biblical Family God desires. We need each other to move forward.

I want to encourage you to make a New Year's Resolution.....To Pray for your church family...for Remnant every day.... and then to obey fully and completely everything the Holy Spirit tells you to do.

I can't wait to see what God is going to do in and through our family. Let's Pray