

It's a wonderful thing – it's an amazing blessing of God, when Jesus Christ isn't only **your** Lord, but when Jesus Christ is Lord of your whole family.

All parents have hopes and dreams for their children. Most want to give their kids every opportunity they can, and they want to see them achieve to the very best of their ability... But I've got to be honest and say, that sometimes, this is to the detriment, of both the child **and** the family... Today, the opportunities are so vast, and the standards of excellence are so high, to not only excel, but even be at all competitive, in the activities that are available to us, requires an enormous amount of time, commitment and energy....

The standards we expect, have changed enormously... *For example, in 1956, the world record for 100m freestyle, was 55.4 seconds... 13 year olds are faster than that today, and that's the way it is in just about every field of sport you choose to look at... And to achieve this new standard of excellence, that we've set up here, and is always getting higher, our young people are being driven harder and harder (either by themselves, their parents, or their coaches)...*

And it's not only sport... Their opportunities are endless – be they: academic, music, ballet, public speaking, whatever...

And some parents find themselves driving their kids in 2 ways... They drive them to keep going – to achieve this standard of excellence – so they can be competitive... And we drive them in our motor-vehicles, all over the countryside, to meet all their commitments...

As a parent, and more specifically as a Christian parent, I decided a long time ago “Yes, I want my kids to do well, in

whatever field they choose... But there is only one area in which I will drive them, and urge them, and push them, and encourage them... and that is towards the Lord Jesus Christ.

The one thing – if I had to give up everything else – the one thing that I want for my kids, is for them to know Jesus Christ as their own personal Lord and saviour. ... And I can tell you this in front of them, because I think they probably know that.

Do your kids know that about you? Do they know by what you do, and by what you say – do they know, by how you encourage them and teach them, and drive them, and show them what's important.. – do they know that your **greatest** hope for them, is for them to have a living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ???? Kids, do you know that about your parents???

Every Christian parent, has this desire and prayer for their children – we all want to see our kids, coming to the Lord...

*Billy Sunday, was a well known evangelist from the early 1900's. And sadly, he shared the heartbreak that many Christian parents feel. He said, "The tragedy of my life, is that although I've led thousands of people to Jesus Christ, my own sons are not saved."*ⁱ

And many Christian parents, feel this same heartache... - the heartache that their children aren't saved... And we've just got to keep praying for them, and knowing that even with our best efforts, ultimately it's up to them, whether they accept or reject Him..

Now, I've introduced our topic in this way today, because, for many of us, that's what we think of when we think of family members who are not yet saved... I don't know why this is – probably because parents feel a responsibility for their children, more than children feel a responsibility for their parents...

But most of us here today, would have a loved one, who is **not** saved: A mother or a father, a brother or a sister, a close aunt or uncle, or cousin... not saved... And if that's you, well you're certainly not alone...

When Jesus was ministering, as far as we can see in the Bible, it was only as He was crucified that Mary makes an appearance, and it was only when He was raised from the dead, that His brothers believed... In fact, they were actually a bit of a barrier to Jesus' ministry...

We're told in **John 7:5** ... **not even his brothers believed in him.**

And in Mark, when the crowds started flocking to Jesus, to hear His teaching, His family tried to take Him away, "He's crazy"ⁱⁱ ... (think they were probably embarrassed by Him)

Jesus' own family didn't believe in Him, and His own family, desperately tried to restrain Him from His religious activities – You can imagine it, can't you, "We just want you to be normal."

And the sad truth of the matter, is that sometimes, **families** will put pressure on someone, to pull back, their commitment

to Christ. And it depends on your family of origin, and your culture, what form that pressure will take.

If my family are committed Christians, they'll be happy for me to be a Christian.

But if my family were Muslims, they might even actually turn me in to the authorities, or maybe even murder me, for becoming a Christian (because I've brought dishonour upon their family).

If your parents come from a Christian culture, but aren't really committed Christians themselves, they might be happy for you to get a bit of religion – they may be happy for you to go to church once a week, or once a month..., but they might start getting a bit worried about you, if Jesus Christ seems to become your main focus in life, and you seem to be taking this Christianity thing all a bit too seriously...

And there have been **many** young people, who felt called to the mission field – called by Christ to go to Bible College – called by Christ to the ministry, or to become missionaries, or youth workers, and it's been their families who have put the brakes on and discouraged them....

“You're too young. Don't rush into this – you've got your whole life in front of you... You've got to think about your future... You need to go to university. You need to get a career. You need to get married and settle down and have a job and buy a house....

And God only knows (and I say this in all sincerity), God only knows, how many people have failed to answer His call to ministry, because they've been discouraged by their families... Families have pushed them to disobedience.

I remember a minister telling his church one time, “*Never go into the ministry, unless you can't stay out of it.*” What a terrible message. I know what he was trying to say – “Be sure of your call.”, but a message like that causes people to delay their call from Christ. And let me tell you, delayed obedience, is disobedience. We should be encouraging one another – encouraging our young people – If Christ calls you, go. We'll support you...

I heard a story once, told by another minister:

A young lad came to talk to his minister, because he didn't know what to do. He felt that God was calling him to go and be a missionary overseas. But his parents told him he couldn't go. He'd be too far away. They wouldn't be able to see him – maybe only once every 3 or 4 years... - “How could you do that to us?”

So the minister went to visit the parents, who were Christians. And he said to them, “You're Christians aren't you?”

“Oh yes, we are.”

“And when your son was born, did you bring him to church, to dedicate him to God?”

“Oh yes, of course we did.”

“Why then, are you trying to take your son back, when 18 years ago, you gave him to God?”

And they wept, and encouraged their son, to follow God with all of his heart.ⁱⁱⁱ

And you know what? They could trust God with their son, because we know, that wherever we go in the world, we've got family.

Matthew 12:⁴⁶ While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. ⁴⁸ But he replied to the man who told him, **"Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?"**

Now Jesus wasn't disrespecting His earthly family, but He was showing us a truth: When you become a Christian, your DNA changes – not literally of course... When you become a Christian, you have a new family, and you have new family values – to honour your Father in Heaven... And sometimes, that might conflict with your old family's values...

⁴⁹ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, **"Here are my mother and my brothers! ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."**

Jesus pointed to His disciples, and said, "Here's my family". "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven, is my family."

You know the saying, "Blood is thicker than water"? Well, the blood of Jesus, shed on Calvary's Hill, is the glue, that binds His family together.

And wherever you go in the world, when you find another bunch of believers – when you find another group of disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, who are doing the will of their Heavenly Father, – you've found family.

You might be a widow. Or a widower. You might have been an only child, or maybe you've been estranged from your family, and they don't want anything to do with you. You might be divorced, or a single mum, or maybe someone in the family has abused you... or maybe, you are just someone who feels all alone... In Christ, you have a family... Isn't that wonderful??? In Christ, you have a family. You're not alone any longer.

Sadly though, sometimes the church is like a dysfunctional family.

The key here, I think, is v50 whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.

Even as Christians, there's always something tempting us, away from our Father's will.

*Just recently, I was struck by something. Over the years, I've gone to many church gatherings, where I've felt totally at odds with many of the others there – places where I **didn't** feel that I'd been among family. And I think the reason, is because we didn't have the same DNA. We didn't believe the same things about Christ. We didn't believe the same things about sin, judgment and salvation...*

And I had to contrast this, with what I experienced in a very powerful way, only a few weeks ago. I went down, south of Sydney, to a Christian conference – The Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches. I hardly knew anybody...

But at every meal, I'd sit down with somebody different, and within a few minutes of sharing with each other, (with every single person that I spoke to) – within a few minutes, I knew that we worshipped the same God – I knew that we both had the same father – our Father in Heaven – And I knew that these people were my brothers and sisters...

And more often than not, as we got up to leave the table, we'd pray for each other – a family meal, including our heavenly father...

I'm sure they still have faults, the same as sometimes I'm a dismal failure as a Christian... But we all had the same Father, and that made us family.

Now, you can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family. In a normal world, you mightn't ever consider having a peculiar person like me as your friend, but I got news for you – “Because we share the same heavenly Father, you've got to love me”.

Take a look around you – these strange people, are your family. They love you, but even better than that, Jesus loves you. Jesus is your brother, you are His sister, His mother, His brother.

Isn't that wonderful???

But there is one thing, that puts strain on the relationship of Christ's family: Disobedience.

When there is disobedience in the family – when we fail to do the will of our Heavenly Father, this puts strain on our relationship with Christ, it puts strain on our relationship with

our Heavenly Father, and it puts strain on our relationship with each other.

And if a church isn't getting along – if the members of that church, are not loving one another, or relating to each other as brothers and sisters – if they're not including one another in the family (not just their friends, but the whole church family) ... If they're not being included, it's most probably due of some kind of disobedience.....

But there's a cure for disobedience – repentance and forgiveness...

⁴⁹ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

Let's pray,

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you loved us so much that you sent your son Jesus Christ to die on the cross to save us. We thank you that you love us so much that you adopted us as your children.

You didn't have to – you chose to.

You chose us, to be your children.

You chose us to be able to be made Holy and perfect in your sight.

You chose us to be sisters and brothers,

Heirs, along with Christ.

Thank you.

Heavenly Father, help us to live as your obedient disciples.
Help us to love one another.
Fill us with a love for your family.

And Lord, we pray for our own earthly families.
We pray for those who have not yet been saved.
We pray, that in your mercy, you would lead them to the
saving grace of Christ.
And that they would, in your perfect timing,
receive Christ as their own personal Lord and saviour.

Lord we pray for those in our families who are also our
Christian brothers and sisters.
We thank you for them.
We thank you for the wonderful blessing it is to be part of the
family of Christ together.

Lord, help us to encourage one another on in obedience to
Christ.
Let us never be a blockage to your will,
But may we be encouragers and supporters of all brothers and
sisters who are following your will.

And Lord, we pray for this church, and the Christian church in
this district.

Lord, fill us with the love of Christ for one another,
as we urge one another on in obedience to our Heavenly
Father,
For the sake of our Brother, the Lord Jesus Christ,
Amen.

ⁱ Billy Sunday in EK Rowell, Quotes and Idea Starters for Preaching and Teaching from Leadership journal. 1996. Baker Books (p.62)

ⁱⁱ Mark 3:20-21

ⁱⁱⁱ I think this was a David Pawson sermon