

The Circus: Family

Family Circus #1 - Pastor Gary Combs - July 21, 2024 - Ephesians 3:14-21

INTRO: Good morning church! (KIDZFEST Content: celebrate decisions and thanks to volunteers. Metrics on decisions, attendance, and volunteers.)

We are starting a new sermon series today called, “Family Circus.” Now I know what you’re thinking. “Why should I come to church to hear about a family circus? I already have one of those at home!” Well, you’re not alone. I don’t care who you are, none of us have a perfect family because none of us are perfect.

You’re not going to want to miss a Sunday the next 5 weeks because listen to the titles for the next 5 sermons:

July 21 - The Circus: Family

August 11 - The Tight Rope: Singleness

July 28 - The Flying Trapeze: Marriage

August 18 - The Safety Net: Grandparents

August 4 - The Lion Cage: Parenting

ILL: Take a look at this cartoon. “Have you ever asked, “Who dealt this mess?” Isn’t that the way we all feel sometimes about our families? The cartoon series, “The Family Circus,” was created by self-taught artist and cartoonist, Bil Keane in 1959. Cartooning from his home office with family all around, Keane was inspired and soon began drawing “The Family Circus,” using his five children as subject matter.



Keane said, “If there is a philosophy behind the feature, it is that a home filled with love and laughter is the happiest place in the world.” Bil Keane passed away in 2011 at age 89. Today, his son, Jeff Keane, continues the cartoon series, keeping the same positive family themes that his father first envisioned.

Need: So what’s the answer to the question, “Who dealt this mess?” We did. That’s the answer. That’s why we worry so much about it. Because we know that much of the mess, if we’re truly honest, is our own fault. Yet no matter how hard we try to have the perfect family, we’re still ending up with crazy chaotic and well, messy. And this often leaves us feeling exhausted and feeling like failures.

Trans: But what if we’re aiming at the wrong thing? What if we stop aiming at having the perfect family and instead aim at having a family that lives and even thrives under God’s blessing? What if we prayed, “God bless our mess.”

BODY: In the book of Ephesians, the apostle Paul prayed that believers would experience God’s blessing on the family. We can experience God’s blessing on our families. How can we experience God’s blessing on our families? The text gives **four steps** to experience God’s blessing on your family.

Read Text: Ephesians 3:14-21 (ESV) ¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

HOW TO EXPERIENCE GOD’S BLESSING ON YOUR FAMILY:

1. Bow to the **Father’s Authority.**

EXP: (14-15) Paul’s prayer reminds us of the origin of the family and under whose authority it is named.

“**For this reason**” (14) - Paul began this prayer in v.1 before taking a brief detour (v.2-13). “Gratitude for the grace of God in chapters 1-2 prompted this prayer” (Tony Merida, *Ephesians*, p.83).

“**Bow my knees**” (14) - Paul was describing his own position of prayer for the believers in Ephesus. Yet, we might see it as an example to “bow the knee” to the Father’s authority over us and our families too.

“**Father**” (14) (πατήρ, *patēr*) - Here, it refers to God the Father, the first person of the Trinity.

“**Family**” (15) (πατριά, *patria*) - Family, tribe. “...in heaven and on earth...” This is the family of God made up of Jew and Gentile, it is the Church both here and in heaven. Yet, that He is the founder of the family “on earth” points also to its application to each of our individual families.

“**Named**” (15) (ὀνομάζεται, *onomazetai*) - Paul made a play on words (“*patēr* - *patria*”), he used it to show that the family originated in the heart of the Father. The Triune God wanted a family made in His image.

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ARG: Every family must choose what foundation, what authority they will follow.

Joshua 24:15 (ESV) ... choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

ILL: Who remembers the sitcom, “Who’s the Boss?” It ran 8 seasons from 1984-1992. Starring Tony Danza, the premise of the show was just as its title implied, “Who’s the boss of this family?” A lot of the chaos in today’s family comes from either not knowing the answer to this question, or having the wrong answer to it.



APP: Every family is built upon some source of authority. Which “authority” will you choose? The culture? The latest trend? Your own upbringing? You might be thinking that you need to get your family “circus” under control, but that’s the wrong thought. What we ought to be thinking is how to get it under God’s control. Will you choose to follow God’s authority for your family?

2. Depend on the Spirit’s Power.

EXP: (16, 20) Paul prayed that believers would depend on the Spirit’s power to live for Christ. Too many families forget spiritual things or they give them such a low priority as to make them unimportant.

“**Strengthened**” (16) (aor,pass,inf) - to make strong or empower.

“**Power**” (16, 20) (δύναμις, *dunamis*) - strength, might, power or ability. In v.20 twice “able” is *dunamis* too.

“**Spirit**” (16) (πνεύματος, *pneumatos*) - Here, the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, sent from Jesus to live in every believer, empowering him to live for Christ.

ARG: Jesus promises to give us power through the Holy Spirit:

Acts 1:8 (ESV) But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you...

We can’t depend on our own power to build our family, we can let the Spirit build it.

Psalms 127:1 (ESV) Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.

ILL: The Greek word for “Spirit” can also be translated “breath.” One of the things that you learn when trying to get your body in shape is that proper breathing is important. Whether it’s push-ups or laps in a pool, if you don’t learn to breathe properly, you won’t be able to go very long.

APP: The same is true for living the Christian life and for bringing your family under God’s blessing. We must learn “spiritual breathing,” depending on the Holy Spirit for wisdom and strength. This means praying alone and as a family together, asking for the Spirit’s power. Having decided to make God the Father the authority for your family, will you decide to depend on His Spirit for strength?

3. Dwell in Christ’s Love.

EXP: (17-19) Paul prayed that Christ would so “dwell” in our hearts that his unconditional love would form a firm foundation that would weather any storm of life. This is God’s glue for the family: Christ’s love.

“**Dwell**” (17) (κατοικῆσαι, *kata + oikeo*) - Lit., to make a home in, to indwell, to settle, take up residence.

“**Love**” (17, 19) (ἀγάπη, *agapē*) - unconditional love, God’s kind of love.

“**Being rooted and grounded**” (17) - to strengthen with roots, to render firm and to lay the foundation, make stable. The love of Christ both nourishes (“rooted”) us and supports us (“grounded”).

“**Breadth and length and height and depth**” (18) - “It seems legitimate to say that the love of Christ is ‘broad’ enough to encompass all mankind, ‘long’ enough to last for eternity, ‘deep’ enough to reach the most degraded sinner, and ‘high’ enough to exalt him to heaven.” (Stott, p.137)

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“**Comprehend**” (18) (καταλαμβάνω, *katalambano*) - to seize tight hold of, comprehend, understand

“**Know**” (19) (γινώσκω, *ginosko*) - come to know, learn. To know through personal experience.

“**Filled**” (19) (πληρώω, *pleroo*) - to fill, complete. Be full to capacity. “Full of God’s fullness.” Committed love. “Paul continues to set forth one impossibility after another. Unconditional love ... unknowable knowledge ... and now being filled by an infinite God.” (Swindoll)

ARG: What real love looks like: It’s sacrificial...

1 John 4:10 (NLT) This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

It’s patient, kind ...

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (ESV) ⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

ILL: Remember Bill Keene’s philosophy behind “The Family Circus?” “A home filled with love and laughter is the happiest place in the world.” Bill’s cartoons were based on his family and influenced by his Christian faith, which he often included. “Jeffy” does the cartoon since 2011.



APP: Will you let Christ’s unconditional love be that which roots and holds together your family relationships?

4. Reflect God’s Glory.

EXP: (20-21) God wants your house to be a lighthouse, reflecting His glory to the world!

“**Glory**” (16, 21) (δόξα, *doxa*) - glory, honor, praise. We were made to bring glory to God, but sin caused the *Imago Dei* to fall. God wants to restore us and sanctify us to be reflections of His glory.

“**Generations**” (21) (γενεάς, *geneas*) - generations, a family. Your children’s children.

ARG: God wants to make your house a light house, your family to “shine as lights in the world!”

Philippians 2:14-15 (ESV) ¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or disputing, ¹⁵ that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world

ILL: Just as the moon reflects the light of the sun on a darkened earth, so God wants us to reflect His glory.

APP: Does your family reflect God’s glory. Trust Christ to help you start a new path for your family, your children and your children’s children!

CONCLUSION: When we heed Paul’s prayer, we don’t end up with perfect families, but we do put our families in a place where we can experience God’s blessing. Yet, God wants to bless you even more. He wants you to be part of His family! He wants to adopt you into His family through Jesus Christ, His Son.

Ephesians 1:5 (NLT) God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.

Sure, the human family may be a mess today, but one day through Jesus, God we will finally make us the family He always planned from the beginning. Will you...

1. Bow to the Father’s authority?
2. Depend on the Spirit’s power?
3. Dwell in Christ’s love?
4. Reflect God’s glory?

Let’s pray.