

AUG 20 & 21 "Family, and spiritual gifts"

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Today's message is going to focus-in on family, and gifts, touching-on the Epistle for today from Romans, and we'll kind- of combine them together to show how we can use our gifts together as a family, and so I thought I'd start today's message by expanding on the children's message about family and how we honor our families and how we honor God through our families, not just our parents, but our entire family.

Now, did you know that the family unit is the first institution created by God, even before His church? By God's design, the relationship between husband and wife is actually the first family unit, and we can read about that relationship in the Book of Genesis. And this, of course, is the creation account of the first man and woman: Adam and Eve. In Genesis 1:27-30, God blessed Adam and Eve and told them to be fruitful and multiply, and the children that Adam and Eve had made the family unit larger. When those children got married, another family unit was formed, and when a husband and wife take another's child into their home to raise that child becomes family through adoption. All generations of families ultimately are traced back to that first family in the garden. The body of believers is called the Church or the Family of God because by God's grace, all humankind, even people like us, can be adopted into His eternal family. So therefore, the family is the essential building block of human civilization. God's creation of Adam and Eve illustrates the importance of the marriage covenant establishing one man and one woman to create and nurture family.

So I thought I'd start off with some scripture verses that can be related to family, beginning with husband and wife. In 2 Corinthians 6:14-16, Paul writes "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? ("Belial is a name that Paul uses for Satan) What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." Rather, Paul exhorts all of us to have spiritual unity in his letter to the Church at Phillipi, chapter 2, verse 2: "then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose." Perhaps one of the ultimate exhortations regarding how we are to follow Christ in exhibiting self-sacrificing, servant leadership, which is true love, in our families, is taken from Paul in Ephesians 4:29-6:4 "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen, Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly -loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the

head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church— for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery — but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” — which is the first commandment with a promise — “that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on earth.” Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”

Sometimes I wonder how well we're doing this, are we honoring our families, or are we essentially abandoning our families? Some of us physically, others of us emotionally, maybe some of us spiritually. We have a man, and husband crisis, in our culture today, in our society, and in our churches. It's God's ironic mystery that only by checking our ego at the door, and bowing the knee by submitting our will to God, can husbands become the spiritual heads of our households, as Paul has described. Because husbands are taking the easy way out and unwilling to bow the knee and submit our wills to God, many of us have our wives then also taking the easy way out, rather than bowing their knee and submitting their wills to God by continuing to encourage their husbands to become the spiritual heads of our homes; they themselves are becoming the spiritual heads of our homes. But what if the wife is currently better equipped, and can do a better job than for those of us taking the easy way out, we'll just kind of wait and see what happens. We'll see what the council and the self study committee do, and we'll just kind of wait and see what kind of new pastors we get; hopefully we'll all like them. If not, well maybe it's time to church-shop a little bit; I know there must be plenty of other good churches here in the general area. After all, if Concordia's no-longer the place for me, we can find another church if we have to, right? Who knows, I wouldn't be surprised if Pastor Matthews turns-up locally here in the area, maybe as a part-time pastor at one of the area congregations; what church wouldn't want him in that capacity. Maybe we can just kind of follow him to whatever local church that he might pop-up at here in the area. There have been plenty of other formerly key-members here at Concordia that have found another church home here in the area for various reasons, maybe they've got the right idea.

You know, I hear around these very halls all the time folks here at Concordia saying: “hey, it's ok that you've left or leave Concordia, we just want to make sure that you've found another Christian church to be a part of” or “the most important thing is to find a church where you're spiritually fed, and if that's no-

longer Concordia, then just make sure you find another church somewhere where you're spiritually fed." While there's some truth to those sentiments, I wonder how much of those sentiments have been influenced by our me-first society and culture, that we live in today. I'm not going to let you off the hook quite so easily.

Have you ever realized how much of an encouragement you are to the person sitting next to you? Maybe you know them well, maybe you don't. Even for those of us that don't know each other as well as others, even just your very presence at worship here every week; the very act of gathering together here as a family, as brothers and sisters in Christ, worshiping, praising, communing, and praying to our shared heavenly Father together in spirit and in truth, We're all struggling to overcome our individual sins and hardships, together in Christ, aren't we? We're all struggling to bow the knee, so that we can grow in our Christian faith together, aren't we?

Have you ever thought about how much of a discouragement it might be if you weren't here any more, especially if it were somewhat sudden or unexpected, without any kind of notice or seemingly without reason? Have you ever thought about, that just like with your family at home, your congregating here and your worshiping here, isn't just all about you? You see, when a church family is tested when a beloved pastor has to leave, and then people begin to leave the church; it doesn't say so much about the ministry of the pastor that's left, as it says volumes regarding the personal, so-called Christian character, of those parishioners taking the easy way out, who selfishly decide, that it's simply time, to walk away. Do Not, Abandon Your Family.

Ok, so we're not going to abandon our church family, and instead we're going to use our spiritual gifts as outlined in today's Epistle from Romans. As a member of the self study committee, I've been able to learn a lot more about all of the spiritual gifts of ministry that we have here at Concordia, some of which we've already mentioned from all of our many and varying children's ministries including unique ministries like the racetrack ministry and various scholarship funds, to our organist and choir and all of our other music ministries like Praise and Promise, and Chaos, to LWML, to our men's ministry. I'm just scratching the surface of all of the wonderful and diverse spiritual gifts of ministry that we have here at Concordia and that's just the point I'm making is that we really do have abundant and varying spiritual gifts here, we're one of the most active churches in the area, in large part because of all of the wonderful spiritual gifts that our glorious God has blessed us with. That being said, over the past several years, I've noticed that we've lost a few of our Concordia family members who 'ye gone to other churches in search of more meaningful spiritual gifts to them, Maybe they liked another pastor a little bit better or maybe they found a music program that spoke a little bit better to them. Michelle, Faith and I visit other LCMS churches in our area from time-to-time. Many of them have multiple pastors and/or other multiple full time staff. Many of those congregations have more monetary and financial resources than what Concordia has. Many of them are strong in music just as we are and some of them have multiple Bible studies just like we do. Faith attends a VBS in summer right around the corner from our

house in Glen Ellyn, and sometimes Michelle attends a women's Bible study there, We've been known to attend Wednesday Advent and Lenten services near our home when it's too inconvenient for us to make it to Berwyn during the work-week, and once in a while we'll even make it to a Saturday evening service somewhere in our area. Many of these churches have very strong spiritual gifts and in some areas their gifts rival or even surpass ours here at Concordia. I'll be honest with you, in the past, we've discussed the possibility of maybe transferring to another congregation in our area. It would be a lot more convenient for us, especially during our summer schedule here at Concordia, where more often than not the 9am folks probably see us hurrying-in late. Not only would it be more convenient, but maybe we'd even be able to gain some spiritual gifts maybe even more abundantly at one of these other congregations. All that being said, after 9-years in Glen Ellyn, we're still here at Concordia, and for one interchangeable; because God is love, so too, especially in this passage, the words "love" and God can be used interchangeably. The greatest gift, love, and God; they're all one in the same, aren't they? Now, as we read this aloud together, because many of you are already very familiar with this passage, don't be so timid as to not focus-in on your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and reflect on His ministry here on earth and on the Cross, and how incomprehensibly awesome His love is for you, and how He's shown that love for you by how He's gone all the way to the cross to cover for all of your selfish sins all throughout your whole life. Will you read aloud with me? "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."

How are we going to honor our families? How are we going to keep from abandoning our families? How are we going to man-up? How are we going, to bow the knee? How are we going to submit our wills to God? How are we going to replace Pastor Matthews? How are we going to receive our new pastors? We're going to do it together, as a family. We're going to use our gift.. ,That's How. Amen?