

Coffee with Phil. 38. What is Family?

Introduction.

Welcome to the podcast, I hope you're having a day wherever you are, I hope you're setting yourself up intentionally to live a life of purpose on purpose. And today I want to speak about family. As I do, I was pondering what to speak about, and I asked the Lord, and he said yeah, get on this one, and so I've got some notes and it's gonna be interesting to see where it heads.

But I want to say this, that family is one of those topics that I find when I bring family up with different people to talk about family, or people share with me their views. I mean, don't you just love that? People like to share their views with you, whether you ask for it or not sometimes. But family is one of those topics that I think can polarise people, it can certainly be a trigger to unlock or expose healthy and unhealthy things that are hidden in a family. But also, you get to see family because life is on display.

So, for instance. One of the things that I get to do as a minister is be involved in weddings, and weddings are one of those examples of family circumstances that really exposed the dynamics of a family, and look, I even remember back to when my generation was getting married, and you know, I was involved in my friend's weddings, and so you're involved in the sort of preparation of the wedding, and you get to see all sorts of things going on. I remember being involved in my family, when my sister got married, and the preparation for her wedding, and all sorts of pressure revealed things, and of course Kathy and myself, in our planning, and preparation for our wedding, family was exposed, and helped me to recognise what my role and my responsibility was. To be intentional about the family or the household that I wanted to lead, and in that case it was just Kathy and I, but I certainly was very clear in what was going to happen on my watch, and what wasn't going to happen. And I don't know about you, but one of the things that I've experienced with family is people might say, or act as if they would say, don't mess with my family, and you know, when that happens I always dial back, because I think, well, do I really want to fight? Do I wanna get stabbed or attacked? Or do I want to cause trouble? And so often I'll step away.

But what I reckon people are saying is, when they say don't mess with my family, what they're actually saying is, don't mess with my view of family, and that's something that, well, I don't know sometimes, I'm a bit naughty and I like to get in there and do that. But also, do you know who was really naughty in messing with our view of family, Jesus, Jesus himself was really messy, and I had a conversation once, because family is something that I promote as key for life to be honest and I've got to be careful about. Because when I talk about family, you're going to bring your filters to that conversation. And so, when I talk about a family, you're going to impose or superimpose on top of that conversation, your upbringing on family, what you think of family, your current feelings about family, your disappointments, your challenges, your struggles, your positive experiences, all of these things get layered on top of a conversation about family.

In the church context, the church that I lead at Zion here, we say that family is our number one value, and yet we've had all sorts of crazy things happen inside the church family that would seem to be coming against the value of family. And I spoke with one of my mentors about it, and he said, look, I can

tell you right now, is the thing that you hold up, and wave as a banner or a flag, is the very thing that becomes a target, and that made me realise that I just have to be really intentional to fight for family, and Jesus was key on this. Jesus in Matthew chapter 12, I don't want to dive too deep here, but I want to show you, that Jesus is messing with our view of family, because he's speaking to the crowd. It says in Matthew chapter 12 verse 46, Jesus was speaking to the crowd his mother and brothers stood outside asking to speak to him. Someone told Jesus, your mother and your brothers are outside and they want to speak to you, Jesus asked who is my mother? Who are my brothers? Then he pointed to us disciples, and said, look, these are my mother and brothers, anyone who does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.

And sometimes I've gotten into a bit of a conversation, or an argument with someone saying, well, don't you make church more important than my family, and my family's visiting, and so I'm not going to be able to serve, I'm not gonna come to church, because they're more important. And I'm like, well, yeah, Jesus is actually saying in this verse that nothing should be more important than him, and worshipping him with our lives. So, I'm just gonna let Jesus mess with your view of family.

But what's worse, there's this verse here in Luke chapter 14, it's a different kind of context, so it's a different part of the story. But a large crowd was following Jesus, and he turned around and said to them, if you want to be my disciple you must hate everyone else by comparison, your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, even your own life, otherwise you cannot be my disciple. And so here we have Jesus saying that there is nothing more important than living a life of serving him and worshipping him, through serving him. And I think the reason I'm saying this is we just have to sometimes allow Jesus to disrupt our false view, or the reality that we've constructed to protect ourselves, and allow him to step in and to reframe our whole mindset.

And this is why I'm sharing this guys, because the honest truth for me is, I'm taking this as a personal challenge that I must bend myself to what Jesus is saying always. And I have my preference. I have my comfort. I've got a family that I love, and we love spending time together, and I prioritise that. But I've gotta tell you that anytime I put that higher than, or elevate that above what Jesus wants me to do, then I'm creating an idol, and I'm causing a problem. And look I work with enough families, as in my job, and I've worked with families for decades, helping them in different areas of life, and I think we've just sometimes got a messed up view of family.

I wanted to share with you, I suppose, what I think of family, and I'm not saying that you have to think what I think. But what I am trying to do is be a little bit vulnerable and expose where my belief comes from, because I'm going to finish with a bit of a challenge for you and for me around answering this question for today's podcast, which is what is family?

Before I get into that, always forget to ask you to share this podcast with some of your friends or maybe even your family. Like this would be a good one for you to flick a text, or a Facebook message, to share the link to Spotify, or to Apple Podcasts, so that you can say hey, look this guy's on a bender. Or what do you think about this? Or this really challenged me, maybe we should talk about it? So go ahead and make sure your one, subscribed to the podcast, so you get it all the time, each week, and make sure you share it with someone who you want to have a conversation with.

What is Family?

So let me start by beginning with, what is family to me? And my family viewpoint. My paradigm, my mindset was really shaped by growing up, and the experiences I had, which were incredibly positive for me. My family growing up was wonderful, it was loving, it was supportive, encouraging. Discipline was firm but fair. We honoured and respected the parents, because that's what was taught, and role modelled, and we were connected to the wider sense of family. So, I was blessed enough to have four grandparents growing up in my world, aunties, and uncles, and cousins, and so family gatherings were huge, but it was awesome, you know? So that was my experience as a young person.

But then it translated into my teenage years where mum and dad would welcome my friends into our home, as family. And particularly when there was me and my guys, we were young adults, we were getting out and about quite a bit, and travelling around in our car, and seeing different parts of the world. But our family home was always a safe place to come back to. There was always a warm shower, or a cold swimming pool, as often was needed. There was somewhere to stay, we would put up a tent in the backyard and we would just live in the tent for the summer. And I suppose, a little bit arrogantly, might be using it as a hotel, but certainly it was welcoming, and I know my friends really valued having a home base, and mum and dad were wonderful for that.

When I left home. I was 17 when I left home and I travelled to the other end of the North Island, and I was far, far away from my family, but I was connected, loosely connected, to a group of young people at a church, and one of the families at that church took me under their wing. And what started off as a kind of a one off thing, turned into a frequent thing, and then it became weekly. Every Wednesday night after dinner, I would jump in my car and I would drive the 10 minutes up to their house, and they knew that I was arriving at ten past seven. And I'd walk in the door, and they'd make me a coffee, and we would just sit and hang out as family for the evening. And they just wrapped me up into their loving home, and there was always cake, or dessert, or lots of fun stories, lots of experiences. And the dad, his name was Ash, he's since passed, but he was a wonderful, wonderful, humble, gentle, loving man, and he was a petrol head, as was I, so he would tell lots of stories about his growing up and his workings, because he worked for Toyota, and so there was always a fast car that he would take me for a drive in, and that was my view of family. That family was open and embracing, and it wasn't necessarily about the home that you were born into, it was more about being part of the family that embraced you.

And so when Kathy and I got married, we were newly weds, and we were living in our own home and Petone, but we always, no, often we had someone living in our home. There was my sister and her husband when they transitioned to Wellington, they lived with us for a short period of time, before they bought their house. There was a young girl called Sonya who had come out of an abusive situation and become part of the church, and she was just looking for someone to live, and we're like, hey, we've got spare rooms, why don't you come and stay with us? Later on in our lives, when we lived out in the country, there was a young girl who was really struggling with some kind of eating disorder, I don't remember the name of it, but it wasn't very healthy, it was actually life threatening, and so we were like, just come and live with us, and be part of our family.

As time progressed and I had my own businesses, I would treat my team as if they were family. And I remember one year we had a huge Christmas party, I hired out the upstairs of a restaurant, and there was three different organisations, and I was leading, and I just brought them all together in the same room. I said look, this is, you guys are all connected to me, and as far as I'm concerned your family. And I treated them as family. And I would help them to buy a house. And I would help them if they were in

trouble. And I would loan them a car, or help them to find a holiday. Why? Because that's what you do as family, you know someone sits with me and they're crying and they say our credit card is maxed out and our power bill was not paid, and my wife is at home, and the washing machine stopped, and there's no electricity. And I didn't blink an eye, like, just give me the account, let's pay that, let's get the power connected now, let's get them on the phone and make sure that you have electricity in your home for your wife and your children. Why? Because to me, that's what family looks like.

Family sometimes bites... but it's still family.

The truth is though, and I've written this down here on the piece of paper, is family sometimes bites back. But it's still family. You know, sometimes when you love people without condition, it just naturally makes room for tough times. And for those of you that have raised children, you know that you go through good times, you go through hard times, where your kids are learning, and exploring, and trying to discover their identity, and find where the boundaries are, and explore new things, and confirm their values in the way that they see the world, and sometimes that creates tension, and it creates a tough times. But the worst thing you can do as a parent is to lock them in a room and tell them that's not what the world is going to look like, because you don't think that way as a parent. And you're just going to get rebellion, and broken relationships.

So, loving your family without conditions makes room for tough times. So, if you go back to my context where my friends were in the house, there were sometimes when my parents really struggled because a few of my guys, a few of my mates, didn't have the same values or belief set as what my family did and that caused tension. But my mom and my dad were committed to loving well, and loving deeply, and so they had to be prepared for those tough times as a result. I would say this, love always requires vulnerability to risks. And you know I've wrestled with this, because over my lifetime of, you know, having employees that I would invest in heavily, not just financially but personally, to see them turn around and move on into a new season of life with no respect or regard for what it had cost me to get them to that stage. But if I don't love them, then who am I to say that they're family? So, if I'm going to call them family, I have to love them. If I'm going to love them, I have to accept that my vulnerability to risk, is my price that I have to accept. Sometimes it hurts really bad. You know, when you love someone ,,and they just choose to reject you and walk away from you that hurts. And, you know, I've had times where I've needed counselling to deal with the heartache and the disappointment of broken connections. When someone denies you, or abuses you to your face, that's gonna hurt, and how do you love well?

And what I've got to decide is how am I going to love in that situation? Jesus, you know, spat on whipped, and his flesh torn, he was mocked and ultimately crucified, and yet he looked upon each and every person that was opposing him, he looked upon them with love. And I've never been in that kind of situation, and I don't think I ever will. But the truth is, I've got to learn how to love like that. And this is what's really challenging me. How do I bend myself to see people, each and every person that I interact with, through the same eyes that Jesus would, you know, when someone doesn't live, or work the way that I would prefer, do I judge them, or do I love them? Do I treat them differently? And I fail at this constantly. I'm always failing at this. I'm always apologising to my staff. I'm always getting myself into my quiet space with the Lord and saying, Lord will you help me to be better at this? That I would love the way you loved. But it bites and it hurts, and there's a price to pay. But, like, I can't see a preferable option other than to treat those close to me as if they are my family.

God has a design for us all.

I'm not sure if you're getting any value out of this, I don't know if it's challenging you or not, but it's certainly challenging me. I'm going to be spending a little bit more time on this than the time that I talk to you, because I do believe it's really important for where I'm at. I just want to give you one more thought, and then I'm gonna land this podcast. But I just want to say this, God has a design for us with regards to family. I do believe that family is the answer, for us to be in Community woven together with God's love, and that God's design would be that he flows through that family. I think of the new church, the early believers. They were gathered in the upper room. They were living together. They're a little bit scared of what was happening around them, so they gathered together to keep each other encouraged, to keep each other safe, to keep each other accountable, and to keep each other pointed to Jesus. And so in the upper room, they were praying that Jesus would encourage them and bind them together, and ultimately, that's what birthed the new church. It says in Acts that they shared their possessions. They spent time together. They studied God's word together. They sold possessions so that there would be no one in need, and they fed each other. And all of that's a picture of family to me.

We see this demonstrated when Jesus is actually hanging on the cross. He's just about to die, and in John Chapter 19 we see, standing near the cross, was Jesus mother, whom we know is Mary, her sister, so the auntie of Jesus was also standing there, who was Mary, the wife of Clopas. So that's one of the supporters of Jesus Ministry, she's quite a wealthy woman, and also Mary Magdalene, the one who had been set free from demonization and worshipped Jesus, with an extravagant demonstration. So Mary, and Mary, and Mary are standing there. Jesus has compassion on his mother, Mary his mother was standing beside John, who wrote the Gospel of John, and he said to her, dear woman, here is your son, and he said to this disciple, meaning to John, here is your mother, and from then on, this disciple took her into his home. You can see here that Jesus is saying, look, family is whom I have called you to live with and take care of, and so in that place there's a designed by God to be woven into family, and I think sometimes we will write that off because we're afraid of the risk. And I've had to decide I'm not gonna limit what God wants to do through me, by hiding because of risk of fear of being hurt again. I'm opening myself up to those that God has called me to walk with, and invite into my circle. And that passage in John Chapter 19 is a challenge for me that Jesus, from the cross, would call me out and say, son, take care of these ones.

There's another passage that also challenges me and that's in Romans, Chapter 11. It's a passage that I refer to as the teaching on the grafting, that God has a design for us as his family, which makes us family with each other. And in that he chooses to graft us in, to bind us together. If you think about the wild olive, and it's got a root stock, or a branch that's bound onto it with bandages, and it's treated and dressed so that it would become one. And in Romans 11, verse 17 and 18, this says, Paul's writing, some of these branches are from Abraham's tree, some of the people of Israel, and have been broken off, but you Gentiles, 'cause remember he's writing to the Romans, you gentiles who were branches from a wild olive tree have been grafted in, so now you also receive the blessing God has promised Abraham and his children, sharing in the rich nourishment from the root of God's special olive tree.

Now what this means to me is that God has taken something that was in place, and it's torn off and broken off, because it didn't want to be part of God's family. It's been snapped off, but there's others that are saying, I want to be part of something bigger than myself, I want to be part of family, and God said, yes I'm gonna take you out of your wild, unrestrained, unrepentant lifestyle, I'm gonna purify you

by grafting you into something bigger and more important. And this is the intentional design that God has for family. I mean, I think about the intentional design that Jacob had when he was just, he knew was about to die and in Genesis 49 Jacob prophesize across the 12 sons or the 11, plus also Manasseh and Ephraim. So he's prophesying into the legacy he's leaving, which is his family, his sons. And you read Genesis 49, and you'll see each prophecy is unique, but it's intentional. Jacob is partnering with God to have an intentional design into the future of his family. And it's intentional, and it's highly charged with prophetic utterance, and so, I would say, that part of what we need to do in crafting family and investing into those around us, is that we need to be partnering with God. Which means, by definition, that we need to be prophetic, we need to be partnering, aligning our hearts and our minds with what God would say, and releasing that as life giving instruction. It's a very hands on role. And so when I'm involved in weddings, or if I'm involved in a celebration of life, like a 21st birthday, or even a funeral for goodness sake, I'm tapping in and I'm saying God what would you say that you would want me to share in this situation, that I can be intentionally partnering with you in what you're creating in this family through death, and through life, and through marriage.

And so God has a design for us, so when I ask you this question, what is family? If you going to answer that question without including God, then you're gonna miss the juice, and the gold, and the blessing that he has for you.

So What?

So, as I land this, I always ask the question. So what? What does all this mean for me, and what does it mean for you? And so the question that I'm asking myself is, what do I want family to look like for me? And I don't know where I learned this, I guess it was by God's wisdom and providence that I just started asking this question really early on in my life. What do I want family to look like for me? And I went after it, and I was intentional, I was asking God to help me to shape it.

And I think of Father Abraham, in the Bible, at the beginning of the Book of Genesis, and he has a promise of a family and a legacy that your descendants will be as numerous as the sand on the seashore, the stars in the sky, and at that point, he doesn't even have a son. But it's a promise, and he receives that promise, and I would say to you that, God's got a promise for you and your family, and your future. Abraham and his wife, they had a false start in Genesis 16. They took it in their own hands and stepped outside of God's plan, and they had Ishmael, and that's what I call a false start, because they got a false answer. Then when they finally have Isaac, the son of promise, there's a period of testing in Genesis 22. And they go for a long walk to Mount Moriah, and you can read the story. Isaac on the mountain of Moriah offered as a sacrifice before God. But then I want you to get to Genesis 24 where you see the deliberate, intentional, design that Abraham has to craft what he wants family to look like in partnership with God's heart, in line with God's promises. But he's doing it because he sees the legacy that God has put before him. He received it in faith it says, in faith he received it, and therefore it was established.

So, when you're going to ask this question, what is family to me? What do I want family to look like for me? I'd encourage you to do what I'm doing. I'm asking God to remind me what that promise is. I'm strengthening myself in the moment so that I don't have a false start or a false evidence, a false answer. I'm asking God to strengthen me in the middle of the testing, where I've got to sacrifice, or I see something that I hoped was my future, that comes, it looks dead, but I'm asking it to breathe life into it. And then I'm being really intentional, and partnering with God, with the prophetic ministry, and putting

my hand to the task to be active in helping God, not helping God because he needs my help, but working with what God gave me to bear fruit, in what is my family? And it's far wider than the four or five or six people that I would call family by blood or marriage. It's far, far wider than the extended family. It's those that God has grafted me into, and that's what I think family is. And may you enjoy considering that. I hope it provokes you. I hope like Jesus has disrupted me, that these thoughts have disrupted you in a way that leads you on a journey to build your own family.

Well, I want to bless you. In the name of God our Father, who is the author of the life that we have, and may be blessed by God as you go, may you truly live a life of purpose on purpose, and I look forward to sharing some stuff with you next time we meet. God bless you. Talk to you soon.