

Connecting to the Family... "BLENDED, EXTENDED, UNENDED"

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Pastor Michael McCall

Pentecost is when God's Spirit came upon God's People with power and purpose and presence. It is God's Spirit that allows us to be born anew as Children of God. It is God's Spirit that binds us together as the Family of God. We wrap up this series on "Connecting to the Family" with the understanding that God's Spirit is at work within us and our relationships...filling in the gaps and making God's people whole.

Now families come in ALL shapes and sizes in the Bible...but ALL of them are brought together by God and ALL of them are meant to be a source of blessing. But some families don't feel that way. As a pastor, I constantly deal with broken people and who have "less than perfect" families. Because of divorce or death, abuse or addictions, difficult people or difficult circumstances – people, Christians included, can experience brokenness, pain, dysfunctionality and "less than God's best" for their life. In this message, I want to offer some steps towards discovering God's best for you and your family...but first I want to briefly address divorce, death, and dysfunction.

God hates what divorce does. Divorced people are usually the first to acknowledge how painful it is...it rips people apart. Malachi 2:16 says **"I hate divorce" says the Lord God of Israel.** God who makes the two into one knows it rips people and families apart. It should not be taken lightly, but neither should it taint people as it has in the past. The primary message of Jesus was forgiveness and new life. God hates what divorce does, but God loves divorced people. You see, in Jesus' day men could end a marriage simply by saying three times "I divorce you." The Hebrew word for "divorce" meant to throw something in the trash. Men literally trashed their wives with no obligation. So Jesus defended women and children who had been trashed...and held such men accountable. Jesus challenges us all to a high ideal and continually makes a way when we fall short of God's best through forgiveness and new life. Do not anyone try to convince you that divorce and re-marriage make a permanent blot against anyone! God's people need to reach out to divorced people. We need to agree with the Apostle Paul that **there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.** Romans 8:1-2 And we need to agree with scripture that we should **be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.** Ephesians 4:32 I hope we have sufficiently cleared the way for divorced people to move forward.

As to death, please know that you have a God who understands...a God who steps in to help. We never hear about Joseph after Jesus was 12...it seems safe to assume he died and that Jesus grieved his loss. Certainly Jesus took care of Mary. Psalms 68:5 tells us **"A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families..."** That is our God...caring for orphans, widows, and the lonely...for everyone.

Finally, dysfunction. We all fall short of what God intends for us...we are all dysfunctional to some degree. But God is not done with any of us. Philippians 1:6 says **"he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."** Do not give up hope for you or your loved ones...God hasn't. Nobody else can love or help them like you - and God can.

STEPS FORWARD TO GOD'S BEST FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY

First * Surrender to Christ, Embrace grace, and Become part of God's forever family.

Ephesians 3:14-15 **For this reason I kneel before the Father, whom his whole family in heaven and earth derives its name.**

If you're not a believer, now is the time to realize that Jesus is God's provision for your best life. Surrender to a whole new level of trust. Embrace God's grace for yourself...you are not second-class and tainted-for-life, you are a fully forgiven person of great worth...a child of God who belongs to God's family...on earth and in heaven. Know that Almighty God loves us like a father who gives his blessing upon his family.

Second * Be continually filled with the Spirit of God.

Ephesians 3:16-17 **I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.**

Life is hard. Christians know that it is only with God's power and presence that we can go through the difficult - even impossible - situations of life. The message of Pentecost is that God's Spirit is in us like "springs of living water". God's Spirit comforts us, heals us, strengthens us, teaches us, enables us, and empowers us. The Holy Spirit is essential for the Christian's spiritual life.

Third * Let God love you to wholeness.

Ephesians 3:18-19 **And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.**

This can be the hardest step...and can take a long time. It will involve letting God into your hurt and learning how to forgive. It will involve putting aside pride and a victim mentality. It will involve learning some lessons you never wanted to learn but are part of your story. It will involve making friends with God's people who can relate to your struggles and be supportive to you. It takes time – the time you need - to heal, get whole, and become spiritually centered. Remember that Christians are called to love even their enemies. Show respect and honor boundaries. Carry out financial obligations. It is like cooperating with the doctor, let God be God and love you into the person God created you to be...into wholeness.

Lastly, let God open the next chapter of your life.

Ephesians 3:20-21 **Now to God who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.**

In this church, this family of God, we minister to individuals. We have singles and single parents, we have marrieds and committeds, we have divorced and remarrieds, we have widows and widowers...we have them all. But whatever earthly relationships Christians have, we know God has more for all of us by His power at work within us to do His good will for us. **For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD God, plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.** (Jeremiah 29:11) Our God is able to deal with our past, to help us through the present, and to give us – and our family – a future. Because God loves us as his own family – and will for ever and ever. Amen.