



## June and July Sermon Series: Messy Church

### Sermon #6: Messy Diversity: The Making of an Incredible Family

#### Getting the Nod:



**Illustration of Three Zoo Animals Living in Unity:** As cubs, three of the world's top predators—a lion (Leo), a Bengal tiger (Shere Kahn), and an American black bear (Baloo)—had been owned by a drug dealer who didn't take proper care of them. The bear's harness grew into his skin because the owner didn't alter it as the animal grew. The animals had been abused and neglected early in life but were finally rescued in 2001. The bear's harness was surgically removed, and all three have recovered 100 percent. They were taken in by Noah's Ark Animal Sanctuary in Georgia.

The staff initially tried to separate them, thinking the three large predators would fight, but they acted out all the more. During separation, the animals were uncooperative. But once they were reunited, they calmed down and behaved well. Twelve years later, the three friends spend their days together playing ball, cuddling, chasing each other, and eating cookies. Allison Hedgecoth of Noah's Ark said, "They live together, and they don't see their differences. They don't see their color differences."

**They were all three animals of with something in common... abuse. But they were also three animals with something else in common... rescue. And that reality changed everything.**

**Transition:** Isn't that a similar view of the family of God? All of us were sinners... abused by the consequences that came with being lost. Victims of damnation. Hurt by the restraints of satanic chains... but we are all here and by the gift of salvation we all have the same song... **Rescued!** And that's what makes us a FAMILY.

#### Connecting Us:

**FAMILY... that's such an important part of life and especially church.**

**Stats from The Associated Press and MTV:** Have you ever thought to ask this question: **What makes someone happy between the ages of 13 and 24?** Happy is not what you might think, especially if the survey was taken by The Associated Press and MTV! According to an extensive and collaborative survey conducted by the Associated Press and MTV... here are the surprising results:

- **The results showed that spending time with family (73 percent) makes young people happiest.** Nearly half of kids surveyed mentioned one of their parents as their hero, with **mothers (29 percent)** ranking higher than **fathers (21 percent)**.
- After family, "**relationships with friends**" was most likely to make children happy.
- **Among those who cited spirituality as the most important thing in their lives**, a larger majority reported being happy with life **(80 percent)** compared **to those who said spirituality is not an important part of life (60 percent)**.
- While parents worry about the influence of our sexualized culture on their children, respondents did not list sex as something that makes America's young people most happy. In fact, being sexually active actually leads to less happiness among 13–17-year old's.

Dr. Bill Maier, vice president and psychologist in residence at Focus on the Family commented... "You won't hear that advertised. You know what's really surprising is that this poll flies in the face of some of these cultural values that MTV is pushing on kids," said "**MTV would say that kids just want more pleasure and material goods, they're not interested in marriage or commitment, and they reject their parents.**"

**Transition: Family made the top of the list!** Paul knew that when he penned the first letter to Corinth. Churches that see themselves as a family prosper more. And he also knew that our own individual family success is the foundation of that Church's future.

### God's Take on 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12:

**In chapter 12**, Paul gives us a picture of what an incredible church family looks like... but these truths also give us a picture of what an Incredible Family looks like! Here is Paul's formula (using the analogy of a body) for the making of an incredible family...

### The Making of an Incredible Family:

#### 1. Every incredible family believes in the power of one.

NLT | 1 Co 12:7-12 A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. 8 To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. 9 The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. 10 He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. 11 It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have. 12 The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So, it is with the body of Christ.

"**The body is a unit**," writes Paul, "though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So, it is with Christ"—that is, with all of us who live under Christ's influence. "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—we were all given the one Spirit to drink."

- **One in culture:** It is getting harder and harder to think of our family life in these terms. The world continually calls us to see our lives individualistically. Somebody asks me, I think easily of my schedule, my achievements, my iPod, my car, my sports, my spiritual life, my ambitions, and my needs. That's why it's almost shocking to meet someone who looks at life very differently.
- **Illustration of 6 foot 8... and 3 foot nothing:** In his book *Rumors of Another World*, Philip Yancey describes a visit Jesse Jackson made to the University of Southern Mississippi: While touring the campus with the university president, [Jackson] noticed a towering male student, six-feet, eight-inches tall, holding hands with a midget coed barely three-feet tall. His curiosity piqued, Jackson stopped to watch as the young man, dressed in a warm-up suit, tenderly picked up the [small person], kissed her, and sent her off to class. The president explained that the student was a star basketball player. Both parents had died in his youth, and he made a vow to look after his sister. Many scholarship-offers came his way, but only Southern Mississippi offered one to his sister, too. Jackson went over to the basketball star, introduced

himself, and said he [admired] him looking out for his sister. The athlete shrugged and said, **"Those of us who God makes 6' 8" have to look out for those he makes 3' 3"."**

- **One in decision:** What's best for the family should always be more important than what we each want.
  - How do you teach and model this kind of vision in your family? Do we make spending decisions based on what is best for the whole unit? Do we set our personal schedules based on what most benefits the whole body?
  - The Holy Spirit is the One who makes us one... and He will always defer to what's best for us all.
- **One in impact:** What's best for the world and our community.
  - It takes a leap of consciousness to think that one of the most profound things we can do in the war on terror, or the struggle for racial reconciliation, or even the renewal of our global environment, is to teach our children to think of their choices in terms of the welfare of the whole family. But if they truly learn to do this at home, think how this vision may play out as they move through the world.

## **2. Every incredible family values the contribution of each other.**

NLT | 1 Co 12:14-20 **Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. 15 If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that does not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear says, "I am not part of the body because I am not an eye," would that make it any less a part of the body? 17 If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything? 18 But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. 19 How strange a body would be if it had only one part! 20 Yes, there are many parts, but only one body.**

Great families see themselves as a unit because, as Paul says, we are all members of one body, and the "body is a unit." We get strong or sick, we win or lose, we rise or fall, together. But great families also remember to keep valuing the unique importance of each individual in that body.

**Illustration of the Different Christmas Gifts:** On Christmas morning, the children in a family do not usually all receive the same gifts. One gets a football, one a puzzle, another receives a doll house, and another a table game. Yet, although each child does not receive the same gifts as the others, the parents intend the gifts to be enjoyed by all the children as they use them together.

The same is true of the gifts God gives His children. We do not all have the same gift, but we are all to use our gift for the good of all in God's family.

- **Our gifts have been given by the Holy Spirit:** Here in 1 Corinthians 12, the apostle Paul names gifts of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, discernment, ecstatic worship, administration, and others.
  - In Ephesians 4:11, he mentions the gifts of shepherding, teaching, and several more.
  - In Romans 12:6–8, he lists the gift of leading, of giving, of encouraging, and of showing mercy.
  - In Romans 12:13, he mentions the gift of hospitality...
  - 1 Corinthians 13, the gift of love.

- In providing these lists, Paul isn't giving us an exhaustive catalogue so much as trying to show us that **God has endowed his people with a stunning wealth and variety of capacities for building up the body.**
- **Our gifts have been given for the common good.**
  - **Use the analogies of Heritage Leaders.** Doug Miller is good at finances; Kellie Michael has a heart of compassion; Larry Lane is a man of wisdom and assimilation; Dennis Milstead has a passion for excellence and looks out for all generations; Joe Lane is a man determined to doing what is right and what is just; Connie Bowman thinks in progressive ways and places her priorities on serving; and Jeremy Streitenberger is a troubleshooter and driven by leadership and purpose. **And that's just our elders!!!!**
- **Our gifts have been given for something incredible.**
  - **Illustration of John Newton:** One of the most influential Christians who exhibited "Grace Living" and touches lives as powerfully today as he did in the late 1700 and early 1800's is John Newton, the writer of "Amazing Grace." As a slave transporter, Newton lived a life of abuse and wickedness. His own evaluation of himself was, "a wretch who was once lost but then was found, saved by amazing grace." **But look at what God did through John Newton.**

### 3. Every incredible family fights the temptation to tear down.

NLT | 1 Co 12:22-26 In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. 23 And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen, 24 while the more honorable parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. 25 This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. 26 If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.

#### Three Ways to Break Down the Family:

1. **Critical Focusing** - Sometimes the hurt comes because one family member doesn't recognize his or her gifts but does see the gifts of others.
2. **Intentional Forgetting** - Sometimes pain in families comes because someone in the family doesn't recognize the importance of others' gifts.
3. **Partial Flourishing** - The third breakdown comes because, sometimes families don't encourage everyone to use their gifts.

#### Closing:

**Illustration of what makes a family stronger:** A few years ago Dr. Nick Stinnett of the University of Nebraska conducted a group of studies called the "Family Strengths Research Project" Stinnett and his researchers identified six qualities that make for strong families. The first quality and one of the most important to be found in strong families was the **quality of appreciation. Families that are strong are strong in part, Dr. Stinnett concludes, because family members express to each other their appreciation for what the other members DO and for who they ARE.**