



## Scriptures

Old Testament: Genesis 1:26-28

Psalm 68:1-6

Gospel: Matthew 1:1-16

## Home Economics

This is the second message in our Easter season series “For the Life of the World.” Each week our RezGroups (our small groups) will be watching a series of short, 20-minute videos by the same title, and we’ll also be gathering here at the Church over the next several Wednesday nights to watch the videos, too, so let me encourage you: Please, somehow, someway get in on these videos.

So, why these videos? Well, because they urge a much-needed shift in our paradigm as Christians. As Christians we’ve emphasized pretty well over the last several decades what we are saved from (sin, death, the devil). But, also in recent decades, we’ve lost focus on a question that for Christians in past ages was always at the forefront: “What are we saved for?” Is it to go to heaven since everything on the earth is just “secular” anyway and “not-eternal”? Or...is God intimately concerned with this world—with things like relationships, jobs, politics, the sciences, and the arts because he wants to use us, his redeemed people, to breathe life into these things because they, too, will be a part of the new heavens and the new earth? In short, is the scope of God’s redemptive action just us or is it also this material stuff of creation and the spheres of mundane life that we occupy every day?

Each week we’ll be looking at the intersection of this question “What is our salvation for?” with a specific aspect of our world. Last week, Dan laid out the broad picture: God has left us as exiles in his world so that we, as Christians, can actively live to shape the world as God intended. This week, we’re going to look at a crucial aspect of our world—the family. Specifically, what is the role of the family in God’s aim to save his creation? That is, how is the family for the life of the world?

## The Soil of Family

Family is like manure. Now don’t credit me with that analogy because I’ve taken it straight out of the video series. Family is like manure.

Now, I have a mother-in-law who loves to grow things. And she knows that a beautiful, colorful, fruit-yielding plant will wither, fade, and eventually rot if it doesn’t have the right soil. But what is soil, ultimately speaking? It’s manure. And how odd that something so full of life, like a plant, would come from something...so plain, so messy.

Now, we have a house in Pittsburgh that I’d love to sell you. Two years ago, we planted some tomato plants and fertilized them with good soil. And I was fascinated for the first time with the

fact that this plant was taking stuff out of that soil, out of that manure of some sort and, through a series of complex chemical processes, was transforming it into food that was giving me and my family life. The soil was giving life to the plant, which was giving life to us.

In the same way, the family, as the soil, gives life to the individual members of the family (the plants), who bear fruit for the life, the flourishing, of the world. Or, at least this is God's design (as we'll look at more closely in a moment). The family is for the life of the world.

## The Soiledness of Family

But the family, like soil, like manure (and I promise I'll stop saying that word soon) is also messy. It's earthy. It's mundane. Sometimes it's grossly unhealthy and isn't the environment it's supposed to be for the life of the world. Perhaps, for you, the very mention of family conjures images of fruitless, lifeless, diseased trees before it conjures images of fruit-laden, life-giving branches drawing from nourishing roots.

So how do we reconcile this tension—that the family is, by God's design, integral for shaping the world into what it is intended to be but that it is also this ordinary, unglamorous, sometimes very broken thing? How is life on a world-scale to come out something so plain and sometimes, so messed up like the family?

## A Look Ahead

Let's look at these questions and let's start in this way: First, let's look at the Trinitarian roots of the family; second, at how the family trains us to image God; third, at the place of children in the family; and then, finally, at the brokenness of the family and other pains related to the family like childlessness, longing for marriage, and the general day-to-day mundaneness of the family.

### 1. The Trinitarian Roots

First, let's look at the Trinitarian roots of the family. But let's start first with human beings considered in and of themselves. In the beginning the Father spoke through his Word and together they sent forth the Spirit to breathe order and life into the chaos that had been spoken into existence. This isn't all explicit in the opening verses of Genesis but when we put together the biblical pieces, this is the picture that is painted: The Father created through his eternal Word, who is his Son, and the Holy Spirit was there hovering over the chaos to bring forth life.

In this Trinitarian creation dance, the Father, as he has always done, was giving away his Son in love for the life of the created world. And the Son, as he has always done, was giving away himself in love to his Father and for the life of the created world. And together, the Father and the Son were giving away the Holy Spirit in love, who, as he has always done, was presenting to the Father and the Son in love, a good, abundant, life-full world. If there's one thing creation tells us, it's that God is the abundant gift giver—giving himself away to himself and for the life of the world.

And...most especially giving himself away to the pinnacle of his creation—to us, his image-bearers. Genesis 1.26: **Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of**

**the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.** As God is the abundant gift-giver, so we, imaging him, were created to be abundant gift-givers, too: to, just like the Trinity, give ourselves to God in love, to one another in love, and to all the world: taking the raw material of creation (much like God took that first chaos created out of nothing) and cultivating it, forming it, beautifying it just like he would, and offering it to him.

In Berlin back in 2011 a group of neighborhood kids were unleashed into a chaos of wooden beams, wooden planks, nails, saws, and hammers. Kids, no older than 12 or 13. And what did they do? They did the human thing; they got to work. And what did they produce? “An unappealing jumble of bent nails and ill cut wood? A blight on the neighborhood?...Hardly.” They built soaring towers 30-feet high that were architecturally stable; in the end they built a mini-city! Why did they do this? Because they’re made in God’s image. They gave themselves away and birthed something glorious.

You are made in God’s image, too. What spheres of chaos has God put you in so that you, in true Trinitarian fashion, will give yourself away—in your job, in the city, in your relationships? How is he calling to you to bring order out of the chaos—to cultivate the raw materials of those spheres? Are you, as a redeemed believer in Christ, doing that in his strength and are you offering it to him? This is the truly human thing to do.

And these are all important questions that we as Christians are to ask as we set about God’s work in God’s world. The human commission from the beginning hasn’t changed just because now sin has entered the picture; it just gets harder and more toilsome. But this is God’s design: That we, as image bearers of the Trinity would give ourselves away to him, to others, and to the world—bring order to the chaos and offer it all to him in worship.

But...in what framework did God design that we would learn how to do this? And the answer is the family. God designed the family to be the soil for learning to give ourselves away for the life of the world.

## **2. Marriage: The Beginning of Family**

So, we’re moving on to our second point: how the family trains us to give ourselves away. Now, to see this, let’s start with where the family starts—with marriage. Continuing in Genesis 1.28: **And God blessed them [the man and woman]. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”** Of course, human beings give themselves away in all kinds of relationships: friendships, collaborations, even interactions with strangers for the life of the world. But nowhere is this self-giving more intimate, more profound than in marriage: one man and one woman, giving themselves to each another in love, for the life of the world.

If ever the first man and the first woman were going to get about their mission of stewarding and cultivating God’s creation, they would need to give themselves to each other in love. Because it wasn’t good for the man to be alone. In the beginning, Adam could not have flourished without

Eve (and I'm not just talking about making babies). Adam needed Eve in order to give life to the world. And vice versa.

If you doubt this, just imagine a world of only men. Now it's a bit of a stereotype, but I imagine a plain, angular, utilitarian world full of heavy machinery and really cool tools, but no one knows how to express himself and everyone wears the same thing and eats the same meal everyday.

No, in all seriousness, men and women need the gift of each other, with or without marriage. And when we think how they give themselves to each other in *marriage*, it is all so that their spouse will flourish and be equipped to give life to the world.

Look at what so many of the epistles says: Husbands, you are pointed toward your wife in love, not toward yourself—so that she can flourishingly give her gifts to the world. Wives, you are for your husband in love, not for yourself. You are to exalt his life, not your own, so that he can better give his gifts to the world. By God's call, you said "yes" to marriage not for self-fulfillment, not for endless romance, but for something beyond yourself and beyond your marriage even—for the life of the world.

Now, for the singles, don't misunderstand. The Scripture doesn't say that each person needs to be married in order to flourish (in fact, it says you may want to consider not getting married). But it does say that if you are married (and this is a big corrective our world needs to hear), it's for your spouse's flourishing, not your own self-fulfillment. Plus, at the general level, men and women need each other, even outside of marriage, in order for humanity as a whole to bring life to the world. So, ask yourself how can you reflect this truth in your life as a single person?

But, at the same time, *marriage* is the only ground for the most intimate giving-to-one-another-in-love that humanity can *ever* have and *needs* to have in order to give life to the world. So, now we move to our point: the role of children in the family.

### 3. Children: The Fruit of Family

**Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.** Men and women are made for one another—to join together. As Genesis tells us in the next chapter, a man and woman give themselves to each other to become one flesh. And, as when the members of the Trinity gave themselves to one another, and out of that giving they created man in their image, marriage is the microcosm of Trinitarian creation. The man and woman give themselves to each other and together create a life just like their own but separate from each of them. An image-bearer of God in born.

But why? What is all this for? Let's look at the foundational relationship of husband, wife, and child. Just as the husband and wife give themselves to each other so that each can better image God in the world, so the father and mother give themselves to their child, training her to give herself to God, to others, and to the world. This is God's design. This is how the family is for the life of the world.

Go back to the illustration about soil. Where did God design that newly sprouted image-bearers learn how to worship him? Where did God design that newly sprouted image-bearers learn how to relate to their fellow image-bearers? Where did God design that newly sprouted image-bearers

learn how to give life to the world? In the soil of the family. God designed that we would learn our God-oriented lives in the world in our families. This is how the family is for the life of the world.

Parents, God has called you to teach your children to bear his image in his world. This is an immense responsibility! But call out to him for the strength to do it. Your children are not a gift to keep isolated from the world, to never know a non-Christian friend. Nor are they a gift to look just like the world—to have the same ideas of success as the world (the right schools, the right job, the right house). No, they are a gift for you to give for the God-oriented life of the world. Teach them who God is and who they are. Model for them what it means to hover Christianly over the chaos of their worlds, to get their hands deep into that chaos with Christ and to bring life to it—in their friendships, in their schools, in their neighborhoods, in their hobbies, in their habits, in their work, in their cities, and on into their single lives or, perhaps, their married lives.

And married people, even young married people. Open your marriage to children. I'm not saying that there's not a place for wisely stewarding your time and resources with respect to children. But think about this: Might the greatest thing you could do for the life of the world be not pursuing your world-transforming career but raising children who know Jesus and who will give themselves toward the kind of world that God wants to bring about?

This is how the family is for the life of the world. A man and woman join themselves in marriage for the life of the other. And out of their union come children, who are raised up and sent out into the chaos for the life of the world.

#### **4. Broken: The Family**

But in our lives there is always the ideal, and then there's the real. You may plant a garden, but the soil has been poisoned by disease or inundated with chemicals that promised to add life but have only destroyed what life was already there. Ideally, the soil is clean and pure, but in reality the soil cannot escape corruption, and this is certainly true of the family. And so, we move on to our fourth point—what about the brokenness of the family?

Infidelity, fatherlessness, motherlessness, abuse, abandonment. These are just a few of the faces sin takes in the family. I said earlier that for some of you the image of the family is something other than vitality, and maybe one of these aberrations is why.

So, how do we respond to this? Well, for one thing, the Bible is supremely honest about sin's destruction on the family—even in some of its greatest heroes.

Nothing gets skipped over more in Bible reading than name lists. But slow down because there's a lot you can learn from a genealogy. Think back on the Gospel reading from Matthew 1, where Matthew began with a list of select individuals in the genealogy of Jesus. Notice that he didn't white-wash over the less than stellar branches of the family tree; instead, he highlighted them. It started with Abraham, who was the father of Isaac...but not before he was the father of Ishmael by a woman who was not his wife. And then, just two names later, we see Judah. Judah was the father of Perez by Tamar...his daughter-in-law, who he slept with because he thought she was a

prostitute. And then later there's David. "David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah." As you remember, David committed adultery with Uriah's wife and then had Uriah killed.

So the portrayal of the family in Scripture isn't rosy; it's very raw. But here's the thing: God fully acknowledged the mess, but he still incarnated himself into it. And what does that mean if not that Jesus was born into and grew up in a family—with Joseph, Mary, and his siblings—to redeem even the family, too?

Some of you may have been nurtured in the soil of an unhealthy family—unfaithful, absent, or abusive parents or some other terrible predicament that fell far short of God's design for the soil of learning life in him for the sake of others. Maybe you feel like you were thrust out into the world devoid of any life to offer the world because your family gave you no such life to give to the world. Please know that this grieves God's heart, that it's the result of the twisted nature of sin and not the way God designed the family to be.

But also know that if the soil of your family was unhealthy or barren, none of that is a hindrance to God; it was not a hindrance to him when he incarnated himself into humanity, and he can still enter and till your ground despite the mess. There are spiritual fathers and mothers, and brothers and sisters in abundance in the Church, the family and household of God. Plant yourself in the love of a father, a mother, a sister, or a brother in Christ who can help cultivate you for abundant giving to the world.

And if perhaps you are the one who poisoned the soil of your family in some way or who haven't done much for the health and nurture of the plants in your care, it is never too late for Jesus to revive that soil—for you to be the kind of father, mother, husband, wife, or sibling that gives life.

But perhaps you've seen so much of the broken branches of the family—divorce, betrayal—that you've written off ever getting your hands dirty in that kind of garden. "Not after what my parents did...I could never be a good parent...a good spouse...and so forth." But God is still committed to the family. It's still very much a part of his plan to build up men and women in marriage, to raise children through them, in order to breathe life into a fallen world. Perhaps you don't desire marriage and a family, and that's ok. But don't let fear be the thing that precludes you from it. With counsel, with wisdom, you can be a part of that kind of soil for the life of the world.

So, despite the brokenness, God still wants to use the family for the life of the world.

## **5. Two Pains Related to the Family**

For our fifth point, I want to consider briefly two other pains related to the family: childlessness and being "single-lonely."

First, childlessness. God's design for the family is that a husband and wife would give themselves to each other and, under normal circumstances, produce children. But from the beginning and throughout Scripture, we see the grief caused by the painful reality of childlessness. God knows that ache, and if that's your burden right now, give and keep giving that burden to him. And keep giving yourself to your spouse. And keep giving yourself to the world. There's nothing less about

what you have to give in Christ. And nowhere does God say that the children you raise must come from you. He only wants that children would have a father and a mother who will show them what it means to love him and order his good world as he wants it to be ordered—for life in Christ.

And, second, being “single-lonely”—that is, being single but desiring to be married. I know that not every single person desires marriage. And wouldn’t it be great for children to learn from their parents that God may want them to remain single for the life of the world? But, again, if you’re single and long to be married, I know that this longing can cause a lot of pain and frustration. It’s very real. And God knows. But I know that you know that living for the life of the world doesn’t have to wait until marriage. Scripture is abundantly clear that that’s everyone’s calling, with or without marriage. For the singles, living for the life of the world as a single is a gift, with its own unique freedoms—and its own unique challenges. But it’s still a gift. Maybe you’re not cultivating a plot of soil in the intimacy of marriage like you desire, but keep growing in and drawing life from the good soil God has given you—whether that’s the soil of your biological family, your spiritual family, or a little bit of both. Because tilling married soil, while it too is a gift with its own unique freedoms, is also full of its own unique challenges of the messy and the mundane.

## **6. The Mundaneness of the Family**

So, let’s close with our final point about the messy and the mundane of the family. You start with the grand, cosmic vision of the self-giving of the Trinity and with us made in that same self-giving image for the life of the world. And then you get to a man and a woman reflecting the self-giving love of the Trinity in the most intimate and creative form imaginable, in joining together and pouring themselves into each other so that each one can flourish in God’s good world, and in creating together the new life of new image-bearers—all for the life of the world.

And it’s so big: Trinity, love, marriage, family, world. And then there’s the day-to-day, messy soil. Where giving in love isn’t the giddy feeling of romance but listening to details about bills, school reports and illnesses and calming sibling unrest. Where the life of the world isn’t manifested in single-handedly feeding the masses, converting our neighborhoods, undoing gross, international injustice, and so forth, but in changing dirty diapers; in going to another day at work; in talking with neighbors about car troubles and the weather; in choosing to respond like Christ to conflicts and harsh words; in being a blessing in all the little things that seem so minor. This is the mundane mess of giving-in-love in the family.

But these mundane moments are the bigger picture. If all of us push our tiny pebbles now, imagine 25, 50, 70 years from now the avalanche of godliness. If we till the messy soil now, the garden of the future might be truly glorious. So be patient. Love in the moment. The children next door who need your children’s friendship. The lonely neighbor who needs the blessing of your family. The small-scale ministry your family can get its hands dirty in. The world we’re all supposed to bless starts with individual faces.

And in the end, may we all remember our Trinitarian and Christ-redeemed calling to give ourselves to our world. May we remember God’s design to teach us that calling in our families. And even in the midst of the brokenness, the heartaches, and the mundaneness of the family,

may God plant us in the families we need so that we will have and be the kind of healthy soil that gives life to the world.