

A Life TRANSFORMED

A Life Transformed Session 2 – Family

Goals of this session

1. Explore biblical perspectives on family.
2. Rehearse the core, formative faith stories of your life so you can share them with your family.
3. Learn a set of faith habits that you can practice at home.
4. Look ahead to the faith heritage that you hope to leave for the next generation.

For the leader

1. Open and close the session with prayer. You may use the prayers written here or invite someone in the group to pray.
2. Group members are expected to have read this lesson before the gathering.
3. There are two videos to watch as a group. The first is a conversation between Dr. Pace, our senior pastor, and Julie Ellerbrock and Rob Dulaney, our directors of children's and student ministries. The second is a video about one of the projects in the capital campaign. The study will prompt you to show the videos at the appropriate time. You'll need to make sure the technology for showing these videos works before your gathering begins.
4. You may receive questions about the capital campaign that you can't answer. That's okay. Please forward those questions to Jennifer Boubel (jboubel@stlukesmethodist.org), tell the group that you're doing so, and pass the answers along to the group.
5. This session will last about an hour.

Opening Prayer

God of all people, you created us to be in relationship with one another. Our souls are weary until we find people whom we can love and people who love us back. We're grateful for the families that raised us, the families that modelled your love for us, and the families we have now, as perfectly imperfect as they are. Lord, take care of my family. Heal me from the wounds that come with having a family. Help me to want the family I have, not have the family I want. Lead me onward toward perfect love of the people you've put in my care. In the name of Christ. Amen.

Video – A Transformed Family

Watch the week 2 study video, a conversation between Dr. Tom Pace, Julie Ellerbrock and Rob Dulaney, with your group.

The Family

It was a hot June day at the beach on Galveston Island. We were a pack of nine- my family and my wife's side of the family. We had the cooler stocked with drinks and sandwiches. We'd brought the sunscreen, lawn chairs, and blankets, everything you need for a beach day.

We could have done without the pandemic, though. It was June 2020, we had been in lockdown mode for three months, and it looked like thousands of other people had the same idea: "We're going crazy. Let's get out of the house!" There were far more people on the beach than I was comfortable with, so we played it as safe as we could.

We had brought a tent to set up on the beach, so we pitched the tent as far from neighboring tents as possible. The tent became a physical expression of our family's germ bubble. We all have a germ bubble- you know, the group of people who get to cough on you and you on them. That pack of nine people on the beach was my germ bubble, and everybody else, well, they could cough on someone else. They're not my bubble.

I love my bubble. I bet you love your bubble. Our bubbles aren't perfect: they're hard work, they make us afraid when they don't come home on time, they know how to get under our skin; we worry about them, lose our temper at them, sometimes we push them away. But your bubble is worth all of it. Today, let's talk about your bubble.

We're talking about family, and how our faith as Christians transforms our families. The basic premise of this course is, *God wants a transformed world, and to get there, God uses transformed people*. One way we get from transformed people to a transformed world is through family. In fact, **family is the first step in the movement from transformed individual to transformed world.**

So let's start with the question, What do you mean by family? Scripture lays out a vision of four layers of family. These layers exist inside one another, like bubbles inside of other, larger bubbles (see Figure 1). Let's call these bubbles the Home Family (the focus of today's lesson), the Church Family, the Friend Family, and the Kinship Family .

The foundational level is the Home Family. This is your germ bubble. This is your spouse, children, parents, siblings- everyone who lives under the same roof as you. The Home Family makes it into the Ten Commandments: "Honor your father and mother" and "Do not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:12,14). And Proverbs: "Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray." (Proverbs 22:6). And the letters of the New Testament: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21).

Then there's the Church Family. This is the family defined by baptism into the body of Christ. When we baptize infants, children, or adults, that person becomes the newest member of the Church Family. "Just as the body is one and has many members," says Paul, "and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ." (1 Corinthians 12:12). Membership in a church isn't membership at a gym or club. It's

membership in a family. This is Christ's family on earth, and Christ would have no family if it wasn't for us.

Beyond that is the Friend Family. These are people who don't live with you and they're not in your church, but they feel like family to you, often more than the people who are related to you. Jesus says we are to lay down our lives for friends, and in doing so, the world will know what love is. (John 15:14).

Friendship is what good home relationships and good church relationships are made of. You can live under the same roof as someone, or sit in worship beside someone, but that doesn't make you friends. It just means you're alone together. It's friendship that makes the difference. Friends *want* to be around one another and share life together. You don't always get to choose your home or church relationships, usually those people are chosen for you, but you do get to choose to *want* these people. It's the wanting of these people that makes for friendship. **If you want to be better family, start by being better friends.**

Finally, there's the Kinship Family. This is everybody else, as in, all other human beings. All people are God's children (Genesis 1:27). Christ has defeated anything that would divide us into fundamentally different tribes and "torn down" the dividing walls that would section off parts of the human race (Ephesians 2:14). God's creation and Christ's salvation work together to make us kin. That means there is no "us" and "them" in God's kinship family, there's only God's "us."

Before moving on, take a few moments to write down the names of people in your families. There's no need to include everyone. The point is to identify who your family is. Then say a quick prayer entrusting these people to God.

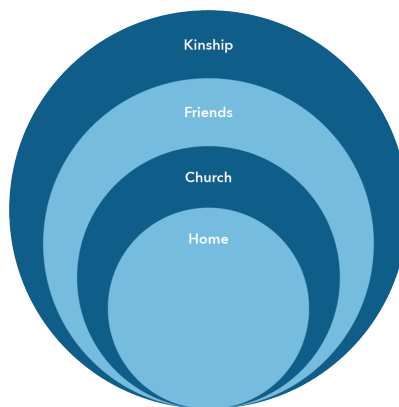


Figure 1

Questions for Group Discussion

1. Discuss the video with Dr. Pace and ministry leaders. What questions do you have?
2. What difference does friendship make in a home and at church? What would home and church be like *without* friendship?

3. Who are your friends that feel more like family than biological family? What makes these people different to you?
4. Where have you seen Kinship done well?

50 Hours

Now let's focus on the Home Family. Whenever you see the world "family" from here on, assume it's the people who live with you.

Ask someone in your group to read Colossians 3:12-17.

¹² As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³ Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

This passage speaks of God's unconditional choosing of people. It's a popular passage at weddings, and for good reason. A bride and groom choose to love one another, knowing the other person is faulty and flawed, they know what they're getting into, but their commitment supersedes the other person's faults. They choose to love that person no matter what.

God chooses us, as faulty and flawed as we all are. God knows we're a mess. God knows exactly what God is getting into, but God's commitment to us is steadfast through it all. That's the fundamental step one of God's grace: God chooses to love you. But then what happens? *We live a different way of life in response.* We practice a set of skills like compassion and meekness and forgiveness and gratitude, and above all, we clothe ourselves in love. **God chooses to love us, and in response, we choose to become like the love we have received.**

But here's where rubber meets the road. Where do we learn what God's unconditional love looks like? Family. And where do we learn what we're actually suppose do in response to God's love? Family. Simply put, family is where disciples are made.

Family is a **Projection** of God's love. Remember, we're not born knowing what love is. Love is a learned concept, and since God *is* love, that means we have to learn what God is like, too. Family is God's instrument to teach us what love is, and therefore, what God is like. Children might learn *about* God at church. They might learn about baby Jesus and Easter in Sunday School. But they learn *who God is* at the dinner table and wherever they feel loved by caring adults. And for adults, too, we often forget what God is like. The world is full of distractions and counterfeits. But we come home and feel the love of family, and we remember, "Oh, this is what God is like because this is what love feels like."

Family is the **Process** of God's love reaching the world. It takes transformed people to have a transformed world, and family is where that first transformation happens. Family is where children, youth, and adults learn God's love for themselves, through the everyday graces of mealtimes, playing and praying together, doing homework together, forgiving one another, and the result is people who have been formed by God's love in word and deed. Now these people can go out into the world and make an impact. That means family is God's *instrument* for showing us who God is, and God's *mechanism* for forming and deploying servants into the world.

My daughter watches a show on Disney Jr. called *TOTS*. TOTS is an acronym for Tiny Ones Transportation Service. It's a cartoon show about storks (yes, storks) and their helpers. It's their job to deliver baby animals to their animal moms and dads because, obviously, that's where babies come from, the stork. As a parent, I've seen far too many of these episodes and I can say, they never show you how the baby is made. The baby just appears on the scene, ready-made and ready to go.

A disciple of Jesus doesn't just appear on the scene. Those Christians in your life whom you look up to, it's not like they were delivered to somebody's doorstep one day, fully formed and ready to go. You didn't see how they were formed as disciples because, unless you're related, you didn't live with them. Most of the formation happened at home, in the everyday routine of family life.

A disciple is a life-long student and a life-long follower of Christ. Jesus said, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23). Jesus never tells us to make more converts, worshippers, or attenders. We are to make disciples. The word *disciple* means someone who studies under a teacher, but the learning is more than book learning; it's a way of life. It's the disciple's job to learn the teacher's way of life, with the goal of the teacher's way of life becoming the disciple's way of life.

Since discipleship is about a way of life, the actual work of learning this way of life has to happen where the disciple is already living a life. **Discipleship can't be contained to one or two hours on a Sunday.**

There are 168 hours of the week. We spend a third of those hours asleep, then most people spend another third at work or at school. Take away time with friends and time stuck in traffic, and you're left with about 50 hours a week with your family. Or if you live alone, 50 hours a week with the people you welcome into your private life. Sure, discipleship happens at work and at school (and I wish it happened more when I'm in traffic), but mostly it happens in those precious 50 hours at home, that tiny bit of time with the people you love the most.

That's why family is **Practice** for discipleship. Family is where we practice how to follow Jesus for the rest of life outside the home.

Kara Powell, a youth ministry guru and author of the book *Sticky Faith*, talks about dry cleaner discipleship. We drop off our child or teenager (or wife or husband) at church, we wait around for the church to clean them up, then we pick them up, all cleaned and pressed for a new week. A dry cleaner mentality expects a professional or volunteer to deliver us someone who is raised in the faith, or a marriage with all the answers, or a teenager who does what we say.

But church isn't the dry cleaners. Church is the locker room. Church is where you get together, huddle up, run some drills like worship and Bible study, and listen to a coach. Family is the practice field. You leave the locker room ready to put some concrete skills into practice, and you practice these skills *so that* you can live differently as a disciple of Jesus in the world. You go to church to learn what to do as a disciple; you go home to practice it.

Questions for Group Discussion

1. How can your family be an instrument for teaching what God's love is like?
2. How can your family be a mechanism for deploying disciples?
3. How can your family be a training ground where disciples put their faith in practice?

Now, let's get to a few of these practices.

Tell Your Story

A pastor raised a family. Like in many families, his children wandered away from the faith when they left home, but the children started having children of their own, and one son in particular was committed to raising his family in the church like his father had raised him. So this young family found a loving church with a great children's program. His daughter learned how to pray before dinner. Hearing her say her prayers reminded him of the dinner table of his childhood and the prayers he prayed as a boy. One day, he told his Dad, the pastor, "Dad, those prayers you made us pray meant a lot to me. I get it now that I have a child of my own."

The pastor was dumbstruck, like he'd been hit in the head with a frying pan. He said, "Wait, you remember that? I thought you and your sister didn't like praying. That's why we stopped praying at dinner when you grew up. We didn't want to force it on you." It led to a somewhat heated conversation about how the family had stopped practicing their faith at home, and that's one of the reasons the children left church when they left home. It was all because the family stopped telling stories about what faith meant to them. They assumed everyone was on the same page.

Stories are powerful. What else are we but a long chain of stories that have led up to this current moment and made us who we are? We make a mistake when we assume our loved ones know our stories when it's likely they don't

Here are three kinds of stories to practice in your family.

1. Heritage stories
2. Origin stories
3. Wow stories

Heritage stories are about the faith you inherited from your ancestors. We underestimate the power of these stories. When Paul's protegee, Timothy, was feeling like a failure in ministry, Paul told him, "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. (2 Timothy 1:5). We are all heirs of stories that have shaped us, for better or for worse, and those stories already influence how you treat the people you live with.

For example, one day I'll tell my daughter of her great-granddaddy, how he was an abusive husband and father, struggled with alcoholism to the day he died, but repented later in the life as he cared for his dying wife, 24 hours a day. I'll tell her what the arguments in my home church did to me when I was growing up, and what it did to me when my parents started going back to church after many years away. These stories *already* influence the way I raise my family. It's best to be clear about where those influences are coming from.

Origin stories are about how you came to faith in Christ. Don't assume your spouse, children, or parents know. Your origin story doesn't have to be glamorous. It doesn't have to be a mountain-top moment of revival. It could be (this is my story) that you were raised in a small church that loved you consistently over time, and after a season of running away, you found a community that welcomed you back. Make sure your family knows these stories. They'll ask questions.

Wow stories are about moments or situations in your day when you encountered God. It's a "Wow, there's God!" experience. It may not be a joyful thing. It could be a terribly sad or confusing thing, but you know God was there. We believe in a God who is present at hospital bedsides and wedding receptions, band practice and soccer games. Make a habit out of sharing these encounters with your family and unpacking them together.

How can you tell you're in a "Wow, there's God!" moment? They usually fall into three categories.

1. "That makes me curious." Something happens and it sparks a question in yourself or a family member. It's a real-world theological question like, "How do I forgive this person? I'm learning this subject at school, but what does the Bible say? Where did my grandparent go after they died? Why did God send the pandemic?" Yes, those are heavy examples, but don't be alarmed. The point is to engage the curiosity in yourself and your loved ones. Don't keep the questions shut in. Give them daylight. God shows up in the questions, not the answers.
2. "That makes me excited." These are moments of awe. They're awe-full. You see a beautiful sunset, an act of tender compassion, the pure joy on someone's face. Unpack these situations as a family. Ask, "What makes this so special? What does this show us about God?"
3. "That makes me hurt." These are moments of pain. Usually it's someone else's pain. You see someone hurting because of disease, old age, homelessness, violence... and you feel what they feel. Children feel these feelings as heavily as adults do, they just don't know how to process them. *Don't keep those feelings shut in.* God is working through them. Or it could be moments of pain in your own family. God is present

there, too. Unpack these situations with your family. Yes, it'll be a tough conversation and you won't have all the answers, but the goal isn't to reach a conclusion; it's to dive deeper.

Questions for Group Discussion

1. Choose one of these stories to share with the group as practice.
2. Why do we assume our loved ones know our stories? What holds us back from telling them?

Habit

Humans are habitual creatures. We are what we repeatedly do. You may have a morning habit of getting in the shower, brushing your teeth, putting on clothes, and zombie-walking to the coffee pot. Or an evening habit of washing dishes, doing homework, watching Netflix, and going to bed.

Family is where discipleship happens, but **habit is the container of discipleship**. Discipleship is transformation by repetition. We learn to live and love like Jesus by committing ourselves to a set of habits, those habits change us from the outside-in, and family is the best place to reinforce those habits because family is where our life already is.

So here are 10 rituals for your family to try. This list is not exhaustive. Please add your own and share with the people in your group.

1. **Family prayer.** Set a time and place where you pray as a family every day. Do your very best not to miss a day. The easiest place is before a meal time. These prayers don't have to be elaborate. Encourage children to pray if and when they're comfortable.
2. **Work shutdown.** Create a habit that demarcates "work time" from "home time." It could be putting your work bag in a certain place as a way of saying, "I'm leaving my work here." Or maybe turning on music when you enter the house. Or making a snack for yourself or your kids. This is helpful for students, too. Students need a space where they can turn off their school mode, be with family, and turn on homework mode later. The goal is to create boundaries around your home time.
3. **Sabbath.** Sabbath simply means "stop" in Hebrew. We are to stop work. It's a commandment, not a suggestion. We are to use 24 hours a week as rest. Some people choose to group those 24 hours together in a single day. For others, it's spread throughout the week. The point is to rest together as a family. You know you're doing it right when you're having fun.
4. **Daily Gratitude.** Tell your family *at least* one thing you're grateful for every day. Tell it to your spouse, child, parent- the most important thing is, say it. Gratitude turns our attention away from ourselves and our present circumstances and moves that energy to the good gifts from God in our lives.
5. **Faith talk.** Have open and honest conversations about faith as a family. The easiest way to habituate these conversations is to have them after worship on Sundays. Talk about the sermon. Talk about what you learned in youth worship

or Sunday School. Kids may not want to start these conversations at first, but once it becomes a habit, it will become part of the Sunday afternoon or evening routine. Also, don't hesitate to turn daily news into a faith conversation. What does God have to say about the news of our day? *These kinds of conversations won't happen unless you make them happen.* Be the parent, spouse, or student who brings it up.

6. **Forgiveness.** No one can hurt us as deeply as family can. But on the flip side, forgiveness is never as powerful as when it comes from family. So make forgiveness a habit for when (not if) you harm one another. Forgiveness should never be an excuse for harming one of your family ("Oh, they'll forgive me anyway"), but it should be an expectation.
7. **Family Motto.** Create a motto that you family can say together. The motto has to capture the DNA of your unique family. The motto could be an inside joke. It could come from a song or a movie. My family's motto is, "Cuties, I'm gonna keep you" from the movie, *Frozen*.
8. **Serve.** Find a way for your family to serve together on a regular basis. It doesn't have to be a grand volunteer project. It'll be working together to keep the house or apartment clean. It'll be delivering a meal to a friend who is sick or grieving. It could be attending a funeral together. It'll be collecting money as a family for one of God's causes in the world. The goal is to serve, whatever the form, and do it together.
9. **Bible study.** Don't make this more complicated than it sounds. Bible study as a family can be as simple as, "What did you think of the Scripture in today's sermon?" Or, "Tell me about the Scripture you learned in youth group today." Think of your family as the extra mile of Bible study. It's the church's job to help people encounter the Bible. You could stop there, but please don't. Your family is where the extra mile conversations happen, where you go the next step and unpack what you're learning about in church.
10. **Prayer requests.** Ask your spouse, parents, and yes, children to pray for you or for someone else in your life. Trust your family with your prayer requests. Don't hide them. And follow up on those prayer requests. Actually say the prayers. It's also nice to let people know when you prayed. Send a text that says, "I just prayed for you."

Questions for Group Discussion

1. Unpack the phrase "discipleship is transformation by repetition" as a group. What does it mean for your home life?
2. Which of these 10 habits have you tried with your family? How did it go?
3. Share the habits that work for your family! Let your group know.

Legacy

What kind of impact do you want your family to make? What will outlive you? What do you want your family to be about? These are the intangibles that end up making tangible imprints for the Kingdom of God.

It's a good idea for every family to have a vision statement and a set of family values. You'll have a chance to write these down.

The vision statement shouldn't be too wordy. Here's mine as an example: to be the good news of Jesus Christ in every thought, every word, and every deed. That vision statement doesn't just guide my family; I hope it's the legacy we're leaving behind us. Your family's vision statement should be the motivating goal that you're all working toward together.

Your family values should be one- or two-word phrases that capture "how it is we do things around here." You know these are good values when you're *not* living up to them. When you don't live up to these values, you're not the kind of family that God dreams you'd be. Aim for five of these values.. For example, mine are: Kindness. Courage. Gratitude. Honesty. Kinship.

Vision Statement for the _____ Family

Values for the _____ Family

Transformed Capital Campaign

Watch the week 2 campaign video with your group.

One of the components of our capital campaign is **supporting Small Steps**, which transforms children and their families.

After investing funds raised in our 2018 Christmas Offering to upgrade our Gethsemane facility to meet Texas licensing standards for a preschool, St. Luke's then partnered with Small Steps Nurturing Center to open a no-tuition, quality, early childhood education program at Gethsemane for economically at-risk children ages two and three. After Covid delayed the original opening, the school opened at full capacity in January 2021! Set in a Christian context, Small Steps focuses on student and family support, including mental health services, occupational, speech and physical therapy, and other proven childhood interventions.

The partnership includes our church contributing \$1 million to share in funding the schools operating budget for its first three years.

Question for Group Discussion

1. Have you ever seen destructive family cycles come to an end or drastically change? How might God be working through Small Steps to change families in Houston?

Closing Prayer

God, thank you for my family. I give them to you. Help me to honor them. Help me to serve them. Help me to forgive them, as I have been forgiven. Help me to clothe my family in love. In the name of Christ. Amen.

Rev. David Horton