

# *Who Are My Family?*

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## **Introduction**

*“Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, ‘He is out of his mind.’”*

*Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him and they told him, ‘Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.’”*

*‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ He asked.*

*Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.’” (Mark 3:20, 21, 31-35).*

Here the gospel gives us some insights into Jesus’ family relationship and His thinking regarding family. As you contemplate this text and your relationship with your family today, ponder these questions: Do you have the family you need? Do you have the family you would like? Can you choose your family?

## **Family Concerns**

Having lived with His family for more than three decades, Jesus’ new activity as a Teacher now took Him away from home, almost all the time. He lived, first by Himself, then with His group of closest followers, His disciples. One day, while Jesus was preaching at Capernaum, His family showed up.

Now Jesus was so successful that people crowded around Him, wanting to listen to Him. He hardly had time to care for His needs. The text says He wasn’t even able to eat! His relatives, namely His mother and His brothers, were apparently concerned about His health. They had heard strange rumors—how He had fasted for forty days, was spending whole nights in prayer, was teaching the crowds all day long and taking no time for rest. In their view, He was burning Himself out. On top of that, the Pharisees were now accusing Jesus of healing a possessed man through the power of Satan. The brothers of Jesus simply could not stand to have their reputations soiled in the neighbourhood and at the synagogue because this younger brother was out of control. They believed that if they engaged Mary, His mother, to help them speak to Him, Jesus would probably listen (see E. G. White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 321).

We should try to understand these relatives of Jesus and why they would do that. In that time, as in any other time, it is not pleasant to be the family of one under suspicion of being an enemy of the state. The members of the Sanhedrin were investigating Jesus! The whole family might suffer dire consequences as a result! So His family just wanted to put some things in order at home and avoid any problems with religious authorities.

It is not entirely surprising to see the brothers of Jesus opposing Him here. The gospels tell us elsewhere that they did not believe in Him (John 7:5). What is surprising is to find Mary, Jesus' mother, also a part of this hostile group. How is it that she would be found among those relatives circulating the rumor that He was crazy (Mark 3:21)? After all, had she not received divine revelation through an angel of the sacred mission of Jesus (Luke 2:19). Was she not convinced? We do not know why, but there she was, outside the house, calling for Jesus and sending in messages for Him to come out and quit His ministry (see Mark 3:31-35). Mary reminds me a little of my own mother, who was always trying to feed me and take care of all my needs whenever I went back home for holidays or to visit! Such possessive love, such overprotecting love—though it may seem entirely appropriate to the parent—is often detrimental and can even be destructive to the relationship with one's child.

### **Jesus Felt the Need for a Family**

Jesus reacted to the actions of His relatives with two unexpected questions: “Who is my mother?” and “Who are my brothers” (Mark 3:33)? These are the kind of questions that an adopted child might ask, but Jesus was not adopted. These questions are the more surprising because Jesus knew for sure who His mother was and who His brothers were. There were rumors about His father's identity to be sure, but never had there been a question about His mother. What then was the real sense of His questions?

Two different views have been put forward to explain Jesus' questions. The first suggests that the questions mean, “Who are they to interfere with my ministry to the point of being ready to stop it? Family ties do not give my relatives the right to control my vocation.” An alternate way of understanding Jesus' questions is to find in them His surprise and disenchantment: “Who is my mother and who are my brothers? I do not recognize them in this role of ‘enemies’ that they are now playing. I thought that a mother is someone in whom a son can always trust, because she would always unconditionally listen to Him and support Him. I thought that real brothers would be always on my side, supporting me and helping me to fulfil my mission. I have a hard time in recognizing my relatives in these people who are so hostile to me. I do not have a family to communicate with. I realise that we cannot understand each other.”

Of these, I prefer the second view. We could say that, in these questions, Jesus is not looking for information. He is looking for affection, for support, understanding and commitment to His mission from His family. Attacked by the Pharisees, criticized by the scribes, suspected by the rulers of the nation, offended by those who associated Him with devils, Jesus was surely even more hurt by the hostility of the members of His own family, including His mother!

“Looking around on all those who were sitting with Him” (Mark 3:34), and “extending His arms to his disciples” (Matt. 12:49-50), Jesus identifies Himself as family with those who support and uphold the will of God: “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my

Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:34, 35). What a surprise, what a joy for the disciples and for all the friends of Jesus to be considered by Him as His new family!

### **We All Need Family**

Many of us suffer from dysfunctional relationships in our family networks. Hostilities, misunderstandings, jealousies, favoritism shown to some and not others, and faulty communication are often present in families. Good relationships just don’t exist. No matter how hard we try sometimes, little progress is made. We do not always have the family we would like or the family we need. When we do not have the right family, we all hunger for love, understanding and support.

You can rent anything today—cars, houses, tools, plants, videos, babysitters. In Japan, you can sign up for “Rent-a-Family.” Elderly Japanese are lining up for this service, in which a stand-in family visits for a few hours and acts like “real” family. Reports tell of customers paying more than \$1,000 a visit for the service. The president of the Lifestage Casting Center that runs the service says that most of his clients have families who rarely come to visit. During “Rent-a-Family” visits, elderly people treat the actors like their own children and grandchildren. They often hand out pocket money to the “grandchildren” and berate their “children” for not visiting more often. The Center president says, “There are lots of people who feel lonely because everyone is chasing money and no one pays attention to the human need for love and acceptance.” Mrs. Suzuki, a retired dollmaker who rented a family, wrote about it: “From the bottom of my heart, I felt as though they could be my family. I know they’re not my real family, but there was a real feeling of warmth” (Krause, 1996, p. 8). Although this “Rent-a-Family” story may raise a smile at first, it really points to a deep need and a disturbing problem that is widespread in family relationships. We can judge the moral strength of someone by how they treat their family.

How is it with you and me? What kind of family do you have? What kind of parents or children are we? Are we sensitive to the needs and feelings of our families—our parents, children and other relatives? Do we treat the elderly with dignity and respect? Since the family is the cornerstone of a balanced life, we ignore the need for a caring family at our own peril. We need a family.

Some of us have wonderful, loving families who are a pleasure to live with or to visit. No one, though, has a perfect family in this fallen world. Often we are exasperated by things that are said or done by our parents or by our children or other relatives. Sometimes we find visiting very difficult. In any case, God is asking us to find ways of bringing our family members together. Along with His request, He offers the power and the courage to do it well. We can commit ourselves and our families to Him and do our part to instigate healing and renewal in damaged relationships.

### **The Church: Our Spiritual Family**

It is wonderful news found in the book of Acts that members of Jesus’ natural family became part of His church as well. Mary, His mother, and James, the brother of Jesus, are found in the upper room (Acts 1:13-14), receiving the Holy Spirit.

Meanwhile, Jesus’ gaze around the room falls on us even today. His question to each of us is: “Are you my brother?” “Are you my sister?” Perhaps we may think of ourselves as being among His disciples whom He calls family. If so, we no doubt read with contempt the acts and attitudes of His

earthly family as recounted in Mark's gospel. However, Jesus' question goes deeper than we may think, for the ties that make us His brothers and His sisters are the ties of God's family, that unite in the church all those who seek to do the will of God. So His question, "Who are my brothers and sisters?" infers "Are you who think of yourselves as my family supporting my ministry like good brothers and sisters who do the will of our common Father?"

Another lesson we derive from this episode in the life of Christ is that the church may supply us, as it did Jesus, with the missing family member, the mother, father, brother, sister, aunt or uncle whom we need. One of the many ways God wants to bless us is by providing for us, within the church, siblings, parents, children, grandchildren and other family members whom we do not always find in our own homes. "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me" (Ps. 27:10). We may be without people to be family to us for many reasons, but as we are "born again" (cf. John 3:3) into Jesus' family, we often find the spiritual links to be stronger and deeper than the links of blood.

Some of our family situations may be happier, more fully functional and satisfying than others. But wherever our different family situations find us, by the grace of our heavenly Father we become brothers and sisters of each other in His church. Along with the abundant riches of His grace, may we find also this additional blessing in His church—the extended, complementary family we need, and may we become "family" for many who need us.

## References

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