

# THE CHURCH IS A FAMILY

*How the Gospel Transforms Our  
Discipleship Relationships*



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LifeWay

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# **INTRODUCTION: A LIFE-CHANGING METAPHOR**

Imagine you're trying to explain a really complex subject—how budgeting works or where babies come from, for example—to a child. How would you do it? What's the best way to give a clear answer without going over their head? While there are many ways to explain complex subjects, sometimes the best way to do it is with a good metaphor.

## **GOD'S MANY METAPHORS FOR GOD'S PEOPLE**

The Bible uses several metaphors to describe the slightly mismatched mix of men, women, and children from every tribe, tongue, and nation who are saved by faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We're the bride of Christ, the one Christ died to present to the Father holy and blameless (Eph. 5:27). We're the temple of the Holy Spirit, where God's presence resides among His people (1 Cor. 3:16). We're the body of Christ, doing greater works in His name than He accomplished for us as an individual on earth (John 14:12). We're a holy priesthood, all of whom have unrestricted access to God and offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ (1 Pet. 2:5).

## **THE MOST CHALLENGING OF THEM ALL**

But there's one other metaphor the Bible uses, one that we talk about a lot from our perspective as individuals but all too rarely as a group: we're a family. Through the gospel, we are adopted by God and named His sons and daughters (Eph. 1:5). We are beloved children and coheirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17); we have an elder Brother who is always interceding for us (Heb. 7:25) and a Father who loves us with, as one children's author put it so well, a "Never-Stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love."<sup>1</sup> This Father gives good gifts to His children (Matt. 7:11) and is always working out all things for their good (Rom. 8:28).

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<sup>1</sup> [Sally Lloyd-Jones, *The Jesus Storybook Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zonderkidz, 2007), 36.]

Most of us get this, at least in part. To say that God's people are saved to be a family isn't revolutionary by any stretch. But do we really grasp what this means practically? When was the last time we stopped and considered the fact that to be a part of God's family means that we are not just saved by Him and for Him but we are saved into relationship with one another—that the gospel makes us a family?

### **THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOSPEL FAMILY**

Family is a tricky subject, largely because so many of us have experienced profound brokenness in these relationships: divorce, abuse, neglect, abandonment, and countless other sins besides. In even using the word, our desire is to be sensitive to those whose experience of family falls far short of God's desire and standard—especially within the context of His people, the church. And what is that standard? Our belief is that there are three hallmarks of a gospel family:

We are safe together

We love one another

We are on mission together

In this book we aim to explore briefly what these mean from the perspective of four broad categories of discipleship groups:

**Our local church.** This is an area of our lives that we often take for granted. In fact, many of us see our local church as somehow disconnected from the rest of our lives—a place we go on Sunday, but that's about it. But if it's true that the gospel saves us into relationship with others, then our gathered congregations are a key element of our growth as disciples. This group, a group of many, may have different levels of relationships between one person and another, but we all have responsibilities to one another. When one suffers, all suffer. When one celebrates, we celebrate together. Whatever the circumstances, we carry one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2). This level of care and relationship building may seem more possible in a smaller-size church, where everyone knows each other, but the responsibilities are the same no matter what size congregation. It does, however, require more intentionality from church staff and members as a church grows larger.

The committed core of the congregation must be taught to look for those unconnected attenders for potential relationship building.

**Our community groups.** Every church has small groups or community groups, whether they are part of an intentional discipleship strategy or they form organically. Some represent a cross section of the ages of the people within the church, while others look more like groups of peers (and if your church is predominantly made up of one or two age groups, then both might be true). They are typically groups of 8-12 people who are choosing to invest in one another in a deeper way than we can within the context of our “group of many” relationships as a congregation. Our goal in these groups is to create safe places for growth in the gospel, to work out our faith with one another as we encourage each other to “love and good works” (Heb. 10:24). A small group environment is where we carry on the example set for us by the early church in Acts 2:42-47. It is clear in this passage that the early church devoted themselves to God and each other through both corporate gatherings (the temple) and in the home (house to house).

**Our deeper discipleship groups.** Just as we have deeper relationships within our small groups than in the congregation as a whole, we also have a smaller subset of close relationships. Even as Jesus did ministry with His twelve disciples, there were three He spent the most time with: Peter, John, and James. We can see this special relationship play out, among other places, in Mark 14:32-34:

*Then they came to a place named Gethsemane, and he told his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” He took Peter, James, and John with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. He said to them, “I am deeply grieved to the point of death. Remain here and stay awake.”*

There is a level of intimacy and accountability that is only possible to achieve with just a few same-sex people in our lives. This smaller relationship dynamic pushes us deeper in our walk with Christ than is possible with our group of many, or even our community group.

**Our one-on-one relationships.** Even as we have deeper relationships within a group of three or four, the greatest level of intimacy and responsibility to one another comes in our one-on-one relationships, or our groups of two. If we look closer at Jesus' smaller group of four, we see that there was one who was even closer than the others: John. This close relationship is testified to by John in, among other places, John 20:1-2;

*On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark. She saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she went running to Simon Peter and to the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said to them, "They've taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they've put him!"*

This intimate bond did not mean that Jesus loved the other disciples any less, but it's obvious that John received Jesus' affections more than the rest. We all need that person in our lives who knows us better than anyone else, that person with whom we can share the highest of highs and lowest of lows. He or she may be a mentor, a spouse, or a close friend.

Jesus said that our love for one another is how the world will know we are His disciples (John 13:34-35). And our love for one another is the best way for us to live out our calling as a gospel family on mission together. Let's get started.

## CHAPTER ONE: THE GOSPEL MAKES US SAFE

On college and university campuses all over North America, the concept of “safe spaces” is on the rise. These are spaces that are intended to be free of bias, conflict, criticism, or potentially threatening actions, ideas, and conversations. But there’s a problem: safe spaces of this kind do not make anyone safe. They make everyone a victim, fearful of anything that might challenge or conflict with our understanding of our truest self.

The gospel does not lead us to search out safe spaces like these. The gospel frees us from a spirit of fear, as it roots us in our new identity—that we are in Christ. We are His, and members of His family. In the gospel we are safe.

### **SAFE TO BE VULNERABLE**

Because of the gospel, we are safe to be vulnerable with one another. The level of vulnerability will be different with each group.

Our group of many in our local congregation gives us a safe space in numbers to bring our burdens and pain each Sunday. We are able to bond together with our brothers and sisters in Christ, knowing that we are not alone in our struggles. This is a very public form of confession and repentance.

Our smaller community group allows a level of vulnerability that is not always possible on a Sunday morning with the congregation. It is in this more intimate environment where we can live out the healing described in James 5:16:

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect.*

Our deeper discipleship group gives us the level of accountability to go beyond just confession to holiness. We confess to one another not so

that we can be real with one another; we confess to one another because we have a desire to be made holy. To be healed. To stop sinning. And we are responsible and even blessed for aiding one another on that journey. James continues this thought in verses 19 and 20:

*My brothers and sisters, if any among you strays from the truth, and someone turns him back, let that person know that whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.*

Our one-on-one relationship is where we can have our deepest level of authenticity and vulnerability. This person knows everything about us—all of the junk, failures, and issues—and still loves us unconditionally. He or she will know parts of our lives that the other groups will never know.

### **SAFE TO BE HONEST**

The only way to achieve vulnerability and authenticity is through complete honesty. Our natural reaction to sin is to run and hide in darkness, but the power of the gospel frees us to come out into the light. Because of the blood of Jesus, we don't have to be afraid of confessing our sin. Not because our sin is not present or that it doesn't have consequences, but through the gospel we can truly own our sin without rationalization or excuse. This is true through all our levels of community.

Our local church should be a place where it is safe to be yourself. A starting point for healing is admitting, "I am not okay." We have a tendency to put on our "Sunday faces" at church and pretend like everything is great. A gospel-centered church allows us to strip that facade away because we know that Jesus has already borne our sin, and therefore, we are free to own our sin in an honest and freeing way.

Our community group gives us the opportunity to share our honest stories to a small group of people who will pray for us, challenge us, and encourage us along the way. The level of honesty the group will be



able to achieve will be dependent on how it is modeled from the leader. If the leader is willing to go first, the group will quickly follow.

In the same way, the group of 3-4 will follow the lead of the leader for the level of honesty. This should be a space where honest feedback and loving correction is the normal practice. The leader will set the tone for the group.

The only way a one-on-one relationship is healthy is if both parties are completely honest with each other. Accountability is only as effective as the level of truth shared.

### **SAFE TO ENGAGE IN HEALTHY CONFLICT**

Conflict is inevitable. Whenever people gather together, there will be occasional disagreements. The freeing part is that the gospel in our relationships gives a healthy perspective to engage in conflict. Because God has first reconciled Himself to us, we can reconcile with those we may have hurt.

Almost none of us are naturally good at handling conflict. You will eventually face conflict in your relationships and community group, and the tendency is to sweep it under the rug for the sake of group unity. The fact is: if it is not properly dealt with, it will eventually destroy you and your group.

When conflict arises in the church or group, taking sides will guarantee a split. Of course, there are situations that arise when one person has clearly sinned against another, but most conflicts simply arise out of personality differences. Don't assume one person is in the wrong, and don't be afraid to elevate the conflict to a pastor or elder in the church.

The process laid out in Matthew 18:15-17 should be followed in a church conflict as well as a smaller group conflict:

*If your brother sins against you, go and rebuke him in private.  
If he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he won't  
listen, take one or two others with you, so that by the testimony of*

*two or three witnesses every fact may be established. If he doesn't pay attention to them, tell the church. If he doesn't pay attention even to the church, let him be like a Gentile and a tax collector to you.*

A group member should only be asked to leave the group after all attempts have been made to restore him to health and fellowship.

## **AN ASPIRATIONAL BUT ATTAINABLE GOAL**

For many in our churches, and even some of us reading this book, this vision of safety is a challenging one. Few of us have experienced it in its fullness, and many of us have had experiences that tell us that the opposite is actually true.

We should all grieve that we often fall short of our aspiration of being a refuge for all who are weary and burdened by their sins (Matt. 11:28-30), but we should not let go of this desire. Instead, we need to press on toward the reality with greater intensity. As we seek to do this, let us offer three encouragements:

- **Safety requires time.** Most people do not feel safe to share their hearts during their first conversation or group gathering. Some may not feel that way for weeks or months. And that's okay. Be willing to be patient and appropriately celebrate the steps that are taken along the way.
- **Safety requires confidence.** If we want people to feel safe in our groups, they need to know that they can share what is really going on without fear of gossip. While there are exceptions, a simple rule for our groups to live by is "What is said here, stays here."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Some of these exceptions include, but are not limited to, revelations of sexual abuse, assault, and criminal activity. You can find resources to navigate how best to serve sexual abuse victims at [churchcares.com](http://churchcares.com).

- **Safety requires the gospel.** This might seem redundant, but it cannot be overstated. The gospel is what ultimately brings us all together. So, we need to continually remind ourselves of the gospel, bring every issue back to the gospel, and show how we have hope in the gospel.

Because of the gospel, we can be vulnerable with one another. Because of the gospel, we can be honest with one another. Because of the gospel, we can engage in healthy conflict with one another. Because of the gospel, we have nothing to fear, because perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18).

The gospel makes us safe.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE GOSPEL MAKES US LOVING—AND LOVED

We live in a culture that loves to talk about love. Love, in many ways, is the central ethic of our time. We've been told through pop songs, TV, movies, books, politicians, blogs, and social media (among other voices) all we need to do is love. But what does the world see love as? For many, love is primarily defined by feelings of (usually romantic) affection and admiration. It is something to fall in and out of. But love, even in our culture, also has this idea of seeking the good of another. Unfortunately, the way we interpret this is that "good" is defined by subjective experience and individuality, which is why to love is to affirm, validate, and celebrate the choices of an individual—even if those choices will ultimately lead them to destruction.

### WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT LOVE

The Bible speaks a great deal about love, but it doesn't define it the way our culture does. Or maybe a better way to say it is that the Bible doesn't apply definitions of love the way that our culture does.

Throughout Scripture, love is deeply connected to God, in the same way goodness is—it cannot be defined apart from Him. The apostle John explained it this way:

*Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him. Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, if God loved us in this way, we also must love one another. No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God remains in us and his love is made complete in us.*  
(1 John 4:7-12)

Although there is much more that can be said about this passage, one essential takeaway from it is the relationship between love and the gospel. The gospel is motivated by God's love, not ours—Jesus demonstrated His love first. “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us,” Romans 5:8 says. The gospel is the proof of God's love more than anything else.

And our response is to love one another. John doesn't just tell us that we respond to God's love in the gospel by loving God back (though that is true), but we demonstrate our love for God by loving one another. So what does this kind of love look like? Paul gave us some clues in 1 Corinthians 12:

*God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the less honorable, so that there would be no division in the body, but that the members would have the same concern for each other. So if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.*  
(1 Cor. 12:24-26)

Here, we see truths to loving one another:

We rejoice together

We mourn together

We have concern for one another.

### **LOVE = REJOICING TOGETHER**

One aspect of loving one another is that we rejoice together, or “rejoice with those who rejoice,” as Romans says (12:15a). This idea is relatively simple, at least in principle. Rejoicing means to celebrate—to express joy and enthusiasm. And this is good news, because we have so much to celebrate.

**Rejoicing as a church.** When we rejoice as a church, we are in part talking about our experience during our Sunday corporate gatherings. Singing together, hearing the gospel proclaimed, taking the Lord's

Supper, celebrating baptisms ... These are all elements of rejoicing as a church. We are celebrating God's faithfulness to us: His power to save us from sin, His power to change lives, and our hope for His final coming.

**Rejoicing in our deeper relationships.** When we think about our small groups, our groups of four, or our one-on-one relationships, there is a great deal of crossover in how we apply this principle:

- We need to set aside time to share how we see God working in our own lives. This may be a follow-up to an application suggestion from last week's study or a testimony to how God is answering a prayer need in someone's life.
- Share how we see God at work in a group member's life. Practice this discipline (and it is a discipline).
- Share moments of grace outside of formal meeting times. Rejoicing together isn't limited to our formal small group or Bible study times. Coffee times, lunch get-togethers, or even texts and emails are great opportunities to share good news about how God is at work in your life or to continue to affirm the good things God is doing in the life of one of your group members.

Regardless of context, rejoicing requires you to be intentional. Receiving life-giving affirmation from your group—people who love you and, Lord willing, you love as well—is challenging. It may be even more difficult than offering it! But in both giving and receiving, we are taking the opportunity to rejoice in all that God is doing in and through us. So do not hesitate to take those opportunities.

## **LOVE = MOURNING TOGETHER**

Loving one another doesn't mean we only focus on rejoicing together. It also means we enter into one another's pain. That we *mourn* together.

No one likes to talk about sorrow or difficulty. (This is why so many people answer, “I’m fine,” in response to your “How are you.”) It makes us uncomfortable, and uneasy. For some of us, the other people’s pain reminds us too much of our own painful experiences. And while we want to be sensitive to this, the truth is sorrow is very much a very real part of our experience of living in a fallen world, and God is using it for our good.

The Bible reminds us that while there is a time to laugh, there is also a time to mourn (Eccl. 3:4). Throughout the Book of Psalms we read of God’s people wrestling with grief, loss, and pain. So, we must be careful not to avoid dealing with something God speaks to in great detail. But how do we do this?

- **Listen.** This is probably the most difficult response to pain and sorrow, but it is among the most important. Sometimes the best thing we can do is just be silent and listen. Silence can be uncomfortable in a group setting, but it’s exactly what’s needed to encourage a hurting group member to have the space to share their pain. Try not to move on too quickly to the next item on the agenda.
- **Pray.** Take every opportunity to bring a mourning and suffering group member before the Lord. He or she may not have the strength to pray for themselves, but you do. Group prayer can be rushed or even forgotten if there isn’t a concerted effort to make it a part of the meeting time. Be prepared to stop in the middle of the meeting to pray for an urgent need.
- **Encourage from God’s Word.** Don’t diminish or explain away hard questions. Don’t immediately rebuke expressions of anger, frustration, or fear. But do encourage one another of God’s goodness, His love for each of us deeply and personally, and of His presence. This is why it’s essential that God’s Word is the centerpiece of our group meetings. God’s truth is where every question and conversation has to eventually land.

- **Be present.** Don't act as though suffering is a communicable disease. We need one another, we need to be present in one another's lives in order to do all of the above. The deepest, most impactful conversations will often happen outside of the official group times. Just being available can be the best posture of spiritual leadership.

## **LOVE = CONCERN FOR ONE ANOTHER**

Another way to look at loving one another is through the example of the early church in Acts 2. There we are told that the believers had everything in common, so that there was no need among them. Believers sold their possessions and even their homes to provide for the materially less fortunate among them. They ate together. They lived together. Every need was the community's.

It becomes clear as you read through the Bible that we were not meant to walk through life on our own. The first-century church spent a majority of their time taking care of one another's needs.

By practicing the one-anothers, they also allowed members to discover and use their spiritual gifts within the church. You can see examples of the gifts—apostleship, discernment, encouragement, evangelism, faith, giving, healing, helps, hospitality, intercession, leadership, administration, mercy, miracles, prophecy, pastoring, teaching, wisdom, and knowledge—woven through the acts of service toward each other.

Creating biblical community in our groups and deeper relationships is allowing room for the Holy Spirit to minister to and through each other. As each person is growing spiritually, they will discover their spiritual gifts and in turn disciple someone else. This is how generations of disciples are created and leaders are developed.



## **MORE THAN A FEELING**

The Bible's vision of love is far more than a feeling. It is an active presence and engagement in one another's lives. This kind of love—this kind of life—is radically different from the way the rest of the world lives. It may not be easy, but we need to embrace it. After all, the gospel makes us loving, and the gospel makes us loved.

## CHAPTER THREE: THE GOSPEL MULTIPLIES

One of the traits of a family is that it grows. It starts with two people—a husband and wife—and grows to include children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, and so on through the generations. Throughout the New Testament, we see the church grow in a similar manner: it starts small but grows larger and larger as more and more people come to know Jesus.

This is ultimately what anyone means when they talk about being on mission. It's about the Great Commission—that, under Christ's authority, we “make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything [Christ] have commanded” (Matt. 28:19-20). But how do we engage that calling as a gospel family?

There are two angles to consider this from, the first being how we seek out those who are still far from God, and the other is how we grow those who are “near,” who have confessed faith in Jesus and are seeking to follow Him faithfully.

### SEEKING THOSE WHO ARE FAR

When we think mission, this is the area we most often place our focus. And we are right to; there are so many people around us who don't know Jesus. So how do we reach them?

- **Serve the community.** We have many opportunities to engage our community, both as a congregation as a whole and within our small groups. Be good listeners, pay attention to what you're hearing as you engage with people in clubs, schools, and after-school activities. Pray and ask God to show you where you can best serve others for the glory of Christ. And act wisely, making sure you know the best way to really help (which is, again, why we encourage listening carefully). We should always seek to understand before we offer opinions.

- **Meet your neighbors.** Chances are good that you have neighbors. Chances are also good that you probably don't know them very well, if at all. While previous generations knew their neighbors well, many of us have never spoken to the people who live next door. Here are a few ideas on how to meet your neighbors.
  - Throw a block party. Opportunities begin as relationships, and block parties set the stage for future friendships.
  - Host a movie on their lawn for the families in the neighborhood. Put out a few flyers around the neighborhood and fire up the latest Pixar hit.
  - Participate in neighborhood-sponsored events like Easter egg hunts or quarterly “spruce up the ‘hood” days.
- **Know the people God puts in your path.** Maybe it's the barista you see every day at your local coffee shop, the Uber driver you get repeatedly, or the person checking out your groceries every time you need to stock up on essentials. Have you considered that God might be putting these people in your path for a reason? Everyone is longing for community, but they may not know where to start.

## **GROWING THOSE WHO ARE NEAR**

This is the less-often-considered aspect of the Great Commission. Making disciples doesn't stop when a person places his or her faith in Jesus. That's the beginning. From a practical perspective, this is what your small groups and discipleship relationships are all about. They are about helping us all grow closer to Jesus, and to be more like Him—and to become disciple-making disciples themselves.

- **Encouraging one another.** What we have in mind here isn't a general encouragement; it has more to do with expressing our gifts for the good of God's people. Where are we using them to

serve one another, to build up the church? Giving ownership of the group over to members is a key way to help them discover their gifts and place of service. How can each group member serve the group instead of just attending? Bringing food, arranging missional opportunities, leading part of the discussion, and taking prayer requests, are just a few areas to give ownership away.

- **Developing leaders.** If we are group leaders, one of the most important things we can do is to develop other leaders. We do not consolidate influence in a small few, but spread it generously. Which group members do you see as having potential to lead as well? Do you have a process for developing leaders in your church? Generations of disciples are created when we help develop and release new leaders to use their gifts.
- **Multiplying groups.** In many ways, this point is the result of the previous two. While some types of groups remain relatively static, others are intended to grow and change over time. A key way this happens is through multiplication. As we are growing disciples in our congregation (our group of many), there is a greater need for more small groups. If your church tends to draw people from around your region, rather than just your neighborhood, there will be a need to start new groups in the neighborhoods of those attending. Each group needs to determine the right time to multiply, by either sending out a new leader to start a new group for new people, or having the new leader take the existing group while the original leader steps out to start a new group. Don't forget to celebrate the birth of a new group when this happens!

## **GOD GIVES THE GROWTH**

One of the most important things for us to remember is that growth is ultimately not about us anymore than it is about any other leader in our churches (or in another church for that matter). When the

Corinthian church was dividing into factions around different leaders, the apostle Paul reminded them that the leaders they were dividing over—Paul and Apollos—were equally God’s servants, each performing his own role. “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth” (1 Cor. 3:6). This is how we need to think about our mission as a gospel family: we are all in this together, and we all will have an important role to play. Some of us will plant seeds of faith. Some of us will nurture them. But if there is any growth, it will be from God.

## CONCLUSION: BEING A GOSPEL FAMILY ON MISSION TOGETHER

One of my (Aaron's) favorite days of the week is Tuesday. On Tuesday night, my small group gathers together to eat together, invest in one another, discuss the Bible together, and pray for one another. And without fail, we begin our time together the same way every week, with a reminder of our purpose:

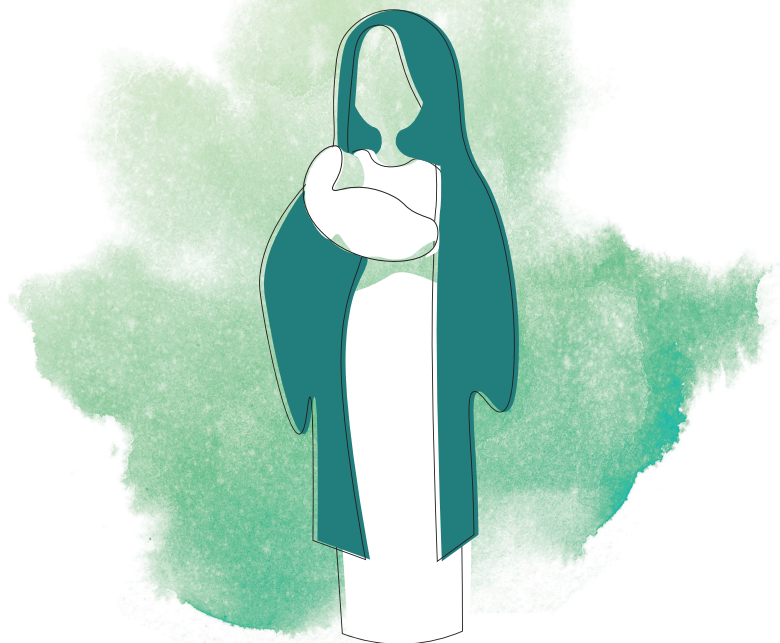
- *This is a safe place. What is said here, stays here. No one has anything to fear because if God is for us, who can be against us?*
- *We are family and you belong here. If one suffers, all suffer together; if one is honored, all rejoice together.*
- *And we are on-mission together. We will take responsibility to love our neighbors and declare God's glory among all people together.*
- *So then this is a safe family on mission together.* For our group, restating this every week isn't a mere ritual: it is a statement of purpose, of what we aspire to be. We want our church and our groups to be a safe place, where everyone who joins us knows they can be vulnerable and honest without fear of judgment. A place where we love one another the way Scripture describes it, by rejoicing and mourning together, and having genuine concern for one another's well-being. A place where we seek those who are far from Christ, and strive to grow those who are near to Him into maturity.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from a statement of purpose written by Dave McDaniel, a deacon and community group leader at Refuge Church in Franklin, Tennessee.

We want this for every church and every group of every size in every context. And we believe it is possible because it is what God is already doing among us. In Christ, we are many things: We are His body. We are His bride We are His temple. And we are His family.

A gospel family on mission together.



## **A BIRTH OVER 4,000 YEARS (AND 9 MONTHS) IN THE MAKING.**

Abraham begat Isaac. Isaac begat Jacob. And so on and so forth. It was a thread Mary knew well as generation after generation of ancestors waited for the Promised One.

They waited. And waited. And waited.

Little did Mary know the long wait would end in her arms.

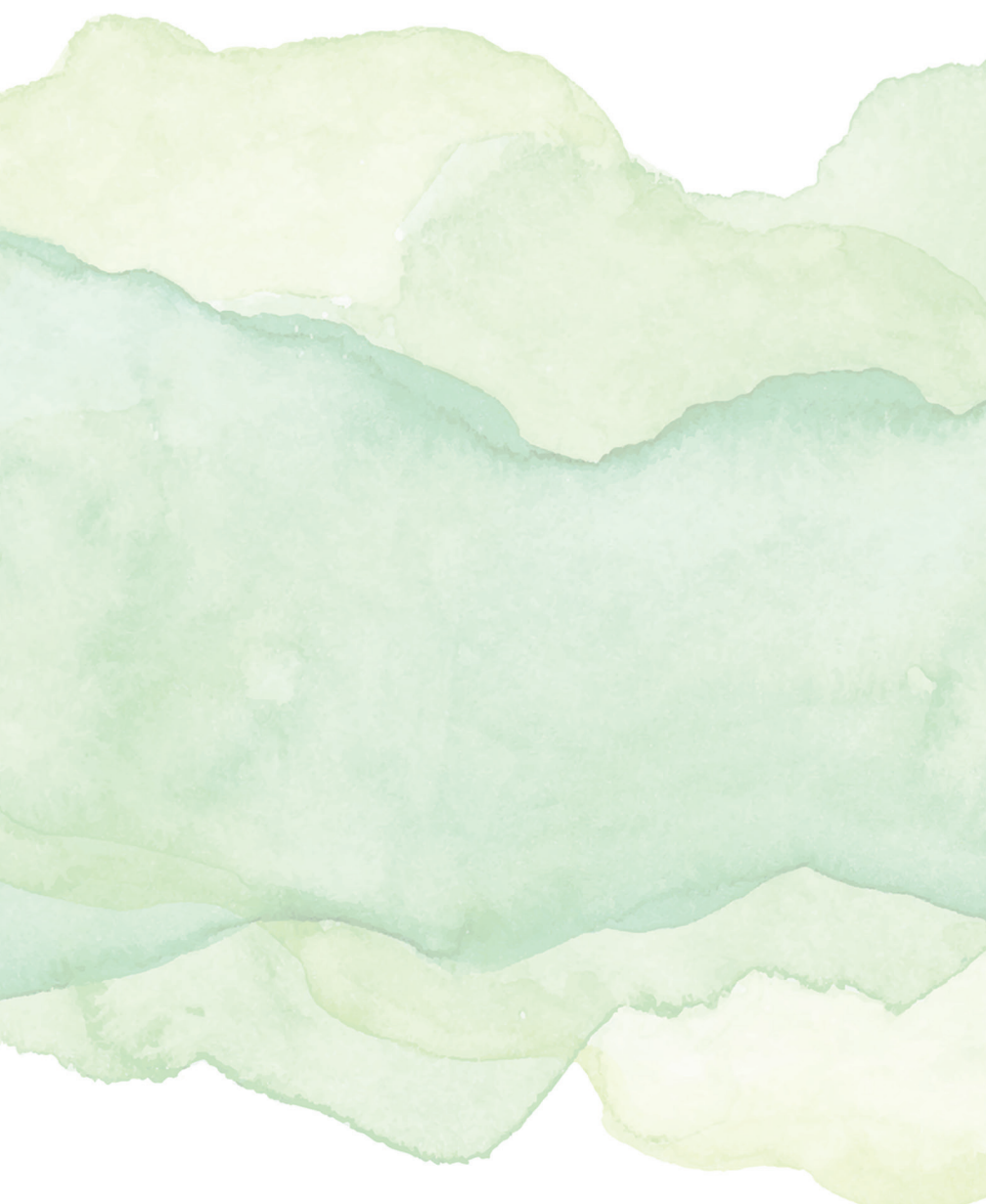
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