Not surprisingly, the family of God has identifiable family characteristics. As children may look or act like their parents or siblings, so children of God find there are characteristics that not only identify them, but unite them too.

There were occasions when Jesus gave specific examples of how he expected God’s children to act or react. In the Sermon on the Mount he taught his disciples to ‘Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you and pray for those who persecute you’ (Matthew 5:44). This, he said, would make them sons (or children) of their Father in Heaven (v 45).

Because Christians see Jesus as their supreme example, they try to be like him. They see in his life qualities to be emulated. He promised his Spirit to help us in this, so we can use the ‘fruit’ of that Spirit – recorded by the Apostle Paul in Galatians 5:22, 23 – as a good reference point for how we should be developing spiritually. The fruit of the Spirit is listed as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. These characteristics should be increasingly evident in all Christians. They identify God’s family – the people who are linked with him by the Holy Spirit’s presence in their lives.