



# 2025 Weekly Devotions

Week of: September 15<sup>th</sup> -21<sup>st</sup>

Sermon: September 14<sup>th</sup>





September 15

**John 10:12-13**

When I think about marriage, I think about the biblical or God-ordained purposes for the institution. I am reminded that marriage is momentary and points to a greater reality that is eternal. In and through marriage, the incredible relationship of Christ and His bride, the church, is to be put on display. We all know that our reflection of His love for us will be imperfect but that does not mean it can't be demonstrated beautifully. Much exists in God's creation that points to greater realities.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Psalm tells us that creation "speaks" of the existence of God and demonstrates levels of His glory. Both things in heaven and on earth declare His glory which screams of His existence. I believe that, like in marriage, the family is supposed to point to a greater reality as well. This week my goal is to highlight how much of Scripture uses the structure and rules for relationships to point to how the family of God, the church, is to relate to one another and how we are to be organized based on headship, submission, gender, giftedness, personality, etc.

It is vitally important the people who make up the church, the body of Christ, relate to one another as family. It must be incredibly sad to God, I know it is to me, when some people can drift in and out of the church as if family doesn't matter at all. How people can walk away from the church with not a word or with silly excuses will always baffle and disappoint me. I remember long ago realizing how challenging it was going to be to get the congregation here at Smyrna to believe that I would stay with them for the long haul and not be gone within three years like nearly every other pastor they ever had; for varying reasons.

The average tenure of the pastors of Smyrna Baptist in her first 104 years of existence was 3 years. I remember one day when a gentlemen said to me, "I was here when you got here, and I am sure I will be here when you are gone." I know that may sound harsh, but it really wasn't. He was just letting me know that this is how it goes in the church. It took me many years to convince the people that I genuinely loved them, was called here, and had no intention of leaving them. I remember preaching a sermon and comparing my commitment to them to my commitment to marriage. I have no intention of leaving Johanna unless the Lord calls one of us home just as I have no intention of leaving my church family until the Lord calls me to a different task or to heaven.

It saddens me to think what "family" must mean to some who can mistreat the church family, ignore it, use it, and walk away as if it does not matter in the least. I can only imagine they treat their own families that way or have been treated like that themselves. Either way it is a sad situation when people live like this. I am forever grateful for the love that nearly all of us feel as Smyrna family today. I am thrilled and know that it is God's grace that we get to experience this wonderful family. Like all families, we hit bumps in the road, pinch each other sometimes, and need to smooth out wrinkles in our relationships. I am so thankful that we are willing to do that because we are committed to each other and we honestly understand the sinful nature that we all still have and which sometimes causes us to get a little sideways. That's true for families, but we stick together.

September 16

**Romans 8:12-17**

As we begin this week to think of the church as a family, let's begin with the amazing truth that we get to call God our Father. From the very outset, we already see God helping us see our relationship to Him in a familiar setting as father and we as His children. In Matthew 6:9, Jesus teaches us to address Him as our Father and in passages such as John 1:12 we are told that we have the privilege of being called children of God. These two biblical affirmations are among many in which God uses an analogy between the human family and the church. The way the human family is arranged provides wonderful clarity as to how the church family is to be arranged and each person treated.

Within the passage that I chose for today, we begin to understand His promises based on His love for us, our future inheritance as His children, and the reality of our intimate fellowship with Him as family (Rom. 8:12-17). I hope to help you see the wonder of the intimacy we can have with God the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit and that we will have a better understanding of how we are to conduct ourselves toward one another. Surely we hope that you will connect the dots and see that the same gender distinctions and role assignments that are biblically defined for the human family will translate into God's structure and design for the church family. This has tremendous ramifications for pastoral leadership in the church.

The inference should be easily made that just as husbands and fathers are called to exercise godly oversight and leadership in the home, so it is to be wise, mature men who ought to be ordained as the fatherly leaders in the church (1 Tim. 3:1-7). There are of course wonderful and specific roles assigned to the amazing godly women of the human family and church family (1 Tim. 5:9-16). I deeply love the design of God's world because I know with all of my heart that He is good and He is love.

Having God as our Father, does not simply imply that He is our Creator. This is indeed true but the point for us today and frankly always is the intimacy within that designation. I encourage you to read Romans 8:12-17 today and pause to thank God for the truth of this text and ask Him to help you see all that this means. Paul writes that because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in us and leading us, we are sons and daughters of God. That relationship is not one of a master and slave but is one of a child and a loving parent. It is within this relationship that we are given the privilege to call God, not just father, but daddy.

Paul says that we are able to cry out to Him, "Abba! Father!" I have often wept as I have witnessed Abel and Micah's relationship with their adopted parents Joe and Kristin. Because of the relationship, they absolutely are able to call them mommy and daddy with complete confidence in their acceptance and unending love. It is beautiful and it is a great picture of how our Abba relates to us and how He wants us to relate to Him. By the way, it is the Holy Spirit who persuades you that you belong at the table of the King and that you will always have a seat at your Dad's table. The Spirit wants us to be fully aware of our sonship and to live in that truth.

September 17

### **Hebrews 12:5-11**

As we consider the analogies between our human families and the church family, it will be helpful to consider what the author of Hebrews wrote concerning our heavenly Father's love for us as His children demonstrated in the form of discipline. We are told in that wonderful book that God, our heavenly Father, disciplines those whom He loves. It is written, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by Him. For the Lord disciplines the one He loves and chastises every son whom He receives." This should be a telling example for how we as parents, and dads in particular, should love our children through proper discipline, training, and guidance.

Far too many people in our society today reject the benefits and wisdom of disciplining children. I am not talking about child abuse, but please know that a "proper" spanking is certainly not child abuse. Solomon wrote in the book of Proverbs, "Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die." This does not mean beat your child with a metal rod. It is meant to be analogous with disciplining as a good shepherd who guides and corrects with the rod and the staff. Sometimes this will require gentle guidance and other times a good "pop". Here is the ugly alternative that I am sure most people do not mean to choose.

Solomon also wrote this, "Discipline your son while there is hope, and do not desire his death" (Prov. 19:18, NASB). This means that there is a window of time for you to have the proper impact on your children. If you fail to discipline them when they are little, you are inviting big trouble later and assisting them in walking into a life of turmoil, irresponsibility, bad choices, and maybe even death. The lack of discipline is equated with participating in your own child's death. I am sure that Solomon had spiritual death in mind as well.

I think of another wonderful proverb that is so revealing as it exposes an all-important truth about our human nature and the nature of all of our children. Proverbs 22:15 says, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of correction will drive it far from him" (NASB). Dear ones, do you believe this is true. All of these silly parents bouncing around like their little children are angels are demonstrating either a rejection of God's teaching or are just ignorant to this truth. Sin is bound up in us and as children, we need discipline and correction, or it will overtake us and control our lives. It is God's plan to utilize godly and wise parents to drive this out of their children and thus to save their spiritual lives as well as lead them to "good" lives in the here and now.

If we go back now to where we began today in the book of Hebrews, I want you to note that it is God's wisdom and love that leads Him to discipline all of us who come to know His as Father. As His children, He knows that we must have discipline in order to grow as His children into the likeness of the Lord Jesus. Think with me today! It is biblically based discipline that is the means by which He demonstrates genuine love for the redeemed and it is this discipline and correction that allows us to participate in His holiness and all of the blessings that flow from that. It is written, "Discipline yields a harvest of righteousness and peace" (Heb. 12:11). He disciplines those whom He loves and we should do the same.

September 18

**1 Peter 1:14-17**

Continuing with the idea of the human family reflecting truths about the church family and vice versa, today I want us to focus for a bit on the need to emulate our parents in conduct, values, and faith. This time it is appropriate to allow the model provided between God and His children to influence the way parents and children should relate to one another in human relationships. This will involve two aspects today. First, it is important that the parent model the correct biblical behavior before their children. Second, it is important that children walk in the ways of their parents.

I do not apologize at all in writing this. This has nothing to do with a child's freedom, self-expression, individuality or any such thing. I am solely speaking from the biblical perspective of God granting parents children who are meant to be led to follow Him. Parents are given the responsibility and privilege of raising their children in the admonition of the Lord (Deut. 6:6-7) so that they will come to know Him, obey Him, and bow the knee to Him as Lord and Savior. This foolish idea that you as a parent are supposed to sit back and let them decide on their own without your guidance and influence is absolutely idiotic. As a parent, you will be held responsible for neglecting so great an assignment.

Let's take a look at 1 Peter 1:14-17 to help us see this truth today. It is written, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" You see, a clear expectation is provided that we as children should conduct ourselves like our Father who is holy. He lives a particular way and thus we whom He has fathered should live that way too. I cannot for the life of me understand why parents think it is wrong to raise and expect your children to follow the Lord as you do. I suppose that maybe it just doesn't matter that much to some parents. We are to reflect His holy character, and I think we can surmise from that, that we should live holy lives as parents and expect our children to do the same; It's biblical my friends.

Peter went on to write, "And if you call on Him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile" (1 Pet. 1:17). Here again we see the very clear expectation that if we have Him as our Father, we are to accept His ways as our own. This implies that when we fail to conduct ourselves like our father, we should be fearful of His discipline. Put this together family! If you truly are a son or daughter, it is completely expected that a good and godly parent is going to discipline you for not following their good desires for your right conduct. Why should we fear? Because discipline is intended to be sharp enough to correct and restore the wayward child.

Another powerful truth given to us in the Bible is found in 1 John 5:1-5 where we are reminded that if we obey out of love for Him we are His children. In other words, our actions will reveal if He is our Father. When they do not on a consistent basis reflect God, we are proving that our father is none other than the devil himself. John 8:44 says as much!

September 19

**1 Timothy 3:4-5, 14-15**

God's fatherly care ought to be reflected in the care Christians exercise towards one another within the church. As the week progresses, I want to shift a bit more to how we are to relate to one another on many different levels in the life of the church. As pastors, Pastor Aaron and I have been called by God to fill the role of overseer or shepherd in this congregation. God and Christ are the ultimate models that we are to imitate (1 Pet. 1:14-15; Rom. 8:29), but in a subordinate sense we are all supposed to imitate the good examples set by more mature believers in our church family (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17). This certainly includes following the leadership and guidance of your God ordained shepherds (Heb. 13:17).

In Paul's first letter to Timothy, he often invokes the analogy of family in order to enable Timothy to better understand the appropriate order and responsibilities in the family of God – the local church. Paul even refers to Timothy as his own "son" in 1 Tim. 1:2,18. He advises him how to relate to older men in the church and to treat them, where possible, like a father. He told him to treat younger men as brothers, and younger women as sisters (1 Tim. 5:1-2). The one I want to focus on today is the admonition that if a man or the church thinks a man is called to lead a church family, he must first have demonstrated that he has led his own human family well (1 Tim. 3:4-5).

In this passage, we must be able to see clearly the connection between male headship in the home and male headship in the church. We must also be cognizant of the need to lead in both places well. This implies that there is a right way and a wrong way to exercise headship. If a man can't lead his own family well, he is certainly not qualified to lead the family of God. Think for a moment of an obvious reality here. God is pointing to the fact that in the church, we are to relate to one another as family. We are not to be strangers, and we must not treat one another as if we are in an unimportant relationship. Just as brothers and sisters, moms and dads, and children are expected to live under the same roof with God-given expectations for the relationships, so it is true in the church family. This is one of the reasons why it is written we weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice (Rom. 12:15). We are connected people in a very meaningful and purposeful way.

I find it interesting that Paul writes to Timothy that if he (Paul) can't get to him, the letter that he has written him is to serve as "instructions" dealing with how people in the church family ought to relate to one another (1 Tim. 3:14-15). Paul is extremely concerned with household order and arrangements. This is true of the human family as well as the church family. Members of the church are to treat one another as they would members of their own family (5:1-2). They are to care for one another in need (5:5,16). The male leaders are to be skillful at managing the household of God well, as demonstrated by their ability to lead their own families well (3:1-7). The point that I want to leave you with today is that good family leadership must be one of the criteria for appointment to the office of the pastor because the very same skills and competencies are required for overseeing one's own house like it is in the house of God. The two distinct entities are to be arranged and led in very similar ways. A man is called to be the father in his own house, and he is called to be the spiritual "father" in the church.

September 20

### **1 Timothy 5:1-8**

My hope this week is that we have begun to see how God portrays the church family in very similar terms as the human family. As you read the verses from the passage chosen for today, meditate on the fact that the church is like a family. Therefore, it is imperative and expected that we treat fellow church members like fellow family members. Notice in the text today that our conduct towards others in the “family” isn’t just about sweeping general obligations to love. There are foundational distinctions introduced by differences in status in the household. We are to treat some like fathers, some like brothers, some like mothers, and others like sisters. There are distinctions that make a difference.

I am saying this friends because I don’t want us to lose sight of the fact that we are all created in the image of God but in both the human family and the church family, there are clear differences between people. Those differences matter and are meant to shape how we relate to one another. A child is supposed to relate to a parent based on these distinctions and God-assigned roles. Husbands and wives relate to one another in view of their unity and distinctions. We must realize that the differences are by God’s design, and they matter immensely.

It bothers me, as it should, when people in our society argue against male headship in the home and the church for an example, based on their unfounded conviction that the world in which Paul was writing was male dominant and that his writing was for an ancient time gone by. The problem with that, among many, is that it fails to consider the truth of unity and distinction woven into the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. I could go back farther than that. There is unity and distinction woven into the very fabric of the Trinity. Could you imagine Jesus in an argument with the Father over equality or submission? I think not!

Almost the entire book of 1 Timothy can be seen as prescriptive types of behavior and organizational structure needed in harmonious family life. The use of the household analogies throughout this book points toward implications regarding leadership and authority in the church. Remember again that leadership in the human family is vested in the husband and father (Eph. 5:22-6:4). The church as God’s household also needs wise and competent leadership. That leadership is to be sought among men who have already demonstrated their abilities in the context of their own families (1 Tim. 3:1-7). Women, by contrast, are not to be placed in authority in the church, because this would not harmonize with the relationship between men and women in marriage as established from creation (1 Tim. 2:11-14). So, the differences between men and women within the context of marriage and family carry over into the different roles assigned in the church. This is at least in part why Paul keeps using family analogies to help young Timothy understand how to arrange and organize the church.



September 21, 2025

### **Ephesians 4:1-3**

I want to end this week of points to ponder on a bit more personal note. I remember some 15 years ago when we as a church experienced an extremely difficult time in the life of our church family. Without rehashing old memories and hurting anyone's feelings, I will just say that one of our leaders made some poor moral choices, upending our young church plant, and threatening the ministry of the church. It was a delicate, difficult, and even somewhat divisive time. I prayed hard and often for wisdom to lead us through those rough and dangerous waters.

I remember deciding to bring my own kitchen table to the church that Saturday before I was to preach on Sunday morning. This would be the first time we had gathered as a church since the fateful news became public. I brought the table, a couple of chairs, and a bottle of water. I moved the podium and set the table right in the middle of the platform from which I would preach. I preached from the chair at the head of the table.

I remember telling stories of my own family's journey and experiences around that table. I spoke of conversations and decisions made in this very spot. The laughter and tears of days gone by flooded by message that morning and with each point that I made I ended with this statement, "But we always worked it out and stuck together because that's what families do." My point was to emphasize that we had lived life together as a family and because of our love for one another and commitment to our family, quitting or leaving was never an option. Families figure it out, commit to one another, and do the hard work of forgiveness, toughness, extending grace, holding each other accountable, and staying until we get through.

Dear ones, I expect that this is how God wants us to work together as a church family too. Surely, there are times when the going gets tough. There are times when we hurt each other's feelings or need to forgive or be forgiven. There are times when our old "flesh" rises up and shows its ugly head. But we stick together because that's what families do. We don't leave each other or write each other off because someone demonstrates they are actually sinners after all, just like the rest of us. None of us are perfect and all need 1 Corinthians 13 kind of love.

I want you to know that it truly breaks my heart when I see or hear of any of you, as members of our family, acting in a way that threatens the well-being of our family or demonstrates immaturity and selfishness towards each other. Church life isn't always easy, but family isn't it. There are hard places along the way, but for the family who puts in the hard work of loving each other like our Lord has called us to, it is infinitely wonderful and rewarding. We are told, commanded even, to love one another and to bear one another's burdens (Eph. 4:1-3). How can any of you choose to live contrary to this passage and feel like you're right with God? It blows my mind! Family members "bear with one another in love gently and patiently with humility" (v. 2). Jesus said others will know you are one of His children if you love one another in this fashion (John 13:34-35).