

It's getting easier by the day to live your life with little to no interaction with other people. You can order groceries online and have them delivered to your trunk without leaving your car. You can order basically anything on Amazon, and it's on your doorstep in 2 days. And if you do for some reason shop in-store, you can use self-scan checkouts and avoid a cashier. A few weeks ago, my family and I went to Taco Bell, and the 3 families ahead of us went straight to the new self-order computer kiosks, even though there wasn't a line to order from the poor girl at the counter, who looked very lonely. You can take classes online without stepping foot in a classroom; browse a used car lot without a pushy salesman; even have a doctor's appointment without leaving your house. You can even go to church online, without needing to get dressed, or even shower! While we can all agree that those innovations are extremely convenient, the question is, are they good for us?

In a world growing increasingly isolated, the numbers are telling. Nearly 25% of U.S. adults report almost always feeling lonely, isolated, and lacking companionship. 54% almost always feel like no one knows them well. Loneliness is the #1 fear of young people today, and 42% of Millennial women are more afraid of being lonely than a cancer diagnosis.

While God's Word doesn't address ordering kiosks, or curbside grocery pickup, it does say plenty about our need for Christian community. The large number of lonely people is evidence that God wired humans with a need for community and connection with others. That isn't just true secularly. It's even more true spiritually!

But with online worship livestreams that allow you to "go to church" from home, and a growing mistrust of organized religion, some might push back, "Why do I need to go to church with others when I can worship from my couch by myself?" Today as we celebrate Welcome Home Sunday, we want to understand **The Need for Christian Family.**

When we say we're a "family" of believers, we're not being cute or catchy. That's what God call us! Our sermon text from Hebrews 2 reveals to us the remarkable truth that the eternal, all-powerful God of the universe is...our brother!

What's even more mind-blowing, consider what Jesus was willing to do in order to make us part of God's family. Jesus, who is "**the heir of all things,**" "**the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being,**" the one who "**sustains all things by his powerful word,**" this same **Jesus...was made a little lower than the angels.**" The Son of God willingly set aside his full power and glory, leaving behind a perfect life in the perfect heaven, humbly born of a virgin to become true man.

And he didn't pop in for a quick visit and leave as quickly as possible, like you might do with some relatives. He spent over 3 decades in the filthy, vile, dumpster, full of death, suffering, and sin, that we call earth. Like a powerful king leaving his castle to live on the streets, but on an infinitely greater scale.

And he did it...for you! He lived a perfect life in this perfect world, and also "**suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.**" And through his perfect life and innocent death, Jesus "**brought many sons and daughters to glory.**" We haven't earned the right to be part of God's family. And yet, as Hebrews tells us, "**both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.**"

Have you ever had a relative you're ashamed to claim as family? Somebody like Cousin Eddie from *Christmas Vacation*? Maybe a sibling or a cousin who really messed up their life, or a dad who always tells lame dad jokes in front of your friends? Maybe you don't tell people they're family, or if you do, you hang your head in shame. If there ever was a brother who had reason to be ashamed of his siblings, it's Jesus. A perfect brother with siblings who really messed up their lives? Instead Jesus joyfully calls us his siblings as if we were holy and perfect. And we are! Because Jesus has made us perfect!

That beautiful, comforting, remarkable message is what God reminds us every week when we gather together to worship with our church family! But can't I hear that same message by myself at home? You could access sermons from far better preachers than me; you can listen to worship music performed by groups with superior talent and resources; all from the comfort of home! So, what's the value in going to church? Christian family and community!

This sermon series is called "Welcome Home," because we are a family of believers, and home is where a family gathers. But let me ask you: Does this feel like "home" to you? Some of you might give a resounding "Yes!" This is where your dearest friends and family are, where you serve God in meaningful ways. You crave being here, and leave filled with the love of God and your church family. That's a beautiful blessing!

But for others, this might not feel like home at all. Maybe you feel like a lonely, disconnected, unwanted stranger from the moment you walk in the doors to when you leave.

And when people don't feel like their church is family, they respond in similar ways to how we'd react if our biological families didn't feel like family. Maybe you avoid the family completely. Maybe this is the first time you've been to church in a very long time. Maybe you only visit the family on special occasions, like holidays, out of a sense of obligation. Maybe this is the first time you've been here since Christmas or Easter. Or maybe you almost always come to the family gatherings, but you don't try connecting with anyone, like the person sitting in the corner playing on their phone the whole time. Maybe you come to church, but you never talk to anyone, leave as quickly as possible, and never volunteer to serve. Sadly, if we cut ourselves off from the family of believers in any of those three ways, we miss out on so many of the benefits and blessings God gives us through a Christian community!

But can we blame people for not feeling like their church is family, if the people there don't treat them like family? Can you imagine going home for Thanksgiving next month, and none of your family even seems to notice you're there? While everyone else catches up, you stand alone, ignored. It would be hard to go back, right?

Imagine going to your church home, but no one tries to connect with you, or make you feel like part of the family? Why bother leaving the couch, right? Even if this place feels like home to you, is it possible that you treat those in your circle like family, but not everyone else?

On "Welcome Home Sunday" we rightly celebrate our family of believers! But it's also a time for us to reflect, confess, and repent for the times when we've cut ourselves off from the blessing God gives us through a family of believers, and the times we've failed to make everyone in the church feel like family.

And that's exactly why we come. Because each week, the pastor, called by God to serve this family of believers, looks you in the eye and says, "I forgive you all your sins!" And you can trust it, because Jesus became **"fully human in every way...that he might make atonement for the sins of the people."** Twice a month, with fellow believers all around you, you get to receive Jesus' body and blood along with bread and wine, and hear "Given for you for the forgiveness of your sins!"

Yes, you can hear a sermon, or sing a worship song while tuning in to church from home, but what you can't get is the blessing of a Christian community God has wired us to need. When I'm alone, I'm not very good at pointing out my own sins. I need others in a Christian family to lovingly point out when I'm straying. The fact is, I'm not very good at reminding myself that I'm forgiven when I've sinned. I need others in a Christian family to lovingly remind me that Christ has forgiven all my sins.

When the world convinces me I'm naïve or foolish because of my faith, and that no one believes in God anymore, I need this community of people from all different walks of life who share my faith in Jesus to encourage me. When I'm suffering, what a blessing to know that my Christian family is storming God's throne with countless prayers for me. We need each other, brothers and sisters.

The first lesson from Ecclesiastes is a beautiful picture of the need for Christian family. **"Two is better than one, because they have a good return for their labor."** No matter how hard I try, I couldn't have brought nearly 600 guests to our church campus for Fall Festival yesterday, or raised \$100,000 to expand our ministry by myself. We need each other. **"If either of them falls down, one can help the other up."** When I fall into sin, or fall into despair, I need others to pick me up with loving care. **"Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves."** Satan loves isolation. But when I'm tempted, it's easier to fight when you have fellow believers fighting the same battles as you, to point each other to the one who, because **"he was tempted, is able to help those who are being tempted."**

That's the challenge, isn't it? To do what we can as a family of believers, to step outside our comfort zones, to sacrifice the time to build relationships with others, to make ourselves vulnerable in sharing what's happening in our lives with others, so that we can better treat each other as the family God intends us to be.

Here's a helpful mindset change. What if me being a part of a church family isn't just for me and my benefit? What if being part of this family is for others, and their benefit? You could worship from home, but what about those who are encouraged by seeing you face adversity with faith? What about those who are encouraged because they know you're praying for them? Or are there to be a listening ear when they need to talk? What about those in the same stage of life as you, who are encouraged that although you face the same struggles, you also are looking to Jesus for strength?

In a world growing increasingly isolated and lonely, remember that God has given a Christian family to build you up and encourage you, and for you to build up and encourage! Look at those sitting around you. These are your siblings! Yes, they have flaws; they are sinners; they will fail to love you like family. But Christ isn't ashamed to call them family. And neither should we. Welcome Home, where our family gathers!