

The Family Course

Joining a new family

In the New Testament Jesus is seen reassuring his disciples that they have been called into a new family (Matthew 12:46-50; Romans 1:6; Jude 1). Jesus makes it clear that his family reflect his likeness and values.

New DNA

In these days of DNA testing we can identify the family to which a child belongs; this new family has a love for the Father and his children (John 15:12; 1John 4:16). They have been chosen out of the world and called into a new relationship with him (John 15:19; Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 3: 26; Ephesians 1:3-6; 1Thessalonians 1:4). The Greek word **Ekklesia** means – ‘called out ones’ – those who have moved from one family to another one. John outlines this new calling in 1John 3:1 **“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God. And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him”**.



Old DNA

So which family do we belong to? The one that loves the Father and his children, or the World's family which sometimes believes it is in touch with God through being born in a Christian country, having Christian parents, or doing ones best and going to church!

The Bible makes it clear that the old DNA will never bring man and God together and describes it as **sin**. The Bible states that sin has **separated** mankind from God (Isaiah 59:2) and has **hardened** the hearts of people towards him (Ephesians 4:18, 19). It has **removed us** from God's presence and we are unable to meet his standard of **holiness** (Genesis 3:23; Romans 3:23). Its **power** enslaves us and makes us **slaves** of our own vices! (Mark 7:20-23; John 8:34; Romans 7:14-15). It has **cut us off** from God eternally and everyone must face his **judgement** (Romans 6:23a & Hebrews 9:27).

Jesus and Jesus alone has fulfilled the moral law of God and through his finished work on the cross is able to save us from our sins – (Isaiah 53:6; John 1:29; Colossians 2:13-15; 1Peter 1:18-19; 1John 3:5). To those who acknowledge his unique role in bringing us back to God he promises to take their sin and to give them a new birth (John 1:10-13; 3:3-8, 16, 5:24; 14:6). **When we are born again we enter a new family with Jesus at the heart** (Colossians 1:13-14).

New Relationship with God

To experience the new birth and enter God's family and enjoy our new relationship with him we need to a) turn to God in repentance and b) have faith in the Lord Jesus (Acts 20:21). **Repentance is seeking to repair a broken relationship**; it brings us back into a real relationship with God the Father. We acknowledge our sinfulness and accept God's forgiveness in Christ which brings us back into fellowship with God (2Corinthians 5:17, 21). Our lifestyles show that we have changed from following our own sinful habits and have asked God to take control of our lives (Matthew 3:8; Luke 19:8-10; Acts 3:19-20; 1Thessalonians 1:9-10). There is also a moment in our lives when we sense that Jesus is Lord. In other words we confess our faith in him before others, "If you confess with your mouth, **'Jesus is Lord**, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved (Romans 10:9-10).

This new birth is identified by four new values or new DNA in our lives:

A new love for God (1John 4:16)
A new hatred of sin (1John 3:9)
A new love for other Christians (1John 3:14, 4:7)
A new relationship with God (1John 4:13, 5:1, 11-12)

God's DNA begins to work its supernatural work in our hearts over time. Slowly we and our brothers and sisters should begin to reflect the likeness of the Lord Jesus - (Romans 8:29, 1Corinthians 15:49, 2Corinthians 3:17-18). This process of becoming more like the Lord Jesus and less like ourselves is called sanctification. Paul puts it this way **"To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints"** (Romans 1:7a). We are called into the family likeness – just as people can see the reflection of our natural parents in our facial features so also people should be able to see in our characters the transforming work of God's grace. In our language, thoughts and character Jesus' Lordship should slowly transform us (Ephesians 4:29-32, 5:3-5; Colossians 3:1-4; 1Peter 1:13-16).

Father's instructions – Believer's Baptism

Just as Jesus obeyed his Father's instructions we also his brothers and sisters are called to **identify** with him and his death and resurrection by being baptized (Matthew 3:13-17).

A Police Officer or soldier must get into his or her uniform before they can be identified as people who serve the Queen. Christians also need to follow the instructions of their **commanding officer** the Lord Jesus. We know from scripture that those who follow the Lord through the waters of baptism are **getting into uniform**.

"Those who accepted his message were baptised" (Acts 2:41)

"He got up and was baptised..." (Acts 9:18b)

"Can anyone keep these people from being baptised with water?" (Acts 10:47)

"Many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptised" (Acts 18:8)

"On hearing this, they were baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:5)

Baptism was not an extra item to be fulfilled at a later date it was expected that those who joined the family did not delay in identifying with the Lord Jesus' death and resurrection.

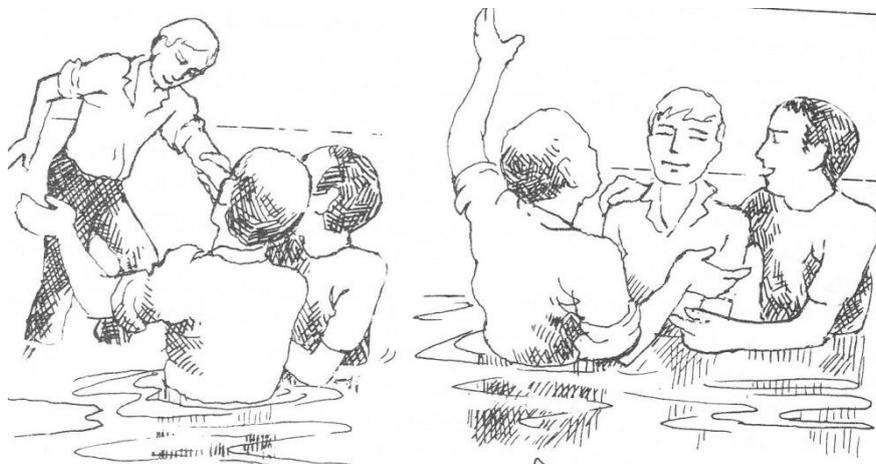
"Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16)

"Repent and be baptised, everyone of you, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven" (Acts 2:38)

Jesus expects us to obey His commands – "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you... (Matthew 28:19-20).

The word 'baptise' is the English form of the Greek word 'Baptizo' which means to immerse, submerge or plunge into a liquid. It was used by dyers to describe the act of dipping material in dye to the point where the cloth completely changes its colour.

The believer is showing the world that they have been transformed through the grace of God and is testifying to those present that they are willing to follow him just as he followed the Father.



Believer's Baptism does not make you a Christian but it does mark you out as one

Baptism Deeper meaning

The scriptures show that on the cross Jesus not only dealt with the penalty of sin (separation from God) but also the power of sin. In Charles Wesley's hymn, 'O for a thousand tongues to sing...' he clearly acknowledges the deeper meaning of being crucified with Christ – **"He breaks the power of cancelled sin and sets the prisoner free" (4th verse).**

As the believer goes down under the water he or she identifies with Christ's death. The believer is buried under the water and the power of sin is broken symbolically.



Paul in Romans 6:1-14 makes it clear that there is a victory for the Christian over the power of sin. He clearly teaches that the old self serving life can be crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20, 5:24). There is a cutting away of the old nature as the dominant power in our lives (Colossians 2:11-12; Galatians 3:26-27; 1Thessalonians 4:3a, 5:23). Jesus calls every believer to leave their old life behind and take up their cross and follow him (Mark 8:34-35; Luke 9:23-24; John 12:23-26).

Paul puts it this way in 2Corinthians 4:10 "We always carry around in our bodies the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our bodies". We are to reckon ourselves dead to the promptings of the old nature. A dead man cannot be provoked, he just does not respond to the values and motivations that once governed his life! (Romans 6:6-7, 14) Now in Christ he has by faith moved into the life of Christ which has replaced the old with the new. If you had an opportunity to move from a dilapidated, run down, rat-infested building to a new flat would you hesitate? The move requires a step of faith but once made enables the Christian to enjoy the blessings God has for them.

Father's Gift – Baptism (Anointing) in the Holy Spirit

John the Baptist testifies that Jesus would baptise his followers with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:7-8, Luke 3:16, John 1:32-34). Jesus himself was anointed with the Holy Spirit to fulfil his ministry (Luke 3:22 4:1, 14, 18-19; John 3:34). This anointing with the Holy Spirit is promised to the disciples in Acts 1:8,

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses”

In Acts 10:38 we read “...God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and ... he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him”.

Not one miracle happens in the ministry of Jesus before he was **anointed** with the **Holy Spirit** and **power**.

This anointing for service does not make people Christ like for that is the process of sanctification where a believer surrenders their life to Christ. Slowly the fruit of the Holy Spirit transforms them into His likeness and character (Galatians 5:22-26).

At Pentecost people thought the disciples were drunk, such was the anointing they had received after prayer and fasting (Acts 2:13).

This promise is for everyone not just a select few: “I will pour out my Spirit upon all people”- (Acts 2:17).

This is not just an initial deposit of the Holy Spirit that comes when a person receives Christ (John 20:22; Ephesians 1:13-14 & Romans 8:15-17). It is a deluge that enables the Christian to minister God's word and to show others that Jesus is the same **yesterday, today and forever** (Hebrews 13:8).

It is clear from scripture that we become eligible for the gifts of the Spirit and a new level of God's power in our lives after we have been filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; 1Corinthians 12:7-11).

The experience of most believers is that they are given a supernatural ability to speak in tongues as they are filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4, 8:14-17, 9:17, 10:44-46, 11:15-17,19:1-7).

They are able to worship God in a new way (John 4:23-24; 1Corinthians 14:15, 18; 2Corinthians 3:17). Their spiritual ears also become sensitive to the voice of God's Spirit – (Mark 13:11; John 10:4 Acts 1:2, 13:2).

It is important to ask him for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, **“If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those that ask him!”**(Luke 11:13). Having prayed, and believed God has heard your prayer, begin to praise God and worship Him with thanksgiving. As you seek God with prayer and fasting and relax in his presence He draws near to you and enables you to worship Him who is Spirit (Matthew 7:7-11; John 7: 37-39). Jesus sought the Father for his special anointing and we should also follow his example if we are to be Baptised in the Holy Spirit. It is also clear from scripture that a believer should continue to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It is not a one off experience, for God has promised us times of renewal and blessing – (Acts 3:19; Ephesians 5:18-20).



Family relational gifts

A balanced individual will realise that the gifts must be operated in **love** (1Corinthians13:1-8; 14:1a).



In Romans 12:3-8 Paul places relational gifts such as **encouragement** alongside ministry gifts such as **teaching**. Their importance is vital if the family is going to function properly as Jesus stresses that the world will know the Christian by their love. We are to love each other in the same self-sacrificing way that Christ has loved us. The way that we show that love is through acts of generosity, mercy, service and encouragement. The first disciples had such a transforming experience of God's love that those who had more than they needed sold off their extra fields and houses to meet the needs of their brothers and sisters in Christ (Acts 2:44-45,4:32-37; Romans 12:13; 1Corinthians12: 25-26, 16:15-16; 1Timothy 6:17-18; 1John3:16-18).

The early church prayed for each other consistently and Acts is a book full of prayer and people praying. "They all joined together constantly in prayer..." "They devoted themselves to...prayer..." "When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God..." "After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly" "...he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark where many people had gathered to pray" "So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off". "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them".

These examples of the church gathering for prayer in Acts show us again how much the church is a family. They prayed constantly together for each other during times of persecution, commissioning and whenever they needed to seek the Father on behalf of one another.

The church was not independent but inter-dependent as the "**one another verses**" in scripture show us. We are to be devoted to one another in brotherly love and to honour one another above ourselves - to live in harmony with one another and to practise hospitality -(Romans 12:9-21; Galatians 5:6b; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12-14; 1Thessalonians 4:9-10; Hebrews 3:13; 1Peter 4: 8-11). Paul shows how the spiritual family should support one another and in Romans 16:13 he writes "Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me also". The Christian needs his family around him as it is clear that the natural family can turn against those who follow Christ and his teachings (Matthew 10:34-39).

Growing in a new Family

If a 40year old lady walked into your church still playing with her dolls from childhood many would comment on her lack of maturity and growth. Today the church is struggling with those who have failed to grow up and who live **vicariously off the discipleship of others!** They are part time followers of Christ who have failed to move from the milk of God's word to the meat of discernment and maturity.

Paul describes these immature believers as infants, worldly, quarrelsome and followers of men (1Corinthians 3:1-4). Tossed about by strong personalities who have manipulated them and led them astray (Ephesians 4:13-15). They are unable to discern or teach due to their lack of knowledge of the scriptures (Hebrews 5:11-14).

John writes in 1John 2:14 "I write to you, young men, because you are strong and the word of God lives in you and you have overcome the evil one".

They knew God's word by heart and had grown in the grace of God being slowly transformed into his likeness. Jesus himself sets the example of victorious Christian living when he answers Satan by quoting scripture when He is tested – "**It is written...**" (Matthew 4:1-11). All God's servants will suffer some form of persecution if they follow the teachings of Christ (2Timothy 3:12). Like Timothy these young men had a maturity that set them apart from the rest. They did not remain children who just knew God as Father and who had their sins forgiven (1John2:12,13c). They had joined his army and were his soldiers dressed and equipped by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 6:10). They knew how to deal with temptation just like Timothy (1Corinthians 10:13; 2Timothy 2:22; 1John 5:21). They were not ignorant of the devil's devices and would not be outwitted by him (2Corinthian 2:5-11). Their Christian character shielded them from his darts and spoke to the world about Christ's righteousness.

Time and time again Satan has been able to gain a foothold in churches through those who have failed to mature or discern. The work of Christ has been held back due to a lack of understanding of some of Satan's weapons:-

1) Broken Fellowship with God

The very first act of Satan was to destroy the fellowship that God had with his creation -

(Genesis 3:1-9) Any sheep that wanders away from the flock (family) is vulnerable to the attacks of wild beasts which only have one aim in mind - the sheep's destruction. In 1Peter 5:8-9 it describes the person who has wandered away from the safe environment of Christian fellowship and encouragement and has been picked off by the devil who longs to destroy the sheep's walk with God and His people. **The New Testament describes the church as a family of believers (Galatians 6:10) and 'God's household' (Ephesians 2:19). We need our family and we need to belong to it (Acts 2:44).**

'All the believers were together and had everything in common'. The early Christians not only sacrificed for each other but enjoyed being together and benefitted from the experience. They would meet in each other's homes and gather for public worship. Christians are described as a body and just like the human body needs all its parts to function properly we all need each other to function fully as a family of brothers and sisters in Christ (Hebrews 10:24-25).

2) Greed

In 1Timothy 6:10 we read, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many grief’s”. This description sums up what happened to Judas as he was unable to contain his own greed and sold Jesus to the authorities for 30 pieces of silver. It says in Luke 22:3 “Then Satan entered Judas...” in other words his greed gave Satan a **foothold** in his life and although he tried to repent later he could not get over his betrayal of Jesus. In Ecclesiastes 2: 1-10 - King Solomon talks about his great wealth but realises that **materialism deadens the soul** – “Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun” (verse 11). Jesus constantly warns the disciples of the need to be content with what you have as nobody can serve God and money (Matthew 6:19-24; Luke 12:15). Paul warns that greed is a form of idolatry and they that worship money cannot enter into the Kingdom of Christ and God (Ephesians 5:5). It is fine for the Christian to have money but not for money to have the Christian! Those blessed with material wealth are encouraged to follow the Lord’s example and to be generous and willing to share the prosperity God has blessed them with (Matthew 19:16-30; Acts 20:35; 1Timothy 6: 17-19).

3) Slander and Malicious Gossip

When Paul left Ephesus he warned the elders that men from within the church would arise and distort the truth in order to draw followers after themselves (Acts 20:30). Paul was not ignorant of **the Devil’s schemes** he forewarned the young Christian converts in Corinth to avoid people who only have their own selfish interests at heart and were full of their own self-importance –“**Not that we Lord it over your faith...**” “**We do not preach ourselves...**” “**...We have exploited no-one**” (2Corinthians 1:24, 4:5, 7:2). Paul and his fellow workers’ integrity was being attacked (2Corinthians 12:17-18) and the false apostles were trying to imply that they wanted the money being collected for the poor of Jerusalem to enrich themselves! The Father of all lies (Satan) knows how to twist the truth not only in regards to doctrine but also in character assassination. That is why those that lead must lead by example and be above blame (1Corinthians 11:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:6-7; 2Thessalonians 3:7; 1Timothy 3:1-12; Hebrews 13:7). A good Christian character is one of the best ways to extinguish the devil’s dart of slander. Paul also makes it clear that a Deacon’s wife also must not be a ‘malicious talker’ (1Timothy 3:11). It is not just leaders who should avoid slander and malicious gossip but all followers of Christ should reflect his character not their own sinful nature (1Timothy 5:13). Jesus does not accept the slanderous remarks of the religious rulers of the time and makes it clear where their source comes from (Matthew 12:34 - John 8:42-47). It can be very dispiriting on the Christian journey of discipleship when you meet up with immature Christians who not only slander their fellow brothers and sisters but fail to realise that they themselves are being manipulated by the father of all lies (Ephesians 6:12). In James chapter 3 verses 11-12 he points out that the fruit of an uncontrolled tongue destroys fellowship and love between brothers and sisters of Christ. Peter had to learn to control his tongue as many a time he was motivated by his own desires and pride and he came close to being manipulated by one of Satan’s greatest weapons -the uncontrolled tongue (Matthew 16:21-23).

4) False Teaching

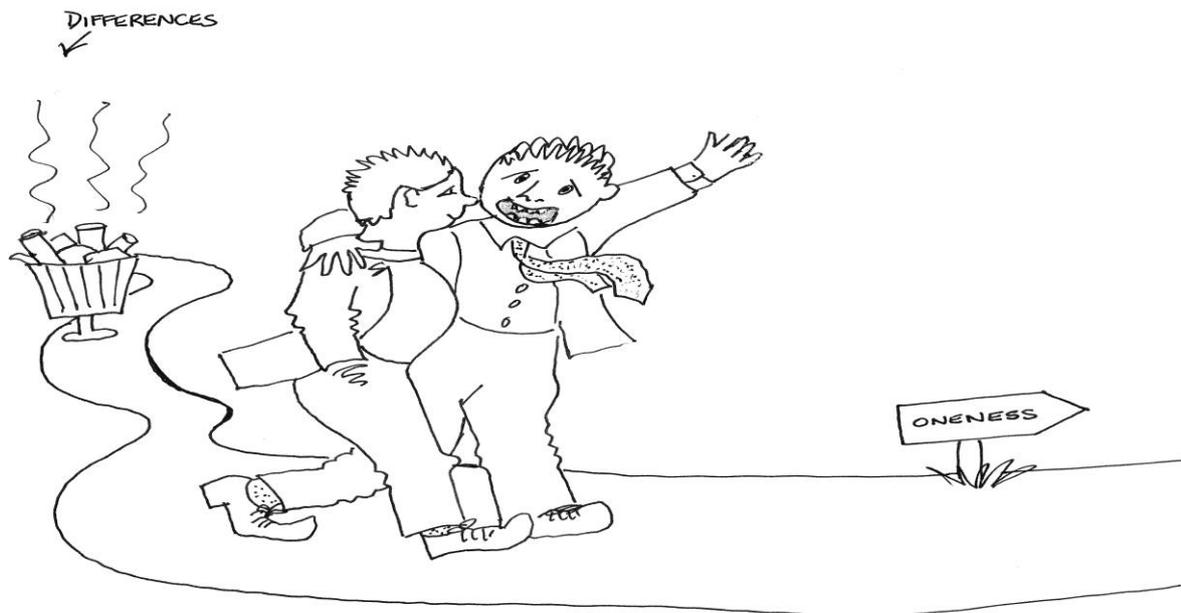
All Christian leaders at some time will have to deal with false teaching on a minor or major scale. Paul makes sure that the timid Timothy does not forsake the need to correct gently those who oppose good Christian teaching (2Timothy 2:23-26). He points out that these people have been led astray by the 'trap of the devil' which has been set to ensnare them in their own conceit. In other words he is the main influence in their lives and has blinded them from seeing the truth of godly doctrine (2Corinthians 11:13-15, 2Timothy 3:13-17). Paul throughout Galatians warns the Christians to ignore those who taught that you could not be justified by faith alone in Christ's sacrifice (Galatians 5:1-15). Jesus also warns the disciples to not be taken in by the false teaching of the Pharisees; who loved to add extra man - made laws (Matthew 23; Luke 12:1). John warns new Christians to avoid the teaching of the early Gnostics who said that Jesus had not died on the cross (1 John 4:1-6). The Christian must build on the foundations of scripture laid down by the Lord Jesus and the Apostles (Matthew 7:24-27; Ephesians 2:19-22; 1Timothy 1:3-7).

5) Sexual sin and allurements

Paul points out in Romans 12:2 that the Christian should not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of their minds. He wants the Christians to avoid all the old patterns of thinking which lead to sin. God's word is to replace patterns of immoral thinking that focused on lust, and sexual immorality. One of Satan's weapons that constantly cause Christians to fall is the allurements of the opposite sex. Time and time again in the Old and New Testament followers of God are tested and tempted to follow the old sinful patterns rooted in sexual sin. Joseph has to flee Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39:7-23) and Lot is seduced by his daughters! Even king David falls for the attractions of another man's wife (2Samuel 11:2-27), which led to the manslaughter of Uriah and the rebuke of Nathan the prophet (2Samuel 12:1-25). John the Baptist is killed by Herod the tetrarch after he denounces his sexual sin of taking his brother's wife (Matthew 14:1-12). The renewal of the mind is vital if a Christian is to avoid being led astray by thoughts that need to be crucified with Christ. The new nature must be fed and the old starved if God is going to bless our lives and our families. James and Paul make it clear that evil desires do come and if yielded to can cut the Christian off from fellowship with God - (James 1:13-15 Ephesians 5: 3-5; Colossians 3:2).

6) Broken Relationship

Jesus has much to say in the area of forgiveness and reconciliation, as one of Satan's greatest weapons is unforgiveness. When Peter made his rash statement that he would not let the Lord down when the Temple Guards came to arrest Jesus – he was comforted by these words – **“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon that your faith may not fail, And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers”** (Luke 22:31-32). His words encouraged Peter and strengthened him during a time of discouragement. God's forgiveness is so vast in comparison with ours! (Matthew 18:21-35; Luke 7: 36-50, 15:11-32) John and James in Luke 9:51-56 are willing to bring down fire on the heads of the Samaritans (sworn enemies of the Jews) but Jesus constantly shows that forgiveness and reconciliation are his values in contrast to the world's unforgiveness and resentment - (Luke 23:34,43). The disciples themselves are taught that forgiveness is not an optional extra in the work of the kingdom, they must follow the Lord's example in forgiving those who have repented - (Matthew 5:21-24, 6:9-15, 18: 15-17,21-22; Luke 17:3-4). Paul also pleads with Euodia and Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord in Philippians 4:2 as they were in danger of splitting the church. A spirit of unforgiveness has destroyed many a church family and placed a wedge between believers. God longs for us to be reconciled to each other so we can enjoy again his presence and blessing- (1Corinthians 11:27-32).



Leaders in the Family

When Montgomery took over responsibility for the 8th army during the Second World War he studied all he could about the tactics and strategy of the German general Rommel. Victory was impossible without developing a counter strategy that would outwit the **old desert fox**.

Christians who fail to recognise the enemy's tactics are likely to remain spiritual pigmies who are often a bad advertisement for the Christian faith. The young men in 1John 2:14 had grown in their faith to such a level they were able to represent their church families (Acts 20:4; Ephesians 6:21-22; Philippians 2:25; Colossians 1:7, 4:7-18). They were soldiers in the Lord's army who had put on their armour and knew how to use the weapons at their disposal: prayer, faith - and His righteousness - (2Corinthians 10: 3-5, Ephesians 6:13-18). They took the sword of the spirit and used its cutting edges to destroy Satan's grip in their lives and the lives of others – (Colossians 1:13-14, 2: 9-10, 15; Hebrews 4:12).

In 1John 2:13 John outlines the ultimate aim of God's spirit and word is to shape us into those who can help others to grow in the family. John puts it this way, "I write to you **fathers** because you have known him who is from the beginning". If you were required to give the characteristics of a man or woman of God what would you say? John says that they had grown through their life experiences to such an extent that they had come to know Christ in all his fullness.

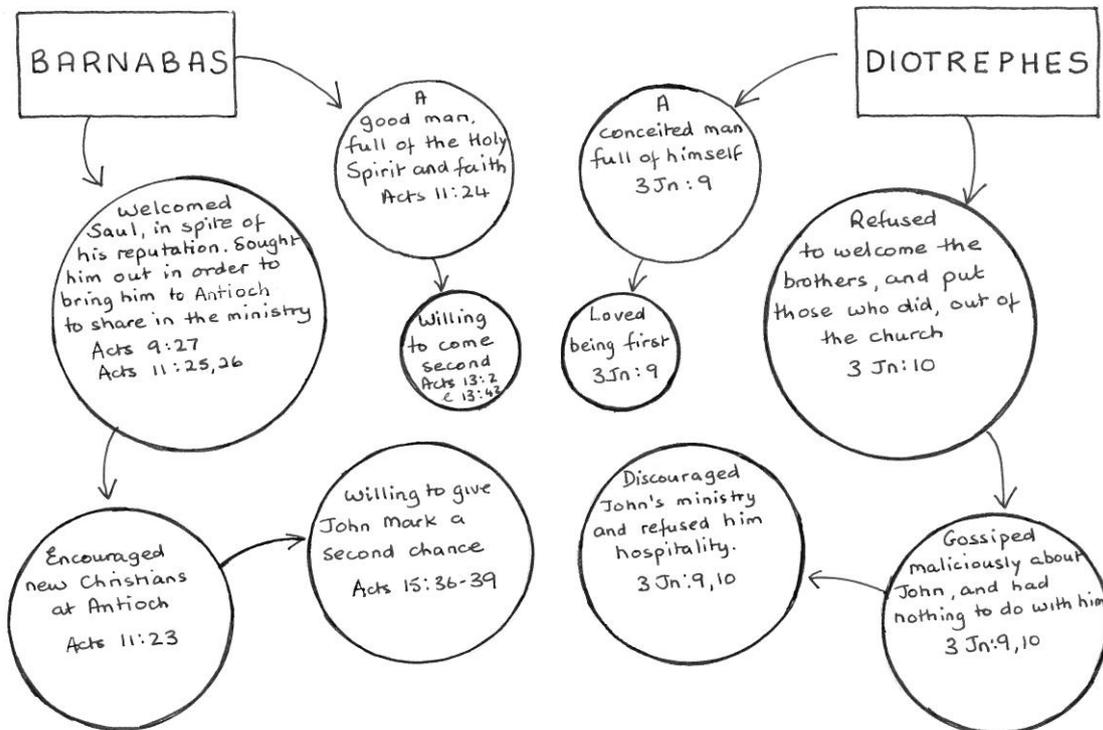
When Paul was an old man awaiting execution in Rome and chained to a Roman guard he said the greatest thing that ever happened to him is that he came to know the Lord. He even says at the end of his life that he still wanted to get to know the Lord even better than what he had already experienced. Some people **go** through life's experiences others like Paul **grow** through them (Philippians 3:7-11).

Paul **nurtured** young Christians and **discipled** and **instructed** them (1Corinthians 4:14-17; Galatians 4:19; Colossians 1:28-29; 1Thessalonians 2:7, 11-12, 3:10, 4:1-2). His life was spent helping others to grow up! He followed Jesus' command and wanted to make disciples who would in turn make other disciples. All Christians are called to help others to grow up in Christ (Proverbs 19:20, 27:6; Colossians 3:16). Not only those blessed with ministry gifts! We can all help in the maturing process if we are prepared to befriend and admonish one another!

In some African villages it is not just the **village elders** that help to discipline others, the **whole village** plays a part and especially those adults **mature** enough to speak the truth in love (Galatians 6:1; Romans 15:14; Ephesians 4:15). The whole aim of the family is to present every man and woman mature in Christ.

Jesus asks His disciples to follow his example – "**Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you**" (John 13:14-15). The disciples struggled with this concept of humility from the beginning of their ministry as they followed Christ (Matthew 18:1-5; Mark 9:33-36; Luke 9: 46-48). They argued not only about who would be the greatest but forgot that Christ himself had left heaven for them! Pride has often blocked the ministry of the Holy Spirit and self praise and self importance is condemned by the apostles as they eventually followed the Lord's example (Matthew 11:29-30; 1Peter 5:1-7). God resists the proud and we are asked to submit ourselves to his Lordship not ours! (James 4: 6-7). The Lord's example found in Philippians 2 should convince us that rivalry and arrogance are the enemies of the work of Christ, Paul puts it this way "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourself" (Philippians 2:3).

Two men stand out in the New Testament - they are a perfect oxymoron – complete opposites in their ministry and attitude towards others - one is **Barnabas** and the other is **Diotrephes**. As the chart points out one was full of encouragement and the other was full of arrogance!



Sadly, the relations of Diotrephes are still with us today and have gained a foothold in some churches! Satan's rebellion which started in Heaven is not only God displacement but human displacement also!

Pride is of course one of the devil's tactics in keeping the church from reaching its full maturity in Christ. Even Paul had his thorn in the flesh to stop him from becoming conceited (2Corinthians 12:7). Whatever the thorn was it shows that God does not allow anyone of us to take His place in the lives of others. It has been said that the ego stands for **Edging God Out** and it is essentially **God displacement**. A Diotrephes has no time for the ministry of others and has lost his or her understanding of the ministry gifts outlined in Ephesians 4:11-13. Different ministries play a part in bringing the believer to maturity and the gifts that are mentioned are given in their plural form. It is clear that within a church of a reasonable size there are people with the gift of teaching, evangelism and pastoral care and the role of any oversight is to help them find their place in a ministry team (Acts 13:2-3).

This does not mean that they should not be **tested first** as Paul makes it clear in 1Timothy 3:10, 5:22a that Timothy should not lay hands quickly on anybody as they may become conceited and fail to release others into their role within the body of Christ (1Timothy 3:6-7).

They also must realise that they have to remain **loyal, faithful** and **respectful** to those in the body such as a pastor or presiding elder who has the responsibility for the main ministry in a local church (1Thessalonians 5:12-13).

Paul and Peter both refer to those under their leadership as **sons**. They were special people who had served alongside the apostles and could be trusted (Philippians 2:19-22). Just like any father Paul and Peter encouraged and trained those under their leadership and released them into their ministry (1Timothy 1:18a; Titus 2:15; 1Peter 5:12-13).

House group leaders, youth leaders and those whose talents and ministry have been a blessing to the local church should be encouraged to take their place in the body of Christ. Clearly they must have a servant heart if they in turn are to **develop** and **release** the ministry of others (Galatians 5:13; Ephesians 5:21; 2Timothy 2:1-2; Hebrews 13:17).

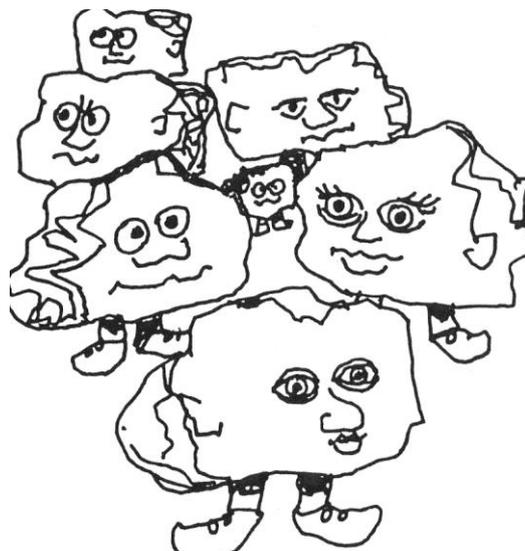
Jesus enjoyed a closer relationship with some men than with others. For example, of the seventy disciples whom he sent out (Luke 10:1) there were twelve with whom he was particularly close (Matthew 10:2). From among those, **Peter, James and John** seem to have been **special friends** and marked out for leadership (Matthew 17:1, 26:37; Luke 8:51; John 21:15-19).

It is important to realise that men gifted in teaching and preaching need the **financial support** of the body of Christ to fulfil their ministry (Luke 8:1-3; 1Corinthians 9:11-12; 2Corinthians 9:7; 1Timothy 5:17-18).

Today, just like the early Apostles some leaders have a wider ministry. A Bishop, Methodist Superintendent, Regional Minister, and Missionary may look after a number of churches but their aim must always be to place the **right leaders in the right place at the right time with the right ministry gifting**.

This **wider ministry** role that the early Apostles fulfilled is vital if the church is going to experience growth and blessing according to God's blue print revealed to us in the scriptures.

We are being built together as **living stones** into a corporate entity to express Christ's life to the world. This process requires the spiritual ministry of each one of us. Just as a house is constructed by many different **skilled craftsmen**, so the Lord's house can only be built properly if the materials and spiritual tools he has provided are used! (1Corinthians 12: 4-11, 27-31 14: 3,26; Ephesians 2:20-22, 4:7-16; Colossians 3:16; 1Thesalonians 5:19-22; 1Peter2:4-5 9, 4:10).



Loneliness is a 21st century phenomenon and even people who join a local evangelical church can feel isolated, rejected and in need of real friends. But God longs for us to enjoy his presence and the love of our spiritual brothers and sisters. In Psalm 68:6 we read, "God sets the lonely into families". He wants us to rediscover the true meaning of family where there is a sense of belonging and encouragement. 'The Family Course' is written to help others rediscover this spiritual truth.

'The Family Course' is being used by evangelists and church planters in the UK and abroad and is available in A5 booklet form from the printers:

info@shepherdprinters.com