

I. Introduction

A. This sounds like beginning of an expose on 60 Minutes or Nightline

1. A letter from a distraught parent to a government official... or is it?

I am writing to you to plead on behalf of my son. All of his life, this boy has had the best education, and he was well on his way to a great career. But just when it seemed his future was secure, he was snatched by a strange religious sect who now controls his every move. It is as if he is no longer part of our family nor the world he lived in before they took him. I implore you and the government to investigate this cult and stop the dangerous influence they have on our young

2. What cult is he talking about? It was church in the third century

a. It's a composite of three letters written to Rome about the church

b. We are used to thinking of Christian faith as being family friendly

1) "Family values" was our term before appropriated by politics

2) That our faith can be unfriendly to families is hard to believe

c. It's what Jesus predicted (**Lk 12:51-52**, **14:26-27**; **Matt 10:21-22**)

d. Some have known those forced to choose between God & family

3. Church must be 100% for families; we must be a servant to families

a. We must focus on finding ways to make our families stronger

b. Most people in culture want to find ways to help their families

c. A church "family focus" can be both in-reach and out-reach

B. There is something else that happens when the church focuses on family

1. There are a lot of people that have no family and get lost in shuffle

a. **Factoid:** What is the only demographic mentioned in the NT?

1) Widows and orphans... those by definition who have no family

2) James says included them is "pure religion" (**Jam 1:27**)

b. Church is to become family for those who have no family

2. Last week, we began "2020 Vision: How We See Denbigh

a. We will be using our vision statement as an outline of the study

b. That statement begins "*Living as God's family under the cross...*"

c. What does it mean for church to be family... in one easy lesson?

3. For many of us, church is the place we meet together once a week

II. The Church as God's Family

- A. Think about the things that once gave us stability and identity
 - 1. **Family:** Most people once lived near aunts, uncles and cousins
 - a. Extended family aren't together; have trouble with nuclear
 - b. Traditional family (mom, dad, kids) is about 25% of families
 - 2. **Community:** Generation ago, many didn't move from birthplace
 - a. Aunt Judy visited when I was 15; first time out of Pike County!
 - b. We move every 4-5 years; community isn't source of stability
 - 3. **Work:** My Dad basically had one job his whole working life
 - a. Today we change jobs every 2-3 years and carriers 3-4 times
 - b. We don't know our neighbors; we don't know co-worker long
- B. **Church:** We can add church to list of things that once gave us stability
 - 1. Once upon a time, every church was a community church
 - a. Mom rode in a wagon to church; can't too far church-hopping
 - 1) Everyone tended to go to church nearest where you lived
 - 2) You had to get along with those folks– they were neighbors
 - b. Community, recreation, relationships revolved around church
 - 1) If you had a dinner on the grounds, whole community knew
 - 2) When church had a gospel meeting, it was a community event
 - c. There was a closeness, identity & stability that came from church
 - 2. The mobility and instability we mentioned takes its toll on churches
 - a. People move around because of work and must find a new church
(Sometimes that process gets so old they just skip it and church hop)
 - b. There's more to it than that; we've become religious consumers
(We expect churches to meet our needs; if they don't, we find new one)
 - c. There's more than that– our lives are just so hectic and busy
 - 1) Sometimes we feel exhausted and overwhelmed with life
 - 2) It takes time and energy to be part of a church family, right?
 - d. See church as a meeting place and want it to leave us alone

3. Is that our vision for the church at Denbigh? Just a meeting place?
 - a. We have a common love of God, but spiritual ships pass in night
 - b. We meet, worship and study without getting too involved in life
 - c. Back when I was in college, everyone travelled with CB radio
 - 1) You could chat and pass time with people going your way
 - 2) Had common interest (“Smokies”) but didn’t know anyone
 - 3) A bunch of people travelling together was called a “convoy”
- C. The church isn’t supposed to be a convoy; it is supposed to be family
 1. Paul says we are to be devoted to one another (**Rom 12:10**)
 - a. We have only one word for love that we use for all context
(So I might say that I love my wife, ice cream and Arkansas Razorbacks)
 - b. Ancient Greeks multiple words that gets translated “love”
(Kind of like the Eskimos who supposedly have twenty words for snow)
 - 1) Paul uses a compound of two of those Greek words here
 - 2) One is *philos* (friendship); other is *storge* (family affection)
 - c. “Be devoted” in the NIV Might not be strong enough translation
Love each other with genuine affection (NL) Love one another with brotherly affection (RSV)
Be devoted to each other like a loving family (GW) Love each other like bro and sis (NCV)
 - d. He goes on to explain what family devotion looks like (**12:13,16**)
 2. Paul takes this idea of family devotion to an extreme (**Phil 2:3-4**)
 - a. “Selfish ambition” was originally day-laborers trying to get hired
 - 1) Someone who brags and promotes themselves is “ambitious”
 - 2) Self-promotion is never a good thing; we see ambition as good
 - b. I’m supposed to promote you over me; not just getting my way
 - 1) That’s the way it is in families– everyone gets needs cared for
 - 2) Church isn’t just see ourselves as family; we’re to act like one
 - c. To get the full impact, you have to notice what’s before/after
 - 1) **Before:** We’re to have the one mind and one love (**Phil 2:2**)
(He uses synonyms, “be of one mind, one mind, one love, one mind)
 - 2) **After:** He says to treat each other in same way Jesus treats us
(Who was Jesus thinking about when became obedient to death?)
 - d. Cross is standard of how we treat church family (**1 John 3:16**)

III. Conclusion

- A. What is our 2020 Vision for the church at Denbigh as God's family?
 - 1. Before I go on, let me say that Denbigh does a lot of things well
 - a. Last week, someone commented on our worship and praise team
 - b. That's something you get in bigger church (*we take for granted*)
 - 2. A series like this can sound negative; focus on things to change
 - a. I don't want to be negative; we tend remember negativity, right?
 - b. Fifty people say they like sermon; I stew over one negative thing
 - 3. I am going to point out some things that I think we need to change
- B. My 2020 vision for Denbigh is a church that is better at being small
 - 1. **First**, we must get better at checking on and praying for each other
 - a. Matt Chandler: People like large churches because of anonymity
 - b. What do folks like about smaller churches? *Lack of anonymity!*
 - 1) In a smaller church, you can know people and be known
 - 2) When you're gone, your chair is empty, and you're missed
 - c. We need to get better at that! We're used to people being gone
 - 1) Most of you are from other places, so you go home a lot
 - 2) We have a high military presence, and we're used to TDY
 - 3) Frankly, we have a lot of folks that come 2-3 times month
 - d. So we get used to people not being here— that needs to change
 - 1) We all need to be involved in calling people when they miss
 - 2) Lynn has 3-4 she harasses if they're gone; need more of that
 - 2. **Second**, we need to find more ways to promote "table fellowship"
 - a. My mom made Sunday dinner for company 1-2 times month
 - b. OK, the world changed, but the power of table fellowship didn't
 - 1) You get to know people over a meal better than other settings
 - 2) There is something in breaking bread (model for communion)
 - a) It doesn't have to be production... just grab a party pack of Taco's
 - b) It can be at a restaurant (*just don't exclude the poor and parents*)
 - c. We won't be family as we should until we spend time at table

C. My 2020 vision fro Denbigh is of a place that LESS like small church

1. **First**, we need to take seriously what the Bible says about gossip
 - a. Quick search found over 60 verses in the NIV (slander/gossip)
 - 1) By contrast, there are 7 verses that condemn homosexuality
 - 2) So why is gossip pounded so profoundly? It is so destructive
 - b. Tuck, do you really think that gossip is a big problem at Denbigh (*That's what I hear! Seriously, I have no one in mind... and everyone*)
 - 1) Gossip is sneaky sin because we don't see how hurtful it is
 - 2) Gossip is also sneaky because nobody realizes they do it!
 - 3) I've had people tell me that so-and-so is a big gossip! Really?
 - c. If that's true, let's band together to stamp out gossip at Denbigh
 - 1) If someone starts story that might be gossip, "Is this gossip?"
 - 2) More subtle? "*What did they say when you talked to them?*"
 - 3) More non-verbal? Just give them the Denbigh gossip stare.
 - d. My 2020 vision for Denbigh is of a place where gossip is gone
2. **Second**, we need Denbigh to be a place where everyone is welcome
 - a. Small churches can be a little clannish and cliquish, right?
 - 1) This is especially true if people are very different from group
 - 2) Guy with Bronx accent in Grandmother's church in Delight (*That old BBQ sauce commercial, "New York City? Get the rope!"*)
 - b. Who is welcome to walk through our door? People needing Jesus
 - 1) Democrat or Republican. Black or White. Gay or Straight.
 - 2) Homeless or High Society. Leathers or Brooks Brothers
 - c. Jesus received everyone, all sinners, but there was more to it
 - 1) Jesus had the REPUTATION for receiving everyone
 - 2) Pharisee talked about Jesus; hey knew he ate with tax collector
 - 3) But He also ate with Pharisees and Sadducees, don't you see?
 - d. People know that Jesus receives all because we receive all

D. May we be the kind of church family where people see Jesus in us

Have you ever stood in the family with the Lord there in your midst

Seen the face of Christ in your brother, then I'd say you've seen Jesus, my Lord