

Study Guide for the Central Church of Christ 9-10-17

September 10 we will study Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 4:1; 25-32 and Luke 10:25-37.

Discussion questions are:

1. Galatians 6:10 speaks of the church as family.
 - a. When are motivated you to reach out to others in the family?
 - b. When have you felt the family reaching out to you?
 - c. What could you do to help us function more as family here at Central?
2. What causes a person to become especially close to someone else in the church?
3. What are some of the “one another” phrases the Bible uses to teach us how to treat one another as family?
 - a. Which of those is most challenging to you?
4. Has anyone in this church been a source of blessing to you personally? Have you personally been a source of blessing to anyone in this church?
5. If you apply the story of the Good Samaritan to our relationship with other church members how does the story unfold?
6. 4:25-31 gives a list of “stop and start” commands. Why is every “stop” followed with a “start”?
7. If you wanted to change a negative opinion of someone into a positive opinion how would you reword the following descriptions of a person who you had previously seen as...
 - a. Messy (likes a casual environment)
 - b. A perfectionist (likes cleanliness and order)
 - c. Clumsy (has many skills some of which are still being developed)
 - d. Dependent (likes to enable others to make decisions)
 - e. Dominating (enjoys making things happen)
 - f. Slow (methodical)
 - g. Liberal (broad minded)
 - h. Quiet (measures words carefully)
 - i. Talkative (friendly)
 - j. Argumentative (loves a good, lively conversation)

Sermon: *Living Like Family*

Over the years I've profited a lot from the writings of Norman Wright who is a therapist, minister, and theologian. He has done as much as anyone to help families overcome difficulties. He writes a lot from the pain of his own family. He had a son who was 23 years old when he died. He was mentally retarded all of his life, having the mind of an 18 month old toddler. Because of that Norman said he had very few memories of his child that were very significant. His son was not able to give anything back to his parents. He only spoke a few words and was unable to respond to their affection. They had only one brief film of him and it had no audio with it so anything that would add to their storehouse of memories was extremely welcome. It was on the first birthday of their son after his death that a friend suggested they call the home

where their son had lived the last 11 years of his life in an institution and talk to one lady who was his caregiver. So they did and explained it was his birthday and they were just searching for some memories. She gladly helped them as she shared with them some things they didn't know about their son. She said, "You might be interested to know he learned to put a simple puzzle together." They were glad to know that. She said, "We would go on a walk every day and he got to where he would run ahead of me and hide, playing hide and seek." They didn't know he could do that. She said, "He learned to hold a hair dryer and dry his own hair and was so proud of that. He got to where he would then turn the hair dryer toward me and pretend to be drying my hair." They were intrigued to know that. Then she told them one memory that would stay with them all their lives. She said, "One day I brought my own baby who was 6 months old to work and I let each of the retarded children hold the baby as best they could. When I handed my 6 month old to your son, he sat in the rocker and he held the baby gently and rocked and when I sang, 'Rock-a-by Baby' while he held my infant, tears ran down his cheeks."

What could be harder than to have a family member whom you love with all your heart but who cannot tell you back, "I love you too." What could be any harder than to give 23 years of your life to a family member and to wonder, "Does he know anything? Does he feel anything?" You would grasp at any straw to know anything of what that child felt. Norm Wright said one day he was doing counseling with a man who sort of reversed things and began counseling Norm. The counselee came into Norm's office, sat down, noticed a picture of Norm's 23 years old son and inquired about the young man. Norm told him he was mentally challenged and had recently died. The counselee said to the counsellor, "I guess you never got to experience what others fathers get to experience with their sons, did you? You never got to play catch with him or take him fishing. I doubt he told you what other sons typically tell their fathers. He probably never hugged you did he?" Norm replied, "No, I didn't get to experience any of that." Then the counselee said to Norm, "You need to remember something. You need to remember that when you get to Heaven your son is going to run to you and throw his arms around your neck and with his new found ability say, "Daddy I loved you all of those years and I still do." What could be harder than to be in a family and to not know how they feel about you, to not hear anybody say, "I love you and I appreciate you and I care for you."?

The largest family on the earth is the church. It's a worldwide family. It is millions strong. We have brothers and sisters whose names we do not know and whose faces we have never seen, whose language makes no sense to us at all but they are still in our family. We are not very close and will not be in this lifetime. But thanks be to God we know a portion of the family on a much more intimate level called the local congregation. This group of people who are assembled hear this morning and about this many more who for various reasons are not here this morning make up the family called the Central Church of Christ. Every Christian in this local family is called to be a blessing to everyone else.

It was to a local church like this one that Paul wrote these valiant words in Galatians 6:10. They are a prolific description of what members of a local church family should be to one another. "...let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." It is the Christian thing to be concerned about the good of all people but it is especially important to

be concerned about the good of this local church. That simply means it is incumbent upon each of us to be very involved in the lives of every person who is a part of this local church family. It is for that very reason that so many people in this church have committed themselves to ministries that serve you and serve your children. It is for that very reason that people make the commitment to be in a Home Team and get to know each other on a level that simply cannot happen in a Sunday morning worship service. The Bible challenges us to take our relationships with each other seriously and be devoted to each other, honor each other, encourage each other, accept each other, instruct each other, serve each other, carry each other's burdens, forgive each other, and on and on. I want to ask you a question this morning and once you answer the question you got the point of the sermon. The question is, "Are you a source of blessing to some specific person in this church?" If so, well done and may your tribe increase. If not, what are you waiting on? If you are in a family you need to give to that family.

To bless someone in essence means to be a friend to them. Jesus was a friend to lots of people. He was in a broad sense friends to all who would accept his friendship. He was known as "the friend of sinners." But on a more intimate level he was friends with 12 men known as apostles. On an even more intimate level he was very close friends with Peter, James and John. And perhaps was even closer yet to John. So here is the Jesus' question for you this morning, "What is the name of the person in this church to whom you are especially close?"

Phil is 30 years old, has a new job, and it is a disaster. He has a demanding supervisor. He had to move 2000 miles away from his parents and they are upset at his moving. One particular day his parents called and just dumped on him for what they called abandoning them. At quitting time the same day his supervisor told him, "You need to work on Saturday this week." Phil went home as depressed as he'd ever been and just collapsed into his recliner. His wife came in, and without saying a word, read the signals. She just knew. She stood beside him, ran her fingers through his hair and massaged his shoulders. She just said, "Would you like dinner now or later? Would you like to talk about it or not?" She was a blessing to him.

Is there someone in this church into whose eyes you can look and in a split second know what's going on inside them. Is there someone who can look at you and know? Have you lowered the mask enough to let someone inside?

How do you know if you are a real blessing to someone else in this church? One way would be to hear them say something to you like this: "You listen to me without judging.", or "You are always reminding me I am a capable person.", or "When I am hurting you seem to know it before I tell you and you put a comforting arm around my shoulder at just the right time.", or "When I was honest with you about how angry I was, you weren't shocked. You accepted me in spite of the evil that was in my heart that day." Who is there in your life who is praying for you? Who is there in your life who shares spiritual truths with you on a regular basis? Who is there in your life who is helping you develop your spiritual gift? Who is there in your life to whom you are accountable for your spiritual health? If there isn't someone in this church with whom you have that kind of relationship then you are not getting from family what you need to get. And if

there is not someone in this church to whom you minister like that then you are not giving to this family what you need to give. If we are to be God's family every one of us must be close to someone in this church.

Regrettably, I have to give a brief disclaimer when I speak on this subject. There are people in this church as there are in nearly every church who are not trustworthy people. The Bible cautions us to be heads up about that unpleasant reality. *Proverbs 12:18 – “There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword.” Proverbs 22:24-25 - “Don't befriend angry people or associate with hot-tempered people, or you will learn to be like them and endanger your soul.”* So there are folks like that who are just not trustworthy but by and large most folks in this church are wholesome folks who mean well and who have your best interest at heart. Most of you want to be a blessing to others. You may not always know how but I know that you want to be a blessing to this church family in any way you can.

Let me tell you an updated story. At some point in this update you will recognize the story. The road was empty. Usually it wasn't. Usually it was pretty busy but that day it wasn't. That day was empty. The traveler down that road walked briskly because it wasn't his neighborhood. He had been through there before and he knew the kind of racial encounters you could have with the locals. He'd had a few of those and they were a little frightening and so he walked hurriedly down the road. He took a moment's breather and rested beside the road under a shade tree. As he sat there he couldn't help but notice a couple of peculiar men walk by. One of them looked like a preacher. The other was dressed like some kind of church worker. And they both walked by and just ignored him. He thought that a bit strange. He decided to continue his journey and walked around a couple of bends in the road and noticed an object lying at the side of the road. As he got closer he could tell it was a person. When he got still closer he saw it was a naked man who appeared to be dead. He went still closer, close enough to see the blood oozing from his wounds, close enough to see the arm bent in the wrong direction, close enough to see the color of his skin which was not the same as his. He couldn't help but notice as he got closer to the wounded man that there were 2 sets of footprints that angled to the other side of the road. He thought to himself, “I guess those church guys didn't want to know how badly this man was hurt.” Foolishly or not this man did not hesitate to help. He went directly to the wounded man without any thought of, “What if someone sees me bent over this man? Will they think I am the one who beat him?”, or “What if whoever beat and robbed him is lurking nearby? Will they beat and rob me?” He bound up the man's wounds as best he could, helped the man up, and no doubt shared some of his own garments with the man to cover up his nakedness. He took him to the nearest inn, got the man a room, and paid for the next few days for the man to stay there and heal. He made arrangements with the innkeeper to look in on the man for the next few days. He then made plans to return in a few days and check on the man himself. I imagine the next morning when the innkeeper took breakfast to the wounded man the conversation might have gone something like this: “You sure have a good friend there who paid for your care. What's his name?” The wounded man would reply, “I don't know his name and I am amazed at his friendship because I am a Jew and he is a Samaritan but he is a blessing to me.

That story was Jesus' answer to "What does it mean to be a blessing? Who is my neighbor?" God wants you to live as a child of blessing which brings us to our text today from Ephesians 4:1 – "I beg you...to live and act in a way worthy of those who have been chosen for such wonderful blessings as these." You have been chosen by God for blessing but blessing were never intended to be hoarded. They were intended by God for us to share with others. In Ephesians 4 Paul lists 4 ways you can be a blessing to others.

1. **Be truthful.** 4:25 – "...each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body."
2. **Be honest and start contributing.** 4:28 – "Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need."
3. **Watch your words.** 4:29 - "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."
4. **Change your attitude.** 4:31-32 - "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

Did you notice how in every case of sinful behavior the formula for spiritual success is "stop and start"? If you've been lying you can't just quit talking. You have to replace lying with truth telling. If you have been stealing you can't just stop stealing. You have to replace it with giving. If your words have been unwholesome you can't just stop being negative. You have to replace it with words of affirmation. If your attitude has been negative you can't just stop the anger. You have to replace it with compassion. Do you remember the story Jesus told about the man who swept his house to get rid of a demon but he didn't fill it up with anything positive so a whole parade of demons shouted, "Look! An empty house! Let's move in!"

The key to being a blessing to other people is to learn to affirm other people the way God affirms us. Do you know the story of Johnny Lingo? Johnny Lingo was a South Sea Islander who wanted to marry the chief's daughter. On his island you would bring to the father of the prospective bride, a number of cows to purchase your bride. The number of cows you should bring depended on how pretty the girl was. The chief's daughter was in everybody's estimation, except Johnny Lingo's, rather plain. So he brought 10 cows to purchase the chief's daughter. Everybody, including the girl's father, said, "Johnny, that's too many cows." But he insisted the chief take 10 cows. Johnny married the chief's daughter and they sailed off to another island for an extended honeymoon. When they returned some months later she was beautiful. Everybody, including the girl's father asked Johnny, "What in the world happened? How did my daughter become so beautiful?" Johnny said, "I don't know. I just treated her like a 10 cow woman and when she learned what had been paid for her she began to see herself in a new light."

If you think a 10 cow woman is something special listen to how much God thinks of you. *"For God so loved you that He gave his only begotten son..."* That's a whole lot more than a 10 cow

woman. Live your life in a way that reflects how much God esteemed you? Once you grasp the reality of that you will be positioned to be an enormous blessing in this church family.