



**Pleasant Hill Presbyterian Church**  
*Connecting faith with everyday life*

## Sermon Archives

Date: May 8, 2016

Title: "Mothers and Families"

Scripture: Psalm 133

Description: Families are diverse and ever-changing. We are called to be the family of God.

Preaching about family is hard, because families are so diverse. Two-parent families, second marriage families, single-parent families, parents who are raising someone else's kids, people who are separated from kids because of divorce, people with grown children who live hundreds of miles away. Families are so diverse. You cannot make one single proclamation that readily fits everyone.

Moreover, "family" is not an emotionally-neutral word. Some of us are grateful for our family of origin; some of us have spent years trying to overcome our family of origin. One size does not fit all.

Here's a true statement that does fit all: none of us got to choose our family. And we all have times when we regret that truth. When you were in middle school, your friends' mothers were nicer, prettier, and far better parents than yours. Their parents let your friends eat cereal for dinner, sleep with their clothes on, do homework *after* the fun stuff. But you didn't get to choose your family.

In addition, your own family changes. What you need to hear today may be very different from what you need next week. Sometimes you've been the smartest person in your family. Line them all up: "You need to stop drinking; you need to go back to school; you need to quit whining; you need to stay out of my room." You could fix everything, if only they would listen!

Other times, you have no answers at all. Do you take away the pacie because it's becoming a crutch and will lead to addictive tendencies or do you let them keep it or they'll have anxiety attacks when they're grown? Do you make them enroll in AP classes to challenge them to reach their full potential or do you discourage AP classes because they add stress and turn kids into workaholics?

Families change. Remember this number: 5. Today, young people are delaying the milestones towards adulthood by five years. Finishing school, getting married, having a child, becoming self-supporting—these events that used to happen in the early twenties now occur an average of five years later. They've created a new term to describe that time: "emerging adult." "Five" means you're going to be an active parent or live with your parents several years longer than earlier generations.

Preaching about family is hard. So is being a family. Can we turn to the Bible for guidance? The Bible is filled with dysfunctional families. What kind of parents were Adam and Eve that they raised a son who would murder his own

brother? What made it okay for Jacob to steal from his brother Esau, *with his mother's help and guidance*? The first civil war in Israel's history, resulting in the death of thousands, was between a father and son—David and Absalom.

Even the BVM (Blessed Virgin Mary). Jesus was twelve years old. "Mary, have you seen Jesus?" "No, I thought he was with you!" "When did you see him last?" "Oh, three days ago." When they found him in the Temple, he offered a snarky-sounding, "Didn't you know this is where I'd be?" (And they let him get away with that? Bang—end of story! If I'd written the Bible, the next verse would've said, "And Joseph spake unto him saying, "Boy, you don't talk to your mother like that!")

So why am I preaching about families this Mother's Day? (The church says it's Ascension Sunday, the day we remember that Jesus "ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God..." I had an ascension sermon half prepared and then hit "delete" and started over. Why preach about families this Mother's Day?

Because it's hard being family. We are at a turning point in our nation and in our world. Whenever culture turns towards nastiness and cruelty and misuse of power and influence, women and children are among the first to suffer. The group that falls below the poverty line first are women and children. The group that gets treated as disposable or as invisible are women and children.

Families need us. We at Pleasant Hill Church must offer an alternative. We are not trying to raise children who will succeed in the world. We are called by God to raise children who will change the world. (repeat)

First, we are expected to be family. We promise at every baptism to join the parents in bringing up this child. Which is some of the best news these parents will ever hear. When that newborn arrived home from post-natal, every mom and every dad ever comes face to face with a harsh reality: "I am so in over my head!" They may be able to hide this as a secret fear...until the terrible twos, or even until adolescence. Eventually the truth will out: I am totally unprepared and inadequate for this task. That's when they remember a single word of comfort: "yes!" As in, "Do you, the members of this congregation undertake *with this family* the nurture of this child.?" "YES!" We are family together.

Actually, I prefer the term "community" over "family" to describe us. "Family" implies a degree of intimacy that we can't reach. And it can convey that if you're not closely relating to every person in the room, you're not meeting the standards. But you can't be best friends with 250 people a week. Being an introvert, I don't even want to be! A community provides a circle of best friends, surrounded by a crowd of strangers. In a community, even the strangers hold a commitment to each other. We're not competitors, we're not potential threats, we're allies. We got each other's back, we're on each other's side, we're in this together, even when we have to ask, "Excuse me, what was your name?"

All this happened in a nano-second during one baptism here. I introduced the parents who brought their infant up to the baptismal font, along with proud new big brother, three years old. Everyone knew the solemnity of the moment. Carolyn, the youngest, age 3, saw the steps and the platform and saw a runway. "Hey, this looks like that cool platform in the Fellowship Hall that's so fun to race across!" Making that assessment, he acted appropriately, sprinting all the way to the piano and back. Upon his return, Mom scooped brother up into her arms.

"Mom wants to play rodeo!" surmised the child. "Let's see if you can hang on for an eight second ride!"

Meanwhile, I am solemnly addressing the parents, "Do you promise to pray with and for this child, bringing her up in the love and grace..." Mom is praying fervently, "Please let this be over quick!" Actually, the room was filled with prayers. Other moms of pre-schoolers are praying, "Thank you, God, that it isn't my child...this week. Because it was last week!" Grandparents were praying, "Isn't that the cutest little three-year old! All boy, that one! I can't wait to ask to hold him after worship!" People who are not parents were praying, "Dear God, thank you for birth control!"

I spent the following week pondering what I might have done in that moment to ease Mom's distress? I couldn't generate a single idea.

Which is the whole point I'm trying to make. On Mother's Day, let's acknowledge the tension between the ideal and the reality. There's the ideal Baptism Service designed in the worship books for the Cleaver family, and there's the way it actually happens. There's the ideal and there's the real and there's this gap between the two. We live in the tension of that gap. Let's confess that: we all fall short of the glory of God. Let's accept that: the worship team doesn't have to re-design the way we administer baptism; the Christian Education group doesn't have to offer a class in parenting. It's okay. And we can celebrate it: we are free from the burden of perfection.

Those of you who are mothers (which is not all of us); those of us who have or have had mothers (which includes everybody)—can we put that to practical use? You didn't come from an ideal family. You aren't creating an ideal family. There's ideal (Hallmark has a thousand ways of describing it.) and there's real (Choose almost any moment and take a selfie.) Can we embrace the ideal and continue to do our utmost to be all God wants us to be, and also refuse to condemn those who fall short? Especially refuse to condemn ourselves.

I want us to do three things this Mother's Day: 1) I want us to refuse to spend even one day pretending perfection and laying that burden on anyone. I want us to honor our fathers and mothers as the real persons they actually are. 2) I want us to hold on to that ideal and keep it as our goal. I don't want us to lose sight of our hope. Let's work and pray for something better for our kids. The next generation of kids may not get it 100%right, but I want them to get it "right-er" than we have. 3) Let's reaffirm our commitment to support one another the way families are supposed to. For Christ has called us to be the family of God, and not just on Mother's Day.