

Series: The Church I see

Family is our heart

Doing life is better together

Today we are continuing in our “Church I see” series. Last week Pastor Tristan launched this new series, in which we are looking at some of our values as a church. We are doing this, because we feel it is important that it is clear, and in focus, for us to see the church God calling us to be like!

Perhaps you are still fairly new to King of Kings, and you’re still trying to work out what kind of a church we are... well, let me try and make it as clear as I can;

Our **mission**, is to love God, love people, and to make disciples! This is why we worship together, do life together, and reach out in missions, evangelism, small groups, and discipleship.

Our **vision**, is to have a greater influence, in our community, by building families, and reaching the next generation.

Our **values**, are to love Jesus above everything! To Esteem the word of God. To walk in freedom through Spirit Life. To be a praying church. To influence our community. To grow and serve in our gifting. Family is our heart. Generosity is our norm. We believe excellence honours God and inspires people. And we want to be faith-filled, big-thinking, risk-takers for God!

Now that all sounds like a lot to take in, but I hope that in it, you can see what we are all about, see the church that we believe God is calling us to be like.

In this series, we are looking at some of our lesser known values, last week Pastor Tristan looked at excellence - giving our best to God - and today, we are going to look at another value, the value of family... Because...

Family is our heart

It really is. Now, I don't know how you feel about family today... I know different people have different experiences with family, and therefore different emotions about family...

George Burns said;

"Happiness is having a large, loving, caring, close-knit family, in another city."
- George Burns

So yes, I know that family are great, but let's be honest, family can also be, complicated! Right?

I'm so grateful for my family, I love them all so much, but there are also times, can I be honest, when I just want to run and hide! Smith family confession time.

The Smith family make it a habit to try and get everyone together, my parents, all the siblings and spouses, and all the grandchildren, at least once a year, most often in Knysna. We all congregate at Jambo, a place that is very special to us in the hills just outside of Knysna. One by one the cars roll in, and the kids roll out, the dogs roll out, and the house fills up fast!

And the first few days are heavenly... the best of times... hugs... big smiles... long walks together... lots of swimming... and then... after day 7, day 8, I'm not quite sure what happens... but we all start annoying one another! Meal times start getting a little bit stressful! Someone forgets to clean up after themselves... somebody says something wrong... and the tension get's real!

But it's not just my family, right? I hope so!

Rick Riordan said;

“Families are messy. Sometimes the best we can do, is to remind each other that we’re related for better or for worse...and try to keep the maiming and killing to a minimum.” — Rick Riordan

That made me chuckle. Because every family has its issues, not so?

So whatever your experience of family might be, I want to share with you why one of the values of our Church, is that family is important. Family is our heart.

Now if you don’t come from a traditional family, please bear with me – you don’t need to switch off - We know families come in all shapes and sizes, and I promise you, that you will see, that in this church family, there is somewhere where you can belong.

Let me start today by showing you biblically, why family is important to us, before I get to some of the practicalities;

So here is the first thing I in scripture see about families,

God created families

If you go back right to the beginning, we see in the book of Genesis chapter 2, that God created mankind, and God created families, check it out;

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.” (Genesis 2:27-28)

I find it so interesting, that God created families first, not a church, not a nation, but families. And so as a church, we want to support families – we know that family life can be messy and challenging, but it can also be the biggest joy. Life is just better together.

It is in our families that we primarily learn what life is like – how to love, how to share, how to serve, how to care. It is where life is modelled – for good or for bad for our children. It is often where faith is grown and found too. So, as a result, at King of Kings:

• **Marriages are important**

We know not everyone get’s married, and that’s not bad. If you’re single, you rock, and you’re not any less important or valued, but many people are married, or will get married, and we believe marriage should be honoured. Being married is not always easy.

I have been blessed to be able to lead many couples in their marriage vows over the years. It is always so special to see the beginnings of a marriage journey and to help couples through the excitement of getting married.

However, life can get tough, and marriages can be tough too! That is why we need to support our married couples and pray for marriages to be strengthened in our church family. Make no mistake about it, there is a massive spiritual attack on marriages, but God loves marriage, and he wants to see your marriage succeed.

Can I let you in on a little secret? In Romans chapter 16, which we will come to in a few weeks again, we are introduced to a married couple named Priscilla and Aquila. Paul says they were “fellow workers in Christ Jesus.” One of the keys to getting marriage right, is serving Jesus together. For some married couples, they each have their own “thing,” or, it is whatever sport their child plays, but for this couple, Priscilla & Aquilla, their “thing” was serving God together, and it made them quite an amazing partnership. Marriages are important. We want to see you get yours right. But also;

- **Parenting is important**

We also believe that parenting is so important.

Joshua in the bible, was a man of God, a leader, a soldier, but also a parent. He said spoke these words to the nation of Israel in Joshua 24;

“As for me and my family, we will serve the LORD.” (Joshua 24:15)

Joshua, took his role as a father and as a parent seriously. He felt a responsibility to lead his family in serving the Lord. Yes, we can run programmes at the church like Kids Church, and Movement, these are so important, but they only can back up what you are doing at home. A teacher or youth leader cannot parent your child. Parenting is a huge responsibility in an era where there is so much opportunity and chaos for our kids. God entrusts children, and young people into our care, so if you are a parent, you have a vital role to play. The choices we make as parents really impact our kids, and so we need to take that responsibility as Christian parents seriously. With this, I can't fail to remind us all that...

- **Children are important**

I am sure you have heard of the story in the bible where the Jesus' disciples got annoyed, with all the parents bringing their little children to Jesus, to bless them. But Jesus was quick to rebuke them, he said;

“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” (Mark 10:14)

As a church, we agree with Jesus, that children are important! They are to be taught and guided, but also to be cherished and protected.

And don't you worry... if you are a child at heart, but not so young anymore, because...

- **Every generation is important**

But it is not only children that are important – families are made up of many generations, and each generation plays a vital role. Families are richer, for the input and wisdom that comes from cross generational relationships.

One of the greatest blessings for me as a pastor, is that I get to interact with everyone. I get to hang out at the Into the Sun Youth Camp, with guys like Damian and Saschin, and I also get to hang out in the Nerina Gardens Tea Room, with ladies like Liz and Sandy.

I got to baptise my young nephews in St James Tidal pool, and I baptised my 80 year old Grandmother, in our swimming Pool. Every generation is important to God! Amen!

- **'Found family' is important**

The concept of 'found family' is a special one to us as Christians. Because we know what it is to be adopted into the family of God. While 'biological family' is always important, God has also taught us as his children about the importance of 'found family.' God set the example for us in this, in that he is...

“A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows... ⁶ God sets the lonely in families” (Psalm 68:5+6)

Yes, I understand that family is complicated, and that we live in a world that is affected and impacted by sin and brokenness. Through this, some people find themselves without a real family around them – whether due to illness, accidents, neglect, abuse, bereavement – so many reasons.

This is why it is important that we realise that 'found family' is family too! Family is not just about biology - adoption and fostering is a beautiful picture of found family – but it extends beyond children too.

In the Bible there are many pictures of found families – Ruth who choose to stay with her mother-in-law Naomi rather than go back to her biological family.

The disciple John who adopted Jesus' mother.

David who was like a brother to the King's son, Jonathan.

Life is better together.

I love seeing found families, where people have made themselves into a family, and it is really a picture of what Church family is like.

So God created family, but here's the next big thing I want you to see;

God created the church to be like a family

If we think church family, is only for the one day a week you are at church, we miss out on the incredible rich blessing that church can be. When we do life together, not just drop in and out for a short time, we grow together in faith and support one another. Look at how the first church did family in Acts 2;

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common.

⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

The early church went into 'church family' with both feet – they immersed themselves in belonging together. Yes, they had their issues, but they were also blessed to be in each other's company and lives. They realised that life was better together. Here's the truth I want you to grasp;

- **If you are God's child you belong to God's family**

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! (1 John 3:1)

Some people feel like they don't belong to a family – but the reality is if you are a child of God, you belong to His family!

It is within the church family context that we can:

- **Care for the vulnerable**

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. (James 1:27)

The first church project, and the whole reason that deacons were invented in the early church, was to care for the widows in the church.

Our care for the poor and the needy comes up again and again in the bible – God often uses it as a measuring rod of how well his people are doing in their faith.

Looking after one another is so important.

I have come to realise that most churches love and expect pastoral care. But can I be honest with you. For a pastor, personally caring for 30 people is possible, but personally caring for 230 people is not!

Here's my point. If the pastors are the only ones caring for people, the church will never grow. People will always fall through the cracks. Pastoral leaders with larger churches can't keep up with a "do-it-all" attitude. We end up disappointing everyone.

It is important that we are all caring for one another.

As a church family, we need to be caring for the vulnerable within our community – one of the ways we do that is through our blessing offering – we support many families each month with groceries. We have also a care ministry of dropping off parcels for those who are ill – you can chat to Pastor Ian if you are keen to get involved with that.

- **Model of how to live out faith**

It is in the church family context that we learn how to live out our faith and have it modelled by others. That is why it is great to have so many people from different generations and different backgrounds as part of the family. We all have walked a journey and can all be both learning from and teaching one another. Paul taught Timothy;

Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity. (1 Timothy 5:1)

There is a role to play for every generation in our church. We need spiritual grand-parents, aunties and uncles! No matter you age you belong and make our church family a richer place.

- **Walk together through the ups and downs**

As a church family we also endure the good and the bad together.

Proverbs 17:17 says; ***“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.”***

This means, that you sometimes only get to know your true friends during times of adversity. True friends, “love through all kinds of weather, and families stick together in all kinds of trouble” MSG

I know over this past few weeks, there have been many people hurting in our church family due to loss of loved ones. I have been so encouraged to hear stories of how some of you in our church community have rallied around them.

However, we are a pretty big church, or at least we used to be before COVID hit, and it used to be easy to get lost in the crowd, even more now that we have not been able to meet in-person for so long.

One of the best ways to really journey together, is through the small groups in the church. I have heard amazing testimonies of how small groups have taken care of one another during these tough times.

10am service only... I have asked Engela Du Preez, one of our church overseers, to share a bit of her story from the past few weeks...

Thank you Engela.

So what is the church I see? I see a church, that is building a family of brothers and sisters in Christ. I see a church that is not just a gathering of believers here at King of Kings, but a gathering of little families, and disciples of Jesus in little pockets all over this valley, and wider.

So as I close today...

I want you to know that your family is important to us, and we want to walk alongside you through the good and the bad times- we are here to pray for marriages, give support to parents and kids. We also need you to know that you belong – even if you don't have a biological family – we at King of Kings are your found family – you have so many grannies, grandpas, uncles, aunties, sisters, brothers and kids who need you in their lives. This means that we together need to care for the vulnerable within our family, we also get to celebrate and cry together. And every person plays an important role in our family.

Please, please don't overestimate your ability to do life by yourself. To run the Christian race by yourself - in isolation. Life is better together.

God made you and I as a relational beings, and when we become Christians, we are adopted into God's family, not as an only child, but as a sibling with brothers and sisters.

I see too many Christians who are living like 'only children.'

But the church of Jesus Christ is by definition a family, an assembly, a group united by a spiritual identity. We're a body. A pack. Not a scattering of lone wolves. And our light shines brightest when we shine together, called to show the world what a community is like when God is King.

I see too many Christians whose love for God and the church has grown cold.

Speaking of the end times, Jesus said in *Mat 24:10*; ***"At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other."... "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who endures to the end will be saved."***

Has your love for Jesus grown cold? Has your love for the church grown cold? Have you turned away from the faith and hated your fellow brothers and sisters? I believe it is time to return to our first love.

Maybe today you need to make your life right with Jesus. Maybe you have never had a personal relationship with Jesus. Today you can. You can start that

I see God's heart for us to be a family of believers on fire for Jesus!