
The Functional Family

Imperfect People, Held Together by Grace

by Oludare Akinbo

"So God created man in His own image... male and female He created them. Then God blessed them."

— Genesis 1:27-28 NKJV



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Dedication

To my immediate family and my extended family, whom God has blessed me with — I could not have chosen or asked for any better than the brothers and sisters I was given, or the family I now have around me, both physical and spiritual.

We are not perfect. We are, nonetheless, truly functional families, by the grace God has given us and continues to give us to be so.

Acknowledgement

Above all, I acknowledge my Creator, Sustainer and Heavenly Father — for the gift of life, my calling, my immediate family, extended family of six sisters and three brothers, and for the lesson of deep respect, unity, and love for one another that He allowed my late father and mother, **Chief Olumoranti Ephraim Aberegidi Akinbo** (1930-2019) and **Mrs Eunice Adenike Abejide Akinbo** (1942-2017), to instill in all of us, through His written Word, from a very early age.

That instruction is the foundation and the power behind the respect, love, and unity we have all built our lives on to this day — the same foundation I have built, and am still building, my own immediate family upon, and the same foundation that guides my interaction and disposition toward my spiritual family as well.

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A Word Before We Begin

Somewhere in your family, right now, there is likely a story you would not want told from a pulpit.

A relative no one quite talks about. A rift that has lasted longer than anyone can remember starting it. A pattern of hurt passed down like an inheritance nobody asked for. If you are waiting for a book about family to describe a family unlike your own — tidy, harmonious, photograph-ready — this is not that book, and I want to say so plainly before you read another page. This book exists because I do not, and have not for quite some time, as I have watched my own family and so many others up close, believed that kind of family exists anywhere outside a frame on a wall — and because Scripture itself never once asks us to pretend otherwise.

Before we go any further, it is worth being clear about a word this book will use often: *dysfunction*. In everyday use, and as this book means it, dysfunction simply describes a person, a relationship, or a pattern within a family that has stopped operating the way it was meant to — conflict left unresolved, communication broken down, roles distorted, trust damaged. It is not a clinical diagnosis and it is not a moral verdict. It is simply the word for something not working as it should. Nearly every family carries some measure of it, in one member or another, in one season or another. What this book wants to distinguish carefully, from its very first page, is the difference between dysfunction in the people who make up a family and dysfunction in the family itself as a whole — because those are not, as the next chapter will show, automatically the same thing.

There is one more thing worth being just as clear about from this very first page, because it is easy to misread everything that follows as a book about willpower — about families simply trying harder to find grace and harmony on their own strength. That is not what this book is arguing, and it would be a smaller, weaker claim than the one Scripture actually makes. The transformation this book describes is not a human achievement dressed up in spiritual language. It is the specific, ordinary work of God's own Spirit, operating through God's own unchanging Word, upon people who remain genuinely flawed the entire time.

Paul makes this explicit when he describes exactly what kind of people God has always tended to choose for this work:

"For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the mighty." — 1 Corinthians 1:26-27 NKJV

The Greek is worth pausing on. "Wise" is *sophos* — intellectual sophistication, the kind of mind a culture admires. "Noble" is *eugenes*, literally "well-born," describing the aristocratic, the pedigreed, those with an impressive family name already behind them. "Foolish" is *moros* — the same root that gives English the word *moron* — the deliberately, almost insultingly plain and unimpressive. Paul's claim is not that God settles for the foolish and the weak because nothing better was available. It is that God specifically selects exactly this kind of raw material, on purpose, so that the resulting transformation can only be credited to Him rather than to any native impressiveness already present in the people involved. A functional family, in other words, is not evidence of especially capable or naturally gifted people. It is far more often evidence of exactly the opposite — ordinary, flawed people who became the site of something they did not manufacture themselves.

Paul says the same thing again, even more personally, when God answers his own request to be delivered from a besetting weakness:

"And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." — 2 Corinthians 12:9 NKJV

"Strength" here is *dynamis* — not mere ability but active, operative divine power, the same root that gives English *dynamite*. "Made perfect" is *teleioo*, meaning brought to its full and complete effect, not a partial patch applied to a permanent deficiency. And "weakness," *astheneia*, comes from a root meaning to hold together — *astheneia* is, quite literally, the state of no longer holding together, of coming apart at the seams. Read together, the verse is not describing strength that merely coexists alongside weakness. It is describing strength that reaches its fullest, most complete expression precisely inside the coming-apart place — which is to say, precisely inside the kind of dysfunction this entire book has been naming. This is not a book asking families to hold themselves together through effort. It is a book pointing families toward the one place Scripture says that holding-together power is actually made complete.

This is why the Word of God is not incidental to this book's argument but central to it. Jesus was direct about what His own words actually are and do:

"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life." — John 6:63 NKJV

"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." — John 10:10 NKJV

Christ's words are not merely instructive. They are, in His own description, spirit and life — an active, life-giving force, not a set of guidelines a family must implement through its own strength. This is the missing ingredient that separates a family merely trying to be functional from a family that actually becomes so. Human effort toward grace and harmony, unaided, tends to run out exactly where this book's own honest catalogue of biblical families ran out — at the limits of what any flawed person can sustain on their own resolve. But an ordinary family, carrying every inherent flaw and fallibility common to fallen humanity, touched by the Spirit of God and genuinely embracing His inspired words rather than merely admiring them, gains access to a transforming power sufficient to navigate those very flaws — and to become, not in spite of its dysfunction but often directly through God's work inside it, the kind of family God has always desired for His creation: imperfect people, held together by grace, functioning as the basic building block of society, and in time, of His Kingdom.

What Scripture does ask of us is different, and considerably more useful: not to manufacture a family without flaws, but to become a family that functions in spite of them. Those are not the same project, and confusing them is where so much of the quiet grief around this subject actually begins. This book means to take that confusion apart carefully, using the same family record every honest reader of the Bible eventually has to reckon with — a family tree running from Adam to Jesus Christ Himself, and then the spiritual family that is the Church, or people of God, containing more scandal, more failure, and more sheer human mess than most of us would ever admit belongs in a sacred text.

And yet it is a sacred text. That is the whole point. Keep reading, and let a very old book have something to say to a very old kind of family — yours, mine, and all human families. Whatever it has cost you already, and whatever it may still ask of you, it has

not once asked you to pretend the cost away.

What follows is not a theory about families in general. It is an argument built, chapter by chapter, on the actual record Scripture has left us — a record this book intends to read honestly rather than selectively, starting with the very first family God ever made.

Introduction

The Marriage That Almost Didn't Survive the War

Louis Zamperini came home from the Second World War a hero, and for a while, he believed the war was over.

He had been an Olympic distance runner before it started — good enough to compete in the 1936 Berlin Games, fast enough that friends genuinely believed he might one day break the four-minute mile. Then came the war, a plane crash that killed most of his crew, and forty-seven days adrift on a life raft in the Pacific with almost nothing to eat or drink, fighting off sharks with his bare hands. When the Japanese Navy finally found him, it was not rescue. It was capture — more than two years in prison camps, singled out for particular cruelty by a guard the other prisoners called "the Bird," beaten and starved and humiliated in ways he would spend the rest of his life trying to forget.

He came home to parades and headlines and a hero's welcome. He married a young woman named Cynthia Applewhite within months of meeting her. From the outside, it looked like the ending every war story is supposed to have.

It was not the ending. It was, if anything, a second war — quieter, and in some ways crueler, because this one was fought inside his own home. The nightmares never stopped. Zamperini began drinking heavily, chasing the sleep and the silence he could not find any other way. His temper turned volatile. He grew obsessed with a single, consuming fantasy: returning to Japan to find and kill the guard who had tormented him. The marriage that had begun so quickly began, just as quickly, to come apart. By 1949, Cynthia had decided she was done. She filed for divorce.

This is the part of the story most retellings skip past, because it does not flatter anyone involved. But it is the part this book actually needs, because it is the part where an ordinary, badly damaged family found its way back to functioning — not through a single dramatic turnaround, but through one person's willingness to go somewhere she did not want to go.

A young evangelist named Billy Graham had come to Los Angeles that year for a series of tent revival meetings. Cynthia, more out of desperation than faith, decided to attend. She came home changed, told her husband she had given her life to Christ, and — to his considerable surprise — told him she would not be pursuing the divorce after all. Louis wanted nothing to do with any of it at first. He had survived a war and a prison camp on sheer will, and religion looked to him like exactly the kind of weakness he could not

afford. But Cynthia's persistence eventually wore down his resistance enough that he agreed, reluctantly, to attend one of Graham's meetings himself.

He nearly walked out partway through. What kept him in his seat, by his own later account, was a single memory surfacing from the raft — a desperate prayer he had made to God in the middle of the Pacific, promising that if he survived, he would serve Him. He had survived. He had not kept the promise. Something about hearing it named again, years later, in a tent full of strangers, stopped him from leaving.

What followed was not instantaneous, but it was real and it was lasting. Zamperini gave up alcohol that year and never touched it again. In 1950 he returned to Japan and stood before eight hundred and fifty men convicted of war crimes at Sugamo Prison in Tokyo, addressing and personally forgiving them, guard by guard, including several of the very men who had tormented him. He wrote a letter of forgiveness to Watanabe himself, though the two men would never actually meet face to face — Zamperini tried once more in 1998, returning to Japan to carry the Olympic torch near the old camp, hoping to look his old tormentor in the eye, but Watanabe declined to see him.

It did not matter, in the end, to what the forgiveness had already done in Zamperini himself. The nightmares about "the Bird" stopped entirely that same year — he later said the very night of his decision was the last night he ever dreamed of his captor. He and Cynthia remained married until her death in 2001, more than fifty years later. He spent much of the rest of his life working with troubled teenage boys, telling anyone who would listen that forgiveness had done for him what raw willpower, medals, and heroism never could.

Nothing about the Zamperini family, in the years right after the war, would have qualified as functional by any ordinary measure. There was addiction. There was rage. There was a filed divorce. What eventually made it a family that functioned again was not the absence of that damage — the damage was real, and it left real scars on both of them for the rest of their lives. And it was not, in the end, raw willpower or sheer determination that turned it around, however much it might look that way from the outside. Cynthia's decision not to go through with the divorce came directly out of what had happened to her at that tent meeting — a conversion, not merely a change of heart arrived at on her own. Louis's own transformation followed the same pattern: not gritted teeth finally winning out over addiction, but a decision, made in that same tent, to hand his life to the God he had once bargained with on a life raft and never paid.

"And He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again." — 2 Corinthians 5:15 NKJV

"For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." — Romans 5:10 NKJV

Paul's language in that second verse is precise in a way worth sitting with. Christ's death reconciles; His life — risen, and now lived out in the believer by the Holy Spirit — is what actually saves, what actually sustains, what actually supplies the ongoing power a repaired family needs long after the initial decision to stay has been made. What made the Zamperini family functional again was not two people gritting their teeth and outlasting their own damage through effort alone. It was two people whose lives had been genuinely taken hold of by the risen life of Christ, working in them what neither one of them had been able to produce on their own — the same pattern, as it turns out, that this book will keep tracing all the way through.

This is a book about exactly that distinction — the difference between a family with nothing wrong in it, which does not exist, and a family that keeps choosing, however imperfectly, to function anyway. And notice, before this book moves any further, what actually triggered that choice in the first place. It was not a self-help principle Louis Zamperini stumbled onto, and it was not a resolution Cynthia talked herself into on her own. It was a word — heard, remembered, and finally obeyed. Cynthia heard the gospel preached in a tent and could not walk away from it. Louis heard his own forgotten promise named aloud by a stranger and could not get it out of his head. In both cases, the choice to function again as a family began the same way Scripture says it always begins: not with willpower reaching for God, but with a word from God reaching all the way down into a life and refusing to let go.

(Zamperini's full story is told at length in Laura Hillenbrand's bestselling biography *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption**, and in two films — 2014's* *Unbroken**, covering the war years, and its 2018 sequel* *Unbroken: Path to Redemption**, which tells the harder, quieter story of what came after.)*

That distinction is where this book actually begins — not with the Zamperinis, as remarkable as their story is, but with the very first family Scripture ever describes, and with what God Himself had to say about family before either sin or grace had entered the picture at all. It is worth starting there, at the very beginning, rather than anywhere

more convenient, because the case this book is making rests on what God said about family before anything ever went wrong — not merely on what He has since had to repair.

Chapter 1

Family Was God's Idea First

Written Into the Very First Blessing

Before there was a nation, a law, a temple, or a church, there was a family — and Scripture places it at the very beginning of everything, not as an afterthought to creation but as one of its first and most deliberate acts.

"So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"
— Genesis 1:27-28 NKJV

Notice what happens in that verse before anything else is assigned — no task, no dominion, no responsibility is handed over before the blessing itself is spoken over this first family unit. God blesses them, and only then commissions them. Whatever else the family would come to mean across the rest of Scripture, it begins here as the object of God's deliberate blessing, not as an accident of biology He later decided to make use of.

The First Statement Having "Not Good" by God

Genesis records God's own verdict on creation repeatedly across its opening chapter — He looked at what He had made and called it good, again and again, until a single, striking exception appears:

"And the LORD God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.'" — Genesis 2:18 NKJV

Everything else in that first chapter earns the word *good*. This specific condition of man being alone earns the opposite of what all of creation received — not good, the only thing in the entire creation account God names as deficient in its solitary state. What follows is the forming of woman from man, and the institution of marriage itself, described in language that has anchored every biblical understanding of family ever since:

The Hebrew behind "helper comparable to him" deserves more attention than this chapter has room to give it — *ezer kenegdo*, a phrase this book can only touch briefly here. *Ezer* is not a word of lesser rank; it is used throughout the Old Testament for God Himself as Israel's helper in battle (Psalm 33:20; 115:9-11), and *kenegdo* means something closer to "corresponding to" or "matching" than "subordinate to." The woman was named, from the very moment of her creation, as the precise and necessary supply for a task the man could not carry out alone — not decorative, not an afterthought, but divine provision for a divine assignment.

This is worth holding alongside the same principle in reverse: just as it is not superiority that makes a man head of his household, but a divine assignment and resourcing given by the family's actual Creator, so it is not inferiority that makes a woman *ezer kenegdo* — it is that same Creator's specific provision for a task neither one of them was ever meant to carry alone.

I have written on this at much greater length in ***A Woman Was Never Meant to Be Decorative***, available to download completely free with other books at oludareakinbo.com/a-woman-was-never-meant-to-be-decorative, for any reader who wants to see the full weight of what *ezer kenegdo* actually means, and how completely it overturns the idea that a woman's worth in a family is ornamental rather than essential.

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." — Genesis 2:24 NKJV

Marriage, in other words, was not one human custom among many that Scripture later baptized for its own purposes. It was God's own remedy for the one deficiency He named in an otherwise finished creation, instituted before sin, before the fall, before any of the brokenness the rest of Scripture will spend so many pages addressing. Family, in its most basic form, is not a fallback position for a world already gone wrong. It is the original design for a world that had not yet gone wrong at all.

A Family Chosen to Carry a Promise to Every Other Family

God's dealings with humanity after Eden do not run primarily through institutions, nations, or abstract principles. They run, again and again, through a single family, chosen and covenanted with by name — and the language of that covenant is worth reading closely, because of how far its reach was always meant to extend:

"I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." — Genesis 12:2-3 NKJV

All the families of the earth. God's covenant with Abraham was not simply a promise to one man, or even to one nation descending from him. It was, from its very first announcement, a promise made through one family, on behalf of every other family that would ever exist. This is the same pattern this chapter has already traced through Matthew's genealogy and through Christ's own thirty years inside a Nazareth household — God consistently choosing to work His largest purposes through the smallest, most ordinary unit of human relationship available to Him. If God Himself considered the family important enough to be His chosen vehicle for blessing the entire earth, it becomes very difficult to treat our own family relationships as a lesser priority, crowded out by whatever more visible ambitions happen to be competing for our attention this season.

A Genealogy Is a Family's Memory

A genealogy, at its simplest, is a record of descent — a tracing backward or forward of the people who belong to one another by birth, generation after generation. It is easy to skim past genealogies in Scripture, the long lists of names that interrupt the narrative and rarely reward a quick reading. But when God created man, He was not merely making an individual. He was starting a family, and every genealogy in Scripture afterward is, in a real sense, an ongoing record of that first family's story continuing to unfold.

Matthew opens the New Testament with exactly this kind of record — the genealogy of Jesus Christ, deliberately structured in three sets of fourteen generations: a gradual rise from Abraham to royal status, a royal line running from David to the Babylonian exile, and a final movement from that exile forward to Joseph, the husband of Mary, through whom the Messiah entered the world (Matthew 1:1-16). Matthew is not filling space. He is making an argument — that Jesus Christ's arrival was not a rupture in Israel's family story but its intended culmination, "the Son of David, the Son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1 NKJV), the fulfillment of promises God had been making to one particular family since Genesis.

A Gift to a Family First

It is worth sitting with a truth this book will keep returning to, because it changes how we ought to weigh the importance of our own households. Scripture is clear that God's purpose to redeem mankind through Christ was not a plan formed after the fact, improvised once sin had already entered the world. It was settled long before Adam was ever formed from the dust:

"But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you." — 1 Peter 1:19-20 NKJV

"All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." — Revelation 13:8 NKJV

In that sense, Christ's mission as Redeemer of mankind was never a secondary or improvised purpose — it was God's own settled intention before the world existed. But it is worth noticing carefully how that eternal purpose was actually carried out in time. Before Christ could be given to mankind as Savior — the One who would take away the sin of the world and reconcile every family of the earth to God — He first had to be given, in the plainest and most ordinary sense, as a child to a family. He was born into one, raised inside one, and remained under its authority for roughly thirty years before His public ministry as Redeemer to mankind ever began.

"Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart." — Luke 2:51 NKJV

The Son of God, who would one day teach with authority no rabbi in Israel could match, spent three full decades in ordinary, unremarkable submission to a working-class household in a town so small it barely appears elsewhere in Scripture. The eternal purpose came first in God's own counsel; its fulfillment on earth came only after this long season inside an ordinary home. If the family was important enough a context for the very outworking of the world's redemption to pass through, and to pass through for thirty patient years before a single sermon was ever preached, it is difficult to argue that our own families are a lesser priority than the more visible callings we sometimes let crowd them out.

A Trust That Never Actually Ended

It would be easy to read the last section and conclude that family mattered to Christ only for those first thirty quiet years — a season He passed through on His way to something larger, and then set aside once His public ministry actually began. Scripture does not let us read it that way. When Christ's public ministry expanded His household to include the disciples who followed Him, He remained genuinely, intimately connected to them — present at their weddings, in their homes, at their sickbeds and their tables — and He never stopped attending to His own blood family either.

The clearest proof of this comes at the moment we would least expect to find it: on the cross itself, in the middle of His own execution. John records that even there, in circumstances of unimaginable physical agony, Christ paused to make provision for His mother's care:

"When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home."
— John 19:26-27 NKJV

This is worth sitting with for a moment rather than passing over quickly. Christ was, at that exact moment, bearing the sin of the entire world, suffering the physical torment of crucifixion, and only hours from His own death. And in the middle of all of it, He turned His attention to something as practically ordinary as who would care for His widowed mother once He was gone. Family was never a phase Christ moved through and left behind. It remained, to the very last conscious moments of His earthly life, a trust He continued actively to carry.

This is precisely the standard this book is asking every reader to hold themselves to: family, whether physical or spiritual, is not background scenery to our real pursuits — our careers, our ambitions, our own personal interests and callings. It is a sacred and vital trust, entrusted to us by God, and being an active, engaged, contributing member of it has to be a conscious, ongoing choice, not an assumption we quietly neglect while our attention is elsewhere. Paul describes exactly this kind of active, deliberate contribution when he pictures the church as a single body:

"From whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love." — Ephesians 4:16 NKJV

Notice what actually makes the body grow in that verse: not merely the presence of each joint and part, but "the effective working by which every part does its share." A joint that exists but contributes nothing does not knit a body together; it simply occupies space where real connection was supposed to happen. The same is true of a family member, physical or spiritual, who is present in name but has quietly withdrawn their actual effort — attention, time, care, presence — into their own separate pursuits.

A family, like the body Paul describes, is only ever as functional as the sum of its members actually doing their share. This is not a passive membership Scripture describes anywhere. It is an active, continuous, conscious contribution, and Christ's own example — thirty hidden years, three years of public ministry that never stopped drawing family in rather than pushing it away, and a final act of family provision spoken from the cross itself — is the pattern every reader of this book is being asked to actually imitate.

With that foundation laid — family as God's own idea, God's own chosen vehicle, and God's own ongoing trust rather than a fallback arrangement for a fallen world — the next chapter turns to a word this book has already used often, and needs to define with real precision before going any further.

Chapter 2

The Word That Doesn't Mean What We Think

An Honest Starting Point

Here is a fact worth naming plainly before this chapter goes any further: you are very likely not the only family on your street, in your church, or in your extended circle who may be carrying the particular kind of trouble you carry. It may feel that way. It is almost never true. Families are made up of people, and people are, without a single exception since Eden, imperfect. We were formed from the dust of the earth, not spun from something incorruptible, and none of us — not one — is Jesus.

"As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust." — Psalm 103:13-14 NKJV

"As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one'... 'There is none who does good, no, not one.'" — Romans 3:10, 12 NKJV

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." — 1 John 1:8 NKJV

God Himself does not deal with any of us according to what our failures actually deserve, precisely because He remembers what we are made of. That same patience is the standard this book is asking every family, and every church, to extend to one another.

An Oxymoron Hiding in Plain Sight

The phrase "dysfunctional family" has become so common that almost no one stops to notice what an odd phrase it actually is. It belongs to the same category as "civil war" or "cruel kindness" — a figure of speech built out of two words that, taken seriously, seem to contradict each other. Strictly speaking, you cannot be dysfunctional and be a family in the full biblical sense at the same time, because a family, properly understood, is defined by its function — its ongoing commitment to belong to and care for one another — not by the flawlessness of its individual members.

The word itself is worth pausing on. *Function* comes from the Latin *fungor* — to perform, to execute, to discharge a duty. It was, in the classical period, especially associated with fulfilling a responsibility that had been entrusted to you, the way an elected official was said to *fungor* his office. A family that functions, in this older and more precise sense, is a family that keeps discharging the duty entrusted to it — keeps performing the actual work of belonging to one another — regardless of how well or poorly any single member happens to be performing at fulfilling their own individual duties elsewhere. *Dys-* simply marks a failure of that discharge, a duty left unperformed. Put the two halves back together honestly, and "dysfunctional family" does not describe a family full of imperfect people. It describes a family that has actually stopped discharging its duty to one another — a considerably rarer, and considerably more serious, condition than most people mean when they reach for the phrase.

Individuals within a family can absolutely be dysfunctional. All of us are, in some particular way or another; this book will spend an entire chapter proving that even Scripture's most celebrated families were full of individually broken people. But a family can still operate as a family — can still function, can still discharge its duty to its own members — regardless of the private failures or public embarrassments of the people inside it. The dysfunction belongs to the individuals. The function, or the failure to function, belongs to the whole.

The First Family, and Its First Failure

Consider the very first family Scripture ever records in any detail, because it will not let us romanticize this for even one generation.

"Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, 'I have acquired a man from the LORD.' Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell." — Genesis 4:1-5 NKJV

What follows is the first murder in human history — one brother killing another, inside the very first family the Bible ever describes, over jealousy that grew directly out of an unresolved spiritual grievance. If Cain had simply been able to say to Abel, honestly, "I see that you have something special with God — would you help me understand it?" —

an entire tragedy might have been avoided. Instead, the first family in Scripture became, almost immediately, its first case study in exactly the kind of dysfunction this book is naming. And still, Scripture does not stop calling them family. It simply keeps telling their story, generation after generation, the way every honest family history eventually has to.

A Second Case, Just a Few Chapters Later

Scripture does not let this remain an isolated incident, either. A few chapters after Cain and Abel, an entirely new post-flood humanity — a fresh start, quite literally, the only eight people left alive on earth — produces its own family failure almost immediately. Noah, having survived the flood through his own righteousness, plants a vineyard, drinks its wine, and lies uncovered and vulnerable in his own tent. His son Ham sees his father's exposure and, rather than covering him with discretion, goes and tells his brothers what he has seen, turning his father's private shame into something spoken about rather than something protected (Genesis 9:20-23). Noah wakes, learns what happened, and speaks a curse — not, notably, upon Ham directly, but upon Ham's son Canaan (Genesis 9:24-25).

Two families, two beginnings — one at the very start of human history, one at the very start of humanity's second chance after judgment — and both produce real, documented dysfunction within a single generation. If Scripture wanted to teach us that a truly functional family must first eliminate every trace of individual failure among its members, it chose an almost comically poor place to start making that argument. Instead, both families remain exactly what they were before the failure: family. The story continues. The genealogy does not stop. This is, from the very opening pages of the Bible, the pattern this whole book is asking you to recognize in your own household.

Chapter 3

Functional Is Not the Same as Perfect

A Careful Definition

If dysfunction belongs to individuals rather than automatically disqualifying the whole family, it becomes worth asking plainly what the alternative actually looks like. A functional family is one that, despite the genuine oddities, failures, and flaws of the people inside it, still encourages, helps, and supports one another. They still love one another. They still accept one another. They still, in whatever imperfect way they can manage, embrace one another.

This needs to be said clearly, because the word is so often misheard: functional does not mean perfect. It does not mean harmonious in every season. It does not mean the picture-perfect family assembled for a photograph. Functional simply means operational. It means serviceable. It means, in the plainest possible terms, that the thing is still working — that despite every dysfunction present inside it, the family is still, genuinely, a family.

The Wesley Household

Few families in Christian history illustrate this distinction more clearly than the household of Samuel and Susanna Wesley in the small English parish of Epworth, in the early 1700s.

By any modern measure, this was not an easy home to grow up in. Samuel Wesley, the father, was often away in London for months at a time, and on one occasion left the family for an entire year over a political and religious disagreement with his own wife. Poverty and debt were a constant presence; Samuel's stubborn insistence on his own principles more than once left the family scrambling for basic support from others. Susanna gave birth to nineteen children over the course of the marriage. Nine of them did not survive infancy. The household that remained — ten surviving children, a frequently absent father, a mother managing nearly every practical and spiritual responsibility of the home largely on her own — was, by any fair definition, under constant strain.

And yet Susanna ran that household with a rigor and devotion that shaped two of the most significant figures in the history of English-speaking Christianity. She personally educated every one of her surviving children, daughters included, at a time when that was far from assumed. She held to a strict daily rhythm of instruction, prayer, and

discipline, believing — in her own words — that "self-will is the root of all sin and misery," and worked deliberately to help each child govern their own. When her husband's long absences left her isolated, she began holding her own informal religious gatherings in the kitchen, gatherings that grew, at their peak, to nearly two hundred neighbors — larger, at times, than her husband's own official Sunday services.

Two of her sons, John and Charles Wesley, went on to found the Methodist movement, a revival that would eventually touch millions of lives across multiple continents and centuries. Charles alone wrote more than six thousand hymns, including "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," still sung in various church services today. Neither son ever pretended their childhood home had been easy or without real hardship. Both, throughout their lives, credited their mother's steady, imperfect, overextended faithfulness as the foundation everything else was built on.

The Wesley household was not harmonious in the way we tend to picture a happy home. It was strained by absence, grief, and financial hardship in ways few modern families would tolerate without real complaint. It was, nonetheless, profoundly functional — a family that, despite every genuine difficulty inside it, kept doing the work of raising, teaching, and loving its children, and produced fruit that outlasted every one of its members by centuries.

A Mother's Seventeen Years of Tears

A household from a very different corner of church history is worth placing beside the Wesleys, because it illustrates something the Wesley story does not — a family nearly broken not by circumstance but by one member's own choices, and restored through nothing but faith and a mother's refusal to give up. Augustine, born in the North African town of Thagaste in what is now Algeria, would go on to become Bishop of Hippo and one of the most influential theologians in the history of the Christian faith. Before any of that, he was, for the better part of two decades, the source of his mother Monica's deepest grief.

From his teenage years, Augustine lived openly outside the faith his mother had raised him in. He kept a mistress for over a decade and fathered a son outside of marriage. He embraced a heretical sect that Monica found devastating, drifting further from everything she had taught him. He stole for the sheer thrill of transgression — famously recounting, years later in his own memoir, a night spent stripping a neighbor's pear tree bare not out of hunger but "for the love of the theft itself." And at one point, wanting to travel to Rome without her, he deliberately deceived his own mother and abandoned her at a North African seaport, slipping away in the night

rather than face her.

Monica did not stop praying for him. By his own account, she wept for her son "more than most mothers weep over the death of a child," and followed him from North Africa to Rome and then to Milan, refusing to let the distance between them become permanent. This continued for roughly seventeen years — not a season of difficulty quickly resolved, but nearly two decades of a mother watching her son choose, again and again, a path that seemed to be carrying him permanently away from her and from God.

In 386, at thirty-two years old, Augustine's resistance finally broke, in a moment of conversion he later described in unflinching detail. Mother and son were reconciled completely. Augustine records their last conversation together, at a window overlooking a garden in Ostia not long before Monica's death, as one of the most tender passages in all of his writing — two people who had spent years divided by his own choices, brought fully back to one another before either of them could have known how little time remained.

There is nothing in this story that resembles a family untouched by real dysfunction. This was not hardship visited on a sound household from the outside. It was one member's own choices — deception, sexual sin, theft, the deliberate abandonment of the very mother pleading for him — that could have permanently severed this family, and very nearly did.

And still, by every honest measure this book has been using, this was a family that eventually functioned as one again — not because the wrong was ever minimized or explained away, and not because seventeen years finally wore down Augustine's own resistance through sheer persistence. It was, by his own account, a conversion — the same Spirit this book has already described meeting him where willpower alone had spent nearly two decades failing to move him an inch. One woman's faith outlasted seventeen years of exactly the kind of dysfunction this book has spent its pages naming; the actual turning, when it finally came, was God's doing in him, not his own late arrival at good sense.

What This Means for the Family of God

The same principle both the Wesley household and Monica's seventeen years of prayer illustrate applies directly to the church, which Scripture consistently describes as a family in its own right. No church, any more than any household, is made up of people who have finished becoming who they ought to be. We are, every one of us, still under construction — capable, given enough time, of finding new and creative ways to fall short of what we profess.

A church that has only recently begun worshiping together often passes through something like a honeymoon season, a period before its members have really gotten to know one another's flaws. Reality eventually arrives, the way it arrives in any marriage, and the people around us turn out to be exactly as imperfect as we are — sometimes in ways we understand, and sometimes in ways that genuinely puzzle us.

This is precisely why grace matters as much as it does. It is why forgiveness matters, why acceptance matters, why love matters, and why Scripture is so insistent that having put our hand to the plow, we must not keep looking back (Luke 9:62). We may not always understand one another. We can still love one another anyway. We may come from entirely different backgrounds, entirely different seasons of brokenness. We can still function together — still bow our heads at the end of a hard week and bless the same Lord, side by side, as one family, however unlikely that family might look from the outside.

Chapter 4

Every Family in the Book

No Family Is Perfect — Including the Bible's Most Famous Ones

If you trace your own family line back far enough, you will almost certainly find ancestors you would rather not claim too loudly. The same turns out to be true of nearly every major family in Scripture. What follows is not an attempt to embarrass anyone long dead. It is an honest look at exactly the kind of families God chose to work through anyway — proof, repeated across an entire book, that dysfunction in the individuals was never a disqualifying condition for the family as a whole.

Adam and Eve: The First Family's First Grief

Genesis 4:1-8

Already examined in Chapter Two, this family's story bears repeating here as the opening entry in Scripture's own honest catalogue. The very first household the Bible ever describes in detail ended its first generation with one brother murdering another over an unresolved spiritual jealousy Cain refused to bring into the open. There was no functional model yet established anywhere in human history for Adam and Eve to have learned from, no prior generation's mistakes to study and avoid. And still, this family — however shattered by what happened in that field — remains, in Scripture's own reckoning, the first family, the one every other family since has descended from. Dysfunction at the very root did not disqualify the tree.

Abraham and Sarah: The Father and Mother of a Nation

Genesis 12:10-20; 16:1-6; 25:1-6; 1 Chronicles 1:32

Abraham and Sarah are remembered, rightly, as the father and mother of the Jewish nation and the ancestors of faith itself (Romans 4:16). They are also, on an honest reading, one of the most complicated marriages Scripture records. Twice, in different countries, Abraham told a foreign king that Sarah was his sister rather than his wife, protecting his own safety while placing hers at genuine risk (Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-18). Sarah, frustrated by years of barrenness, gave her servant Hagar to Abraham in an attempt to force God's promise along on her own timeline — a decision that produced real and lasting family conflict (Genesis 16:1-6).

Later in life, after Sarah's death, Abraham took another wife, Keturah, and fathered several more sons by her and by his concubines; to protect Isaac's inheritance, he sent these other sons away eastward, apart from the son who would carry the promise (Genesis 25:1-6; 1 Chronicles 1:32). By any modern accounting, this is a family history full of deception, rivalry, and painful division. It is also the family God chose, by name, to carry His covenant promise to the entire world.

Jacob: The Deceiver Whose Sons Sold Their Brother

Genesis 27; 37:12-28

Jacob, twin brother of Esau, built much of his own early story on deception — stealing his brother's birthright and blessing before fleeing for his life, terrified of the very family he had wronged. God met him anyway, blessed him, and renamed him Israel.

And the household Jacob went on to raise carried forward its own inherited pattern of favoritism and rivalry: his twelve sons, resentful of their father's open favoritism toward Joseph, conspired together to kill their own brother. Only their own fear stopped them from carrying it out directly; instead, they threw him into a pit, then sold him to passing slave traders and told their father he had been killed by a wild animal (Genesis 37:12-28). This was the family that would become the twelve tribes of Israel — the family through whom God's covenant nation was formed. Its founding story includes attempted fratricide.

David and Michal: Contempt in the Middle of Worship

2 Samuel 6:14-23

David, described elsewhere as a man after God's own heart, brought the Ark of the Covenant back to Israel with such uninhibited, dancing celebration that his own wife Michal, watching from a window, despised him in her heart for it (2 Samuel 6:16). When David returned home, she confronted him with open scorn rather than shared joy, mocking the very worship he had just offered to God (2 Samuel 6:20). The exchange that follows is sharp on both sides, and the text closes with the plain, sobering note that Michal had no children for the rest of her life (2 Samuel 6:23). Even the king remembered as Israel's greatest worshiper could not bring his own household into agreement over how to worship God together.

Absalom: The Son Who Split a Kingdom

2 Samuel 15:1-12

David's own son Absalom — handsome, charismatic, and clearly gifted — used those very gifts to position himself for years before openly rebelling against his father, fracturing the kingdom of Israel and plunging the nation into civil war (2 Samuel 15:1-12). This was not a stranger's betrayal. It was David's own child, raised inside his own household, turning that same household's internal wounds into a national catastrophe. The greatest king in Israel's history could not prevent dysfunction from taking root inside his own home, or keep it from eventually costing the whole nation dearly.

The Father of Two Sons: A Parable Jesus Told on Purpose

Luke 15:11-32

Jesus Himself, when He wanted to illustrate the character of God the Father, reached for a family story rather than an abstract argument — the parable most of us know as the Prodigal Son. A younger son demands his inheritance early, in effect wishing his father dead, and squanders the whole of it in reckless living far from home (Luke 15:11-13). An older son, meanwhile, harbors his own quieter resentment, refusing to celebrate his brother's return and accusing his father, bitterly, of never rewarding his own years of dutiful service (Luke 15:28-30). Every dysfunctional family, across every generation, recognizes at least one of these two sons somewhere inside it. Jesus told this story on purpose, using a fractured, ordinary family to describe the extraordinary grace of God the Father toward both kinds of broken children at once.

Lot's Family: Compromise, Rescue, and What Followed

Genesis 19:1-38

Lot's household illustrates a different, quieter kind of family dysfunction — not open betrayal, but slow compromise. Having chosen to settle near Sodom for its evident prosperity, Lot's family became entangled enough in that culture that his own daughters were engaged to men who mocked his warning of coming judgment as a joke (Genesis 19:14). When angels finally intervened to rescue the family, Lot's wife could not fully let go of the life she was leaving, looking back against explicit instruction and losing everything in the act (Genesis 19:26).

What remained of the family — Lot and his two surviving daughters — retreated to a cave, where the daughters, believing wrongly that the rest of humanity had been destroyed and their family line would end with them, got their father drunk and conceived children by him (Genesis 19:30-38). This is among the darkest family stories Scripture records, and Scripture does not look away from any part of it. And yet even here, the family line continued — one of Lot's resulting descendants, Ruth the Moabitess, would one day become an ancestor of King David, and, further down that same line, of Jesus Christ our Lord Himself (Ruth 4:13-17; Matthew 1:5), proof that even a family's worst chapter was not the end of what God could still bring out of it.

Rahab: A Family Pulled Out of a Falling City

Joshua 2:1-21; 6:22-25

Set beside Lot's family, Rahab's story offers a striking contrast — a household inside another doomed city, rescued this time not by angels acting on their own initiative but by one woman's own quick faith. Rahab lived and worked as a prostitute in Jericho when Joshua's spies came through her territory, and when the moment came to negotiate her own safety, she did not ask only for herself. She specifically bargained for her father, her mother, her brothers, her sisters, and everyone who belonged to them, asking the spies to "spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death" (Joshua 2:13 NKJV).

The promise was kept in full: when Jericho fell, "they brought out all her relatives and left them outside the camp of Israel" (Joshua 6:23 NKJV) — an entire extended family pulled intact out of a city given over to judgment, because one member of it acted in faith on behalf of all the rest. Rahab, a Gentile with no claim on Israel's covenant by birth, becomes an ancestor of David — and, in the same line as Lot's own descendants, of Jesus Christ our Lord Himself (Matthew 1:5).

Naomi and Ruth: Loyalty Built Inside Real Loss

Ruth 1:1-18

Not every family story in this chapter is a story of betrayal or compromise. Naomi's family suffered genuine, compounding tragedy — famine forced them from their homeland, and within the span of Ruth's opening chapter, Naomi buried her husband and both of her sons, left with nothing but two foreign daughters-in-law and a bitterness she named openly, telling her friends to call her Mara, meaning "bitter," "for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me" (Ruth 1:20 NKJV). When Naomi urged her daughters-in-law to return to their own families rather than follow her into an uncertain future, one of them, Ruth, refused, in words that remain among the most quoted expressions of loyalty in all of Scripture: "Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God" (Ruth 1:16 NKJV).

This is not a family untouched by loss. It is a family that chose to stay functional, loyal, and committed to one another precisely inside that loss, rather than letting genuine grief dissolve what remained of their bond — and it is through this very family, reconstituted through loyalty rather than blood alone, that both Ruth and Naomi become ancestors of King David, and, further down that same line, of Jesus Christ our Lord Himself (Matthew 1:5-6).

The Same Story, Told Honestly, Generation After Generation

I could keep going through the record all morning. There are no perfect families in this book — not one, from the very first chapter of Genesis to the closing genealogies of the New Testament. What Scripture offers instead is something considerably more useful to a reader whose own family is genuinely imperfect: honest testimony that God has always worked through exactly this kind of family, and never waited for a flawless one to appear before He did.

Notice, too, the range of dysfunction — and rescue — on display across these nine households. Cain and Abel show us violence born of unaddressed spiritual jealousy. Abraham and Sarah show us deception and rivalry inside a marriage genuinely devoted to God. Jacob's sons show us sibling conspiracy escalating nearly to murder. David and Michal show us contempt breaking out even in the middle of shared worship.

Absalom shows us a child's private wound becoming a national catastrophe. Lot's family shows us the slow, quiet danger of compromise rather than any single dramatic

betrayal. Rahab shows us the opposite of that same danger — a household inside the same kind of doomed city, pulled out whole because one member acted in faith on behalf of the rest. And Naomi and Ruth show us something this chapter has not yet emphasized enough — that a family can also be genuinely reconstituted, not merely endured, through loyalty freely chosen rather than blood alone. No single pattern of dysfunction, or rescue, repeats itself twice in this list. And in every single case, without exception, God's larger purposes moved forward through the family anyway, not around it.

Chapter 5

The Scandal Jesus Chose

A Genealogy Full of Names We Would Rather Skip

When Matthew records the genealogy of Jesus Christ, he does not sanitize it. Alongside patriarchs remembered with real honor — Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, King David, King Solomon — the family line running directly to Jesus Christ includes several figures whose stories, read honestly, are not simply imperfect. They are genuinely scandalous by any standard, ancient or modern.

An Unusual Choice Before We Even Reach the Scandal

It is worth pausing on something easy to miss before examining any single name on this list: the simple fact that women appear in this genealogy at all is itself remarkable. Jewish genealogies in this period were reckoned almost exclusively through the male line; women, as a matter of standard practice, were typically omitted entirely from this kind of formal record, however important their actual role in the family's history had been. Matthew breaks that convention deliberately, and not once. He names Tamar (Matthew 1:3), Rahab (1:5), Ruth (1:5), and "her who had been the wife of Uriah" — Bathsheba, named this way specifically to recall the scandal of how she came to be part of the family at all (1:6). Four women, each with a story a more careful editor might have quietly left out, each named anyway, deliberately, at the very front of the New Testament.

Why This Record Actually Mattered

It is worth understanding, before looking at any single name, exactly how high the stakes of a genealogy actually were in the world Matthew was writing in — because that context is what makes his honesty so remarkable rather than merely interesting. A genealogy in the ancient Near East was not a curiosity kept for sentimental reasons. It was a legal and social document, the basis on which land inheritance, tribal identity, priestly eligibility, and royal legitimacy were all established. Ezra records priests who could not prove their genealogy being excluded from priestly service entirely until the matter could be settled (Ezra 2:62). A family's honor, in a very concrete and practical sense, rode on the cleanliness of its recorded line. This was precisely the kind of document a family edited carefully, if they edited it at all — the socially safe move, available to Matthew at every turn, was simply to leave the difficult names out, the way most family records quietly did.

Matthew does the opposite. His first readers would have known exactly who Tamar was, exactly what Rahab's occupation had been, exactly what David did to Uriah. Including these names was a deliberate editorial decision, made in full knowledge of the social risk, resting the Messiah's legal claim to David's throne on precisely the record a more cautious writer would have smoothed over.

Tamar: Widowed Twice, Deceived, and Vindicated

Genesis 38

Tamar was married into Judah's family, widowed, remarried to her first husband's brother by custom, and widowed a second time — deliberately denied children by that husband, who refused to let her conceive (Genesis 38:6-10). Left without the son she was owed by custom and promised by Judah himself, she disguised herself and posed as a prostitute, deceiving her own father-in-law into fathering a child with her (Genesis 38:12-19). One of the resulting twins, Perez, becomes a direct ancestor of King David — and of Jesus Christ Himself (Matthew 1:3). Judah, confronted with the full truth, admits that Tamar's actions, unconventional as they were, were more righteous than his own failure to keep his word to her (Genesis 38:26).

Rahab: A Prostitute Who Chose the Right Side

Joshua 2:1-21; 6:22-25

Rahab lived and worked as a prostitute in the city of Jericho when Joshua's spies came through her territory. Rather than betraying them to the king, she hid the men on her own roof, lied to protect them, and secured, in exchange, a promise of safety for herself and her entire family when Israel eventually conquered the city (Joshua 2:1-21). That promise was kept. Rahab, a Gentile woman with no claim on Israel's covenant by birth, becomes an ancestor of David — and of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5).

Rehoboam: The King Whose Pride Split a Kingdom

1 Kings 12:1-19

Solomon's son inherited Israel at its peak and lost half of it in his first act as king. Ignoring his elder counselors, he answered Israel's request to lighten Solomon's harsh labor with a threat of even heavier burdens (1 Kings 12:1-14). Ten tribes revolted immediately, splitting the kingdom for good — pride, not scandal, was Rehoboam's failure, and he remains part of the same royal line that leads to Christ (Matthew 1:7).

Judah: The Father-in-Law Tamar Deceived

Genesis 37:26-27; 38:1-26

Judah's own name sits twice over in this record, and neither appearance flatters him. It was Judah who first proposed selling his own brother Joseph into slavery rather than simply killing him outright, profiting from the betrayal (Genesis 37:26-27). Years later, he is the very father-in-law Tamar deceived — visiting a woman he believed to be a roadside prostitute without ever recognizing his own daughter-in-law, after failing to keep his word to her (Genesis 38:1-26). Confronted with the truth, Judah does not deny it or shift the blame: "She has been more righteous than I," he admits plainly (Genesis 38:26 NKJV). That same Judah, decades later, offers himself as a slave in his youngest brother's place rather than let their father lose another son (Genesis 44:33-34) — the clearest sign in his story that real change had taken root. He remains, name and lineage both, in the tribe from which the Messiah Himself would come (Matthew 1:2-3).

David: Adultery, Murder, and the Mercy That Followed

2 Samuel 11:1-27

David, watching from his rooftop, saw Bathsheba bathing, sent for her, and slept with her despite knowing she was another man's wife. When she became pregnant, David arranged for her husband Uriah to be placed at the front lines of battle and then abandoned, ensuring his death, in an attempt to cover his own sin (2 Samuel 11:1-27). This is not a minor lapse tucked quietly into an otherwise spotless record. It is adultery compounded by calculated murder, committed by the very king remembered as a man after God's own heart. And it was David and Bathsheba's own later son, Solomon, who would carry the royal line forward toward Christ (Matthew 1:6).

Solomon: Wisdom Undone by Excess

1 Kings 3:5-14; 11:1-8

Solomon began his reign asking God for wisdom rather than wealth or long life, and God granted the request so generously that his wisdom became legendary across the ancient world (1 Kings 3:5-14). He built the temple in Jerusalem, arguably Israel's greatest architectural and spiritual achievement. And yet this same man accumulated seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, many of them from nations Israel had been explicitly warned against intermarrying with, and "his wives turned away his heart after other gods" in his old age (1 Kings 11:3-4 NKJV). Extraordinary wisdom did not protect Solomon from extraordinary personal failure, and both belong, without editing, to the same man in the same genealogy Jesus was born into.

Manasseh: The Worst King Who Ever Repented

2 Kings 21:1-16; 2 Chronicles 33:1-13

No king in Judah's history did more damage than Manasseh. He rebuilt the pagan altars his own father had torn down, practiced witchcraft and divination, sacrificed his own sons in fire to a foreign god, and "shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another" (2 Kings 21:16 NKJV). By any measure, this is the most wicked single name in this entire genealogy. And then, carried off to Babylon in chains, Manasseh did something none of his own victims had been given the chance to do: he humbled himself and genuinely repented, and "the LORD... brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom" (2 Chronicles 33:13 NKJV), restored, forgiven, and still recorded — child sacrifice and all — as a direct ancestor of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:10).

One Thread Running Through All Seven

Look closely at what Tamar, Rahab, Rehoboam, Judah, David, Solomon, and Manasseh actually have in common, and a pattern emerges that is easy to miss when each name is considered only on its own. Every one of them, in a different way, crossed a boundary the surrounding culture treated as disqualifying. Tamar exploited a loophole in Israel's levirate marriage custom through outright deception. Rahab was not merely a sinner but a foreigner, entirely outside Israel's covenant by birth, from a city under divine judgment. Rehoboam let pride override wisdom and cost an entire nation its unity. Judah sold his own brother for profit and later failed to keep his word to his own daughter-in-law.

David violated two of the Ten Commandments in a single episode, against a fellow believer, using his own royal power to do it. Solomon married directly into the nations Israel had been named-and-numbered warned against, for the explicit reason that it would turn hearts away from God — and it did. Manasseh sacrificed his own children and filled Jerusalem with innocent blood. Boundary-crossing of one kind or another sits at the center of every single name on this list, and Matthew's genealogy does not exclude a single one of them from the line that produces the Messiah. If anything, it seems almost deliberately built from exactly this kind of story, as though God were making a point Scripture never states outright but keeps demonstrating anyway: no boundary any of us has crossed, and no boundary crossed against us, places a person permanently outside what God is still willing to use.

For the Reader Whose Own Origin Feels Complicated

This matters for a specific kind of reader this chapter has not yet addressed directly. Some of you reading this book carry your own complicated origin story — born outside marriage, raised in a blended or reconstituted family, adopted under circumstances you were never fully told about, or simply aware that the beginning of your own family's story involves a chapter no one likes to discuss at gatherings. If any of that describes you, this genealogy was not written past you. It was written, in part, for you. Tamar's son Perez carried the stain of his own conception's circumstances into the direct line of the Messiah, and Scripture never once treats that fact as a disqualifying footnote requiring apology. Whatever the circumstances of your own beginning, they are not a category Scripture places outside of what God is willing to use, redeem, and build something lasting through.

Not Ashamed of a Single Name

Taken together, this family line running to Jesus Christ contains incest, deception, prostitution, pride, adultery, murder, and open disobedience to God — named plainly, not hidden between the lines. If your own family history contains someone who has lied, someone who has been unfaithful, someone struggling with addiction, bitterness, or a temper that has cost real relationships, you are not describing anything Scripture has not already recorded, in detail, inside the very bloodline of the Messiah.

And here is the point this chapter has been building toward: Jesus was not ashamed of a single name on that list. As the novelist Harper Lee once put it through a character in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, you can choose your friends, but you cannot choose your family — they remain your kin whether you acknowledge them or not, and it makes you look foolish to pretend otherwise. That has been true of every person ever born, with one single exception. Jesus Christ, alone among every human being who has ever lived, actually chose His own bloodline before He entered it. He selected Tamar, Rahab, Rehoboam, Judah, David, Solomon, and Manasseh as His own ancestors, knowing every scandal attached to each of their names, and He was not ashamed to be identified with a single one of them. He came, in part, to redeem family members exactly like them — and exactly like yours, mine, and any human family.

Chapter 6

The Family of God

The Church Was Never Meant to Be a Room Full of Finished People

The family of God — the church, in its plainest biblical sense — is made up of exactly the same kind of people this book has been describing all along. No one inside it, this book's own author included, has arrived at anything resembling completion. We are human, formed from the same dust as every flawed family already examined in these pages, and prone to the same failures.

There is a particular kind of insult people sometimes reach for when someone behaves badly — "why don't you act human?" — as though being human were itself a guarantee of decent behavior. It is worth noticing how strange that phrase actually is. Plenty of animals show more patience and gentleness, in their own way, than some people manage on their worst days. Being human has never been a guarantee of goodness. It has only ever been the raw material grace has to work with.

Adopted, Not Merely Included

Chapter Five closed on the observation that Jesus Christ, alone among every human being who ever lived, actually chose His own family rather than simply inheriting it. It is worth carrying that same observation one step further here, because Scripture makes an almost identical claim about how believers come to belong to God's own family.

"Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will." — Ephesians 1:5 NKJV

"For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'" — Romans 8:15 NKJV

Adoption, unlike birth, is always a deliberate choice. No one is adopted by accident. This means that every believer's place in the family of God rests on the same kind of deliberate selection Chapter Five described in Christ's own choice of His earthly genealogy — God did not find Himself stuck with an imperfect family He had no say in. He chose it, name by name, the same way a family chooses to adopt a child rather than simply receiving one by chance of biology. This is worth remembering on the days

church family feels hardest to love: you were not merely allowed into this family. You were chosen into it, deliberately, by a Father who already knew everything imperfect about you before He made the choice.

"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified." — Romans 8:29-30 NKJV

Notice the order of that chain, because the order is the whole point. Foreknown, predestined, called, justified, glorified — every single link was already decided before you ever took a first step toward Him. Adoption into this family did not begin the day you responded. It began in a decision God had already made about you long before that.

"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." — John 6:44 NKJV

Even the coming itself is not something you managed to accomplish under your own initiative. Scripture is careful not to let salvation become a story about a person's own resourcefulness in finding God. It is a story about a Father who draws, and a child who is found only because He first came looking.

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you." — John 15:16 NKJV

Jesus says this to His own disciples directly, and it settles the matter as plainly as it can be settled. Whatever sense of belonging you feel — or do not yet feel — toward the family of God, the actual mechanics of how you came to belong were never primarily about you doing the choosing. They were about a Father who chose first, and kept choosing, long before you had any idea you had been selected at all.

A Household, Not Merely a Gathering

Paul reaches for domestic, familial language directly when describing what the church actually is, rather than settling for more abstract institutional terms:

"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God." — Ephesians 2:19 NKJV

Household is a family word, not an organizational one. It describes people who share a roof, a table, and a name — not merely a shared interest or a shared schedule. Paul's choice of this particular word matters, because it sets the expectation for how church members are meant to treat one another: not as members of a club who can be quietly avoided when relationships grow difficult, but as family, bound by something considerably harder to walk away from than mutual convenience.

What Actually Holds a Church Family Together

A church, properly understood, is a group of genuinely different people who have come together as one body — not because they have already solved their individual dysfunctions, but because they have agreed, imperfectly and repeatedly, to keep functioning together anyway. This is precisely why the qualities Scripture keeps emphasizing for church life are not qualities of achievement but qualities of relationship: grace, forgiveness, patience, love, and a settled refusal to abandon the work once begun. The New Testament names this practical glue again and again in its many "one another" commands — bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another (Ephesians 4:32), and, perhaps most directly of all:

"Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do." — Colossians 3:13 NKJV

This is not a call to pretend the differences and hurts inside a church family do not exist. It is a call to hold them the way this whole book has been arguing every family must hold its own internal dysfunction — honestly, without illusion, and without letting the honesty become an excuse to walk away. You may not always understand the person seated beside you in worship. They may not understand you either. You can still love each other anyway. You can still accept the genuine differences between you, appreciate whatever diversity of background and experience each person brings, and still find a way, at the end of even the hardest week, to bow your heads together and bless the same Lord as one family.

Chapter 7

Where Love Draws a Line

A Necessary Boundary: Distance Is Sometimes Right, Hatred Never Is

Nothing in this book should be mistaken for an argument that a functional family — physical or spiritual — must simply accept, excuse, or quietly absorb every vice, sin, and act of wickedness committed inside it, so long as everyone keeps showing up. That is not what this book has been describing. A family that has stopped calling sin what it is has not achieved some higher form of grace; it has simply stopped functioning as the kind of family Scripture actually calls us to be, in a different and more serious way than the dysfunction this book has spent so many pages defending against premature disqualification.

Scripture does record real instances where distance, or even formal separation, is the right and necessary response to sin that refuses correction. Paul instructs the Corinthian church plainly not to keep close company with a professing believer who persists openly in serious sin: "not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner — not even to eat with such a person" (1 Corinthians 5:11 NKJV). He tells the Romans to "note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them" (Romans 16:17 NKJV), and instructs Titus to "reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition" (Titus 3:10 NKJV).

The apostle John, in his second letter, goes further still, instructing believers not to receive into their own homes anyone who comes teaching false doctrine and denying Christ: "do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds" (2 John 1:10-11 NKJV) — a real, deliberate boundary, not a suggestion. And Paul's well-known instruction not to be "unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14 NKJV) describes exactly this same principle applied to close, ongoing partnership: real distance from those actively opposed to righteousness is sometimes the faithful response, not the failure of one.

But notice what none of these passages ever authorize, however plainly they authorize distance. Not one of them makes room for hatred, animosity, or vindictiveness toward the person being kept at arm's length. This matters enough to state as its own principle: Scripture gives real warrant for separation. It gives no warrant, anywhere, for enmity.

Christ's own instruction in Matthew 18 proves this precisely, and it is worth reading with more care than it usually receives. After describing the full process of private correction, then correction before witnesses, then correction before the whole church, Jesus concludes: "if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector" (Matthew 18:17 NKJV). Read carelessly, this sounds like license to treat the unrepentant as an enemy. Read against everything else Christ actually taught and modeled, it cannot mean that. This is the same Jesus who commanded, without qualification, "love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44 NKJV) — and who was Himself criticized repeatedly for eating with tax collectors and sinners, seeking them out rather than avoiding them (Matthew 9:10-13; Luke 19:1-10).

"Treat him as a tax collector" cannot mean "hate him," because Christ's own treatment of actual tax collectors was compassion, invitation, and pursuit, never contempt. What it means instead is the same thing Paul makes explicit a few decades later, describing this exact situation in almost identical terms: "if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 NKJV). Distance, yes — close, ongoing, unguarded fellowship withdrawn, for the sake of both the offender's own shame leading to repentance and the community's own integrity. Enmity, never.

*Why does this distance matter enough for Scripture to command it? Because the person in question is not merely flawed — every person in every family this book has examined was flawed — **but is actively resisting reconciliation, or willfully embracing sin, boasting in it and entirely comfortable continuing on in it.** That is a materially different condition from ordinary human failure, and Scripture is careful to keep the two conditions from being confused with one another.*

Most division inside a family or a church is not this kind at all, and Scripture does not speak kindly of it. Paul names the ordinary sources of division plainly — pride, favoritism, personal ambition, disputes over opinion or preference — and places them squarely among the works of the flesh rather than anything to be defended: "hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies... of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21 NKJV).

Splitting a family or a church over pride, over favoritism, over who is right about a matter of opinion, over administrative disagreement — none of this is the righteous distance this chapter has been describing. It is precisely the kind of division working against the unity Christ prayed His people would hold onto, on the night before His own death — a prayer this chapter will return to shortly. The distance this chapter defends is narrow and exceptional — reserved for actual, unrepentant wickedness — not a license to walk away from a brother or sister over anything less than that.

And yet Scripture treats the person who casually creates this kind of division — who sows discord among brothers merely for its own sake, rather than in defense of righteousness — as one of the most serious offenders it names anywhere. Solomon's list of things the Lord hates ends on this exact note:

"These six things the LORD hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him... a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren." — Proverbs 6:16, 19 NKJV

The Hebrew repays close attention here. "Sows discord" translates *meshalleach midyanim* — *meshalleach* is an intensive form of the verb *shalach*, "to send," describing not someone who merely drifts into an argument but someone who actively launches conflict, the way an archer deliberately looses an arrow rather than one falling by accident. *Midyanim*, "discord" or "contentions," shares its root with the Hebrew word for legal dispute and courtroom accusation — this is a person who manufactures grounds for accusation between brothers where none genuinely existed. And the word rendered "abomination," *to'ebah*, is one of Scripture's strongest terms of moral revulsion, used elsewhere for idolatry itself. Solomon places the deliberate sowing of discord among family in the very same moral category as bowing to another god — a striking, deliberate placement, and a serious warning to anyone tempted to treat casual estrangement from family or church family as a minor thing.

This is precisely why Christ prayed, on the night before His crucifixion, for a unity among His own family of believers modeled on nothing less than His own unity with the Father: "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us" (John 17:21 NKJV). Paul labored for the same unity in his own ministry, urging believers to be "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3 NKJV) and to be "of one accord, of one mind" (Philippians 2:2 NKJV). This is the standard this book is actually holding up — not the false peace of a family that has agreed never to name sin, and not the false righteousness of a family

that has confused necessary distance with permission for animosity, but the harder, narrower path between the two: naming sin honestly, keeping whatever distance faithfulness genuinely requires, and refusing, in every case, to let that distance curdle into the hatred, unforgiveness, and vindictiveness Scripture never once sanctions.

This is a subject that deserves, and has received, a fuller treatment than this chapter has room for — I have written on it at greater length in a companion volume, ***That They May Be One***, for any reader who wants to go further into what biblical unity actually requires and where its real boundaries lie. For the harder, more personal question of how to actually love the specific difficult people in your own life — including those working actively against you — ***How to Love Someone Hard to Love*** takes up that subject directly. Both are available at oludareakinbo.com/my-books.

Chapter 8

Making Family Important Again

The Charge This Book Has Been Building Toward

Everything this book has examined — the theology of family from Genesis onward, the honest record of Scripture's own dysfunctional households, the scandal-filled genealogy Jesus was not ashamed to claim, the church itself as a family of unfinished people — leads to a single, practical charge, and it is worth stating as plainly as the rest of this book has tried to be stated: make your family important to you again, starting now, not at some more convenient future date.

This charge breaks down into four concrete movements, each grounded in something Scripture actually asks of us rather than left as vague sentiment. But before naming them, it is worth returning to the distinction this book made carefully on its very first pages, because these four movements are easy to hear as a self-improvement checklist, and that is not what they are. None of what follows is offered as something to be accomplished by simply trying harder. Every family this book has examined that actually became functional again did so because God's own Spirit, working through God's own Word, supplied a power none of them had managed to generate on their own — Zamperini's sobriety, Monica's seventeen years of unrelenting prayer, Susanna's daily discipline inside a household stretched thin by absence and grief. The four movements below are not a substitute for that same power. They are simply what that power tends to look like once it actually takes hold of a person — the visible shape love takes when it is genuinely fervent rather than merely willed.

First: Renew Love and Devotion Toward the Actual People You Have

Not the idealized family you might wish you had been given instead — the real one, flaws included. Peter's instruction to the early church applies with equal force inside a household: "above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8 NKJV). *Fervent* is not a mild word; it describes love stretched taut, actively reaching rather than passively assumed. A family does not stay functional on the strength of shared history alone. It stays functional on the strength of love that keeps choosing to reach toward the people already in front of it.

Second: Pray for Them, Specifically and by Name

It means praying specifically for the salvation and wellbeing of every family member who does not yet know Christ, by name, the way Job once prayed over his own children, rising early and interceding for each of them individually (Job 1:5). Paul commends this same specificity in Epaphras, who is remembered as "always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Colossians 4:12 NKJV) — not a general, background hope for his people's wellbeing, but focused, named, ongoing labor. Vague goodwill toward "my family" in the abstract costs a person nothing and accomplishes very little. Naming each person, one at a time, before God, is a different and considerably more demanding discipline — and it is the one this book is asking you to actually take up.

Third: Do Something Concrete, Not Merely Something Felt

It means doing something concrete and kind, this week if possible, for someone in your family you have been angry with, ashamed of, or quietly estranged from for longer than either of you would probably admit out loud. John will not let love remain a purely internal, sentimental thing: "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18 NKJV). Paul gives the same instruction a practical edge, extending the obligation of Christian love specifically into the household: "as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10 NKJV) — a principle that applies with at least equal force to the household you actually live in. A phone call. A visit. An honest, unprompted apology. Scripture is not interested in whether you have warm feelings toward your family this week. It is interested in whether those feelings, or the absence of them, ever actually turn into something done.

Fourth: Learn How Reconciliation Actually Approaches, Not Just That It Should

Knowing that reconciliation matters and knowing how to actually begin it are two different things, and Scripture does not leave the second question unanswered. The prodigal son, deciding to return home, does not simply show up and hope for the best. He rehearses what he will actually say: "I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and am no longer worthy to be called your son'" (Luke 15:18-19 NKJV). Notice what his rehearsed words do not contain — no excuse, no blame shifted onto circumstances, no minimizing of what was actually done. A genuine approach toward a broken family relationship names the wrong plainly before asking for anything in return.

Joseph offers a second, complementary model, worth holding alongside the prodigal's. When his brothers first stood before him in Egypt, Joseph did not immediately reveal himself and declare everything forgiven. He tested them first, deliberately, across several difficult encounters, before he was satisfied that real change had actually taken root in them (Genesis 42-44). Only then, unable to restrain himself any longer, did he finally say, "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt" (Genesis 45:4 NKJV), and weep with them openly. Reconciliation, in other words, does not always have to happen in a single dramatic gesture. Sometimes it is built carefully, a step at a time, the way trust itself is generally rebuilt — through consistent evidence rather than a single declared decision.

Why This Cannot Wait for a More Convenient Season

This charge was framed, deliberately, as something to begin now rather than at some later, more convenient date, and that urgency deserves its own explanation rather than being left as rhetorical flourish. James is blunt about how little any of us can actually count on regarding tomorrow: "you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (James 4:14 NKJV). Every story this book has told involved real time — years of Monica's prayer, decades before Zamperini's reconciliation, an entire lifetime of the Wesley children's formation. But every one of those stories also depended on someone still being alive long enough for the reconciliation to actually happen. Not every estrangement gets that long a runway. The charge to act now, rather than eventually, is not manufactured urgency. It is simply an honest reckoning with how little any of us actually know about how much time remains to do this work.

When the Other Side Will Not Meet You Halfway

It would be dishonest to close this chapter without addressing what happens when your own effort toward reconciliation is met with continued rejection, because that does happen, and Scripture does not pretend otherwise. Paul's own instruction accounts for exactly this possibility: "if it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18 NKJV). Notice the careful qualification built into that sentence — *if it is possible*, and *as much as depends on you*. Paul does not promise that every reconciliation attempt will succeed, and he does not place the full weight of another person's response on your shoulders. Your responsibility is your own faithfulness — the love actually offered, the prayer actually prayed, the door actually left open. Whether it is received is not, finally, within your control, and Scripture never asks you to guarantee an outcome you were never given the power to guarantee. It asks only that the door was genuinely, honestly left open on your end.

An Obligation That Does Not Depend on Deserving It

You do not get to choose your family. Only Jesus Christ, entering His own genealogy by deliberate choice rather than accident of birth, has ever had that particular freedom — and even He, given the choice, selected a bloodline full of scandal rather than a spotless one. The rest of us inherit our families exactly as they are, flaws included, and Scripture does not release us from responsibility toward them simply because they are difficult to love.

You cannot disown them, not in any sense Scripture would recognize as legitimate. You have an obligation to pray for them, to love them, to bear witness to them of what Christ has done in your own life, and to help them in whatever way is actually within your power. Your family — every difficult, embarrassing, unfinished member of it — belongs in your prayers, often, and by name. Paul names this obligation as a debt in the most literal sense: "Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8 NKJV) — a debt of love that, unlike every other debt, is never actually paid off, only ever continued.

I have written on this at greater length in ***Owe No Man Anything But to Love One Another***, available at oludareakinbo.com/my-books, for any reader who wants to sit longer with what that unending debt actually requires.

Jesus Christ came to redeem family members exactly like Tamar, exactly like David, exactly like whichever name in your own family history is hardest to say out loud. He bore the cross to Calvary, shed His blood, died, and was placed in a borrowed tomb, for

family members like yours. He rose on the third day to prove that He can conquer anything — and if He conquered death itself, there is no family dysfunction, however old or however entrenched, that He cannot also conquer, given the chance.

Personal Reflection

Before the final word, sit with these ten questions. Some of them will be uncomfortable; that is part of their work. Do not rush past them. The honest answers are where the change begins.

1. Have I been quietly measuring my own family against a standard of harmony Scripture itself never actually promises?
 2. Whose dysfunction in my family have I allowed to convince me the whole family is somehow disqualified, rather than simply one flawed member of it?
 3. Like Susanna Wesley, am I in a hard season with someone in my family that may still bear fruit I can't see yet? Or like Monica, is there someone I have not yet stopped praying for? This applies to physical family or spiritual family — or both.
 4. Which biblical family from Chapter Four's honest record most resembles my own — and what comfort, or what warning, does that comparison actually offer me?
 5. Is there a name in my own family history I have quietly tried to keep out of the story, the way I might once have wished Tamar or Solomon were left out of Jesus' genealogy?
 6. Am I currently withholding forgiveness from a family member on the grounds that I do not yet understand them — when Scripture never actually made understanding a condition of forgiveness?
 7. Do I actually pray for the salvation and wellbeing of specific family members by name, or only in the vague, general way that is easy to let slip?
 8. In my local church family, am I extending the same grace to fellow believers' obvious imperfections that I would want extended to my own?
 9. What would it cost me, honestly, to do one concrete, kind thing this week for a family member I have been distant from?
 10. If Jesus was not ashamed to claim my family's exact flaws as His own inheritance, what am I still ashamed to bring to Him in prayer?
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Final Word

Every family this book has examined — Adam and Eve's, Abraham and Sarah's, Jacob's, David's, the family Jesus Himself was born into — was genuinely, sometimes severely, dysfunctional in its individual members. Not one of them was disqualified from God's use because of it. Louis and Cynthia Zamperini's marriage nearly ended in divorce before it became, instead, a fifty-year testimony to what grace can rebuild. Susanna Wesley's household, strained by absence and grief and poverty, produced two of the most consequential men in the history of the Christian faith. Monica wept and prayed for seventeen years over a son who lied to her, abandoned her at a seaport, and lived by his own admission in open sin — and lived to see him become one of the most consequential theologians the church has ever known.

The difference, every time, was never the absence of dysfunction. It was not, either, simply a matter of these families trying harder than the ones who did not make it. Remember where this book began: not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble — God has consistently chosen exactly the weak and the foolish things of the world for this work, so that the strength on display could never be credited to human effort alone. The families examined in these pages did not hold themselves together by willpower. They became, each in their own way, the place where God's strength was made perfect in weakness — where His Word, which Christ Himself called spirit and life, was actually allowed to dwell rather than merely admired from a safe distance. That is the missing ingredient this whole book has been pointing toward: not a technique for finding grace and harmony on your own strength, but a Person and a Word capable of producing what no family, however devoted, could ever manufacture unaided.

You do not need a perfect family to be part of God's story. Scripture has never once required that, and the genealogy of Jesus Christ Himself is the proof. Nor do you need to have chosen your family in the first place to owe it your love — Christ did not wait to be born into a spotless line before He was willing to redeem the one He actually had, and He has since chosen, by adoption, to call people like you and me family as well, knowing everything imperfect about us in advance. What you need is what every family in this book eventually received: the Spirit of God meeting real, ordinary weakness, and the Word of God actually dwelling — richly, not occasionally — in people who kept choosing, one imperfect day at a time, to let it.

Make your family important to you again. Today, if you can. And ask for the only strength Scripture has ever promised is sufficient for the work.

"Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do." — Colossians 3:13 NKJV