

Hebrews 13:1-3 - Feels Like Family

Sign Title: Why church feels like family

March 7, 2010

We arrived at an exciting part in the book of Hebrews. The rest of the book of Hebrews will have a different feel to it than the earlier portion of this book. Everybody take their thinking caps out and put them on. We are going to Bible school before we get to our text.

New Testament letters, which are most of the books in our Bible beginning with Romans and move toward the end of the Bible, follow a pattern. The front 80% of these letters are theology, that is the truth about God and Christ. The last 20% is practice, that is real life issues, what it looks like to live as a Christian in the rough and bump of everyday life.

When I was a teenager studying the Bible, I was frustrated with this. Skip the brainy theology stuff and give me the action steps because I am an action oriented guy. I wondered, why is there a clear line in these letters where they shift from God information to practical application. The reason the front ¾ of these letters spend so much time teaching the greatness of Christ is because *it is only when we understand who we are in Jesus that we can live for Jesus.*

Last week, the writer of Hebrews hit his theological grand finale about Jesus. Like a rock band screaming on the electric guitar as they close their concert, the writer of Hebrews closed his theological section about Jesus. This morning the writer of Hebrew shifts gears and gets real practical. That is the gear he stays in till the end of the book.

Hebrews 13:1-3

I entitled this message, “Feels like Family” because that is what these verses are about. They tell us how to live together in the God’s family as we keep in mind who we are through Jesus. A defining quality in our family life is the incredible capacity we have for love. This capacity for love comes from our experience of the greatest expression of love known to man, the love of Christ shown to us.

We love because he first loved us. 1 John 4:19

Our capacity for love also comes from the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The Holy Spirit literally pours into us a supernatural capacity to love others.

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Romans 5:5

As a church, the capacity we have for love is greater than anyplace else in the world. Turn to your neighbor and say, I have a supernatural capacity to love you.

Everybody wants to be loved. I was watching a television news program on the cult of the hugging saint. Has anybody heard about this? This lady in India has tens of thousands of people traveling from around the world to her village so she can hug them. I am watching the program thinking how this lady is loving people in her own strength. Imagine what we can do with our supernatural capacity to love through God’s strength.

Our text shows us three ways Christ’s love propels us to love our brothers and sisters.

Christ's family continues loving one another.

Let brotherly love continue. Hebrews 13:1

This word brotherly love is the word *philadelphia*. It is family love. It is the kind of love that takes place in a home. It is the kind of love that happens when people are connected on a deep family level at their DNA.

If you are a kid growing up in your home, you probably don't think about your brother or sister with deep love. Right now, they are probably the most irritating thing in your life, but trust me, when you in the right situation, you will feel totally differently about your own flesh and blood.

A few years ago, our boys were at wrestling practice. At the end of practice the team played a game called *King of the Mat*. In this game the lightest two athletes wrestle, the winner stays on the mat and is wrestled by the next heavier man in the room. When it came to Daniel, he did well and won a number of matches and found himself wrestling bigger and bigger kids. Eventually he had to wrestle a boy the same size as his older brother, David. We warned the bigger boy to be careful with Daniel because Daniel was much smaller. He didn't listen. He grabbed Daniel and threw him over his head slamming him on the back of his neck. Daniel was crying in pain. Who do you think the next bigger wrestler was in the room? David, Daniel's brother. David went on the mat to challenge this wrestler and he was mad. There was smoke his nose and fire coming from his mouth. The boy was backing away before the match even started. I will never forget what David said to me when the match was over. He said, "Dad, when he hurt Daniel, he hurt me."

That is the deep family connection we are talking. As brothers and sisters through Christ, this is the kind of connection we have between us.

This family love between us is one of the evidences God gives us that we are saved.

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. 1 John 3:14

This family love we have for one another is also the way the world realizes that something supernatural has happened in our lives. People look at the church and they don't see everyone from the same socio-economic class, they don't see everyone part of the same ethnic race, they don't see everyone the same age and they just don't understand why everyone gathers together. The only thing that ties the group together is Jesus and the way this love is seen is the way we love one another.

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:35

Notice the verb in this short verse. We are to let brotherly love *continue*. We are not to create brotherly love, we are to let what is already in us come out of us. We don't have the capacity to create love for our brothers and sisters but we have the capacity to squelch the love.

Remember what was happening at this time, these were Jewish Christians in Rome undergoing persecution. When you have a bad day at work and come home, how much family love do you feel like showing? Not much! When life is tough, it is hard to love. We have the love for our family but we don't feel like showing that love. We have to choose to show the love. This is not an optional thing. It is a command. When life is tough, *keep loving each other*.

It is not just when life is tough that it is hard to love our family, but it is also when we get close to people that we discover things about them we didn't know about before, things that are irritating. The closer we get to our church family, the greater capacity we have for disappointing one another. It is like a newly wed couple. They can't wait to get married and be together all the time. Then when they finally get married they discover life isn't easy. She can't believe he is so messy and leaves his clothes on the floor. He can't believe she is so insistent on the toilet paper rolling from the top rather than the bottom. He takes 6 minutes to get ready in the morning and he can't understand why it takes her over 60 minutes. She is crying because the dinner is overcooked, he really doesn't care, it is better than anything he could make for himself.

The closer a family gets, the harder it is to love people when you see the irritable side of people. Let's just be honest, as we get closer, you will find things about me that are annoying. You will find things about me that God is still working on. What are we supposed to do when we get close enough to finally see the irritating and unfinished areas of our lives? Should we gossip about it? Should we leave our church in search of a new perfect church home? By the way, if you do, it will only a year or two in your new church home until you discover they are just as messed up as your old one. What does it say we are to do? We are to *continue* in brotherly love.

Why do we love each other? *We are a family through Jesus where each one of us is given a supernatural capacity to love.*

Christ's family doesn't neglect strangers.

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Hebrews 13:2

The word hospitality is a good word. There is great impact in the original Greek that we miss in our english. The writer of Hebrews just told us to continue loving our brothers. The Greek word for hospitality is literally love of strangers. So we move from continuing to show love for our church family to not neglecting to show love to strangers outside of the church family.

Thanks to incredible success in our country of the Hotel and restaurant business, hospitality in our day is not as desperately sought as it was in the ancient world.

In the first century, there were hotels, but nobody wanted to stay there. In a 1st century document written by a man named Aristophanes, Aristophanes writes a friend asking which hotel he should stay in when he visits a town. He asks which hotel has the fewest fleas. Plato writes about an innkeeper who kept his guests hostage. Another first century writer, Theophrastus, puts inn keeping on the level of running a brothel.

If you were traveling, the place you wanted to stay was in someones home. Clean bedding and a home cooked meal were invaluable. Love of strangers was an important part of the Christian life in the ancient world.

seek to show hospitality. Romans 12:13b

Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. 1 Peter 4:9

If you are a church leader you must show hospitality. It isn't optional. See 1 Tim 3:2; 5:10; Titus 1:8 where hospitality is requirement for church leadership.

Ladies, I know you are freaking out. You are wondering how you can get your house clean for your own family much less for other people. Women, take a chill pill. This is not Martha-Stewart hospitality. This is practical hospitality. This is come over and have burgers and potato salad on paper plates. It is not a 7 course meal where you iron the folds into the napkins before the guests come.

Why does the writer of Hebrews command us not to neglect showing hospitality? Isn't that the way it happens? We don't have a problem with the idea of hospitality, we just never get around to doing it. We neglect it.

Why was it so important for Christians to not neglect hospitality in the ancient world? Hospitality was part of their evangelistic strategy. People who stayed in the home of a Christian left saying, "Those people are the kind of people I want to be." They have a real love in that family like I have never experienced before. Of course their families weren't perfect but they were sharing Jesus by simply being living for Jesus in their home.

When we invite people into our home we connect with them in a much deep way than we could at church. When we are around the dinner table we talk about the normal things of life. we share the love of Christ in our actions, example and words.

The writer of Hebrews puts a little reminder in here from Genesis 18 where he says, "some have entertained angels unaware." This is a reminder of what happened when Abraham showed hospitality to three strangers in Genesis 18. It turned out two of them were angels and one was probably a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. Talk about a surprise guest list!

Has anyone ever thought they entertained angels as possible guests?

Some people have experiences like that. According to Scripture, it can and does happen. We may find ourselves entertaining angels. Before you get carried away with angelic speculations, that isn't the point the writer of Hebrews is making. The point is not the angels. The point is *you never know who you are loving to when you show hospitality.*

You may find yourself playing an important role in someones life or them richly blessing you.

Let me give you an example of extreme hospitality I have never forgotten. When I began in seminary in Philadelphia, my first job was as a part time youth worker in a little Mennonite church in Pennsylvania. I was a single guy who was rough around the edges but I did my best to teacha handful of kids the Bible each week at church. Each Sunday for over a year, different families in the church grabbed me after the service and either took me to restaurant or invited me over their home for Sunday dinner. Folks, I loved going to that church. It wasn't the preaching that kept me coming. As a student on a meal plan, I couldn't wait for a good meal on Sunday! I still remember the first Sunday I had to buy my own lunch. It was over a year after I began attending. What a great demonstration of the love of Christ using a knife, fork and spoon.

Since hospitality is so important, I want to get practical about this and exercise it better here in our own Sunday gatherings. One Sunday a month, usually the first Sunday we will be enjoying family meals together. Not only will

this give us a chance to have a family meal but it will also give us a chance to rub shoulders with new people in our church and show hospitality to them.

Second, I want to start something new. I would like us to have one to two families a week that come on Sunday looking for new people and planning to invite them to lunch. You can invite them to Pizza Ranch or you can invite them over your home for a meal, that is your call. If enough people sign up for this a family may only have the chance to do this once or twice a year.

Take out your registration card and look on the back. If you are interested in being a family that takes responsibility for some of the hospitality we show to our Sunday guests, sign up and we will give you a call.

Why do we love strangers? *We are a family through Jesus where each one of us is given a supernatural capacity to love.*

Christ's family remembers those who suffer.

Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body. Hebrews 13:3

We know that nobody has yet died for their faith in Rome but it appears people were suffering. This verse implies some people of the church were arrested for their faith and mistreated. Prisons in the ancient world were not like today. Prisoners didn't get three square meals. There was no cable TV or warm blankets. Prison life was rough. If you needed anything, you didn't get it unless your friends brought it to you. Those who remembered you brought your food, they brought you clean clothes, they brought you blankets. If people from the outside didn't take care of you, life was not pretty.

It wasn't uncommon for prisoners to go through a great deal of suffering because people on the outside of the prison forgot about them suffering on the inside. After all, when your friend is out of sight, they are out of mind. Christians had a reputation for the incredible care they showed for their Christian brothers and sisters in prison.

In an ancient document called *The Apology of Aristides*, the writer describes how Christians cared for their own in prison.

If they hear that any of their number is imprisoned or oppressed for the name of their Messiah, all of them provide for his needs, and if it is possible that he may be delivered, they deliver him. If there is among them a man who is poor or needy, and they have not an abundance of necessaries, they fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with their necessary food.

Talk about amazing sacrifice for others, it amazes me that people fasted to provide for their brothers and sisters needs in prison. Today, there are not many Christians in our country who are imprisoned for their faith. Our country is an exception. If you look at www.persecution.com or www.persecution.org you will see countless stories of people all over the world suffering in prison for their faith.

The point the writer of Hebrews is making is broader than just those suffering jail time. He says that when our brothers and sisters through Jesus suffer, we empathize with them. We feel their suffering and we help them the way we would want to be helped.

If one member suffers, all suffer together... 1 Corinthians 12:26

Let me get practical. Each week a weekly prayer list comes out. Many of the prayer requests are about those in our body going through a difficult time. What a better way to follow this command than to pray through the prayer sheet,

to drop some people on the list a brief note of encouragement or to send a brief email letting them know you are praying for them. The family connection between us connects us so close that when one of us suffers, the rest of us feel that suffering and we feel compelled to love them.

Why do we love those who are suffering? *We are a family through Jesus where each one of us is given a supernatural capacity to love.*

Conclusion

Now everyone stand up, turn to the person next to you; give them a high-five and say, "You have a supernatural capacity to love people, this week, go do it!"

Prayer

Father, thank you for loving us when there is nothing lovely about us. Thank you for giving us a supernatural capacity to love people. I ask that Faith EFC will become a church where our supernatural capacity to love people is lived out in a tangible way. Amen.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the EFCA. He enjoys reading, writing, time with his family and wrestling with his sons. His favorite topics of study are ancient rhetoric and preaching.

Feel free to contact him at ktruck@gmail.com or visit his web at www.kurttrucksess.com

© Dr. Kurt Trucksess. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include the web site address (<http://www.kurttrucksess.com/>) on the copied resource.