

Sermon: *Formed For God's Family*
Text: *Hebrews 2:10*
Date: *October 26, 2008 AM*
Place: *Jesup First UMC*

You and I will always be family not only in this life but in the life to come. You see, God has a purpose for your life. You were planned for God's pleasure; that's worship! That's our first purpose, but there's more. Hebrews 2:10 says: **"God is the one who makes all things and all things are for His glory. He wanted to have many children share His glory. His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ."**

Here's your second purpose: You were formed for God's family, that's fellowship! Now, fellowship is a word that many people misunderstand, because it's more than casual conversation; it's more than sharing a meal or a cup of coffee. Bob walks up to Jim and says, "How bout them Noles?" Jim says, "May, they're really tearing up the field, aren't they?" And they talk for a few more minutes and then, Jim says: "Well, nice fellowshipping with you." Listen, that wasn't fellowship; that was just small talk!

Fellowship is deeper than that. Fellowship is: loving God's family. I Peter 2:17 says: **"Love your spiritual family."** And that's why we have the Bible, because it tells us how to live in relationship with God and with one another. And the best place to do that is within the church. I John 4:21 says: **"The person who loves God must also love other believers."**

Now, in the church, there are four levels of fellowship. And that's what we're going to talk about this morning.

The first level of fellowship is membership, choosing to belong! Ephesians 2:19 says: **“You are members of God’s very own family and you belong to God’s household with every other Christian.”** We belong! You see, the church is more than believing; it’s belonging. When you were born, you were born into a family and when you were born again, you were born into God’s family.

Now, some people claim to be Christians but you never see them in church. You know, a football player plays on a team; a baseball player plays on a team. Musicians play in a band. And Christians belong to a family; you were formed for God’s family. Romans 12:5 says: **“In Christ, we who are many form one Body and each member belongs to all the others.”** Every Christian belongs in a local church.

Some people are floating believers. And if they don’t like the preacher or if things don’t go their way, they stop coming and start going somewhere else. But listen, God’s plan is for every believer to belong to a local church, to settle down and stay put, because that’s how you grow in Christ. You don’t grow by jumping from place to place. You grow by setting down roots and deepening your fellowship with other believers.

Now, baptism is the symbol of belonging. Baptism says: *“I belong.”* When a man and a woman get married, they exchange rings, outward and visible signs of their love for one another. Those rings become symbols that they belong together. That’s what baptism says, *“I belong to God and His family.”*

I Corinthians 12:13 says: **"This is what we proclaim in word and action when we were baptized: each of us is not a part of His resurrection Body."**

The first level of fellowship is membership, choosing to belong!

The second level of fellowship is friendship, learning to share. We were made for relationships. God looked down and said: **"It is not good for man to be alone."** We need friends to share life with. Acts 2 says: **"All the believers met together constantly and shared everything with each other."** And the more they shared the deeper their fellowship became.

Now, the Bible says there are at least three things we need to share. ***First, we need to share our experiences.*** We learn from one another **"just like iron sharpens iron."** We learn from the triumphs and tragedies of others. That's why we need to share our experiences with one another.

Second, we need to share our homes. I Peter 4:9 says: **"Open up your homes to each other."** You see, real fellowship doesn't happen at church; it happens when you invite someone over to sit down for a while and share your life. And I'm thankful for those 10 people who opened their homes for our weekly huddles. That's where real fellowship happens.

Third, we need to share our problems. We aren't supposed to face our problems alone. The Bible says: **"Share each other's troubles and problems."** It says: **"Weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice."** Everybody needs somebody to share their troubles with.

The second level of fellowship is friendship, learning to share.

The third level of fellowship is partnership, doing my part. A partner makes a contribution to the family. A partner doesn't sit; a partner serves. Now, every family has tasks that need to be done; in our family, we have chores and everybody does something. Well, the church is a family and we are called to serve together side by side until Jesus comes.

I Corinthians 3 says: "***We are partners, working together for God.***" In fact, the word "*fellowship*" is often translated "*partnership*." And man, there's nothing like being part of a team that cooperates and participates together. Paul told the Church at Philippi: "***We are partners, spreading the good news of Christ everywhere.***"

Now, to be a partner, you have to find your place. Ephesians 4 says: "***The whole body is fitted together perfectly; as each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.***" You can't be a partner while sitting in the bleachers. You've got to do your part.

And you've got to do your part with the right attitude. Someone asked Mother Teresa: "*How do you handle all the death and disease every day?*" And she said: "*Every person I bathe, every person I bandage, I imagine seeing the face of Jesus and I do it for Him.*" That's what Matthew 25 says: "***Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.***" And so it is that everything that we do,

we must do together – as partners – as if we were doing it to the Lord Himself.

The third level of fellowship is partnership, doing my part.

The fourth level of fellowship is kinship, loving others like family. Now, your kin are the people who are closest to you, the people that you love the most. These are the people you are most committed to. Acts 2:42 says: ***“They were like family to each other.”*** You see, we’re not like a family; we are a family. Romans 12:10 says: ***“Be devoted to each other like a loving family.”*** You see, the Greek word for fellowship is Koinonia, and it means to be intimately committed to one another, to be as committed to one another as we are to Christ. That’s kinship. It means being willing to sacrifice for one another. It’s the kind of love that took Jesus to the cross. I John 3:16 says: ***“We know what real love is because Christ gave up His life for us and we ought to give up our lives for one another.”***

Now, how do we reach that level of fellowship? Well, you start by standing with one another in times of crisis. When everybody else is walking out, your church family needs to be walking in.

The Johnsons – daughter kidnapped and killed baby – etc.

That’s what kinship is all about – really loving one another. The fourth level of fellowship is kinship, loving one another like family.

Now, if you miss this, you’ll miss it all, because life isn’t about accomplishments; it’s about relationships. When I’m with people who are dying,

they don't ask for treasures or things or trophies; they ask for family. Life is about relationships: your relationship with God and your relationship with family and friends.

When we love God, that's worship; when we love others, that's fellowship! John 13 says: "*Your strong love for each other will prove to the world that you are my disciples.*" Soon after Jesus said this, Christians were being thrown to the lions and burned at the stake. And in the midst of the persecution, a Roman historian wrote: "*Behold, how they love one another.*" That's what we want our church to be known for – not for its size or its buildings – not for its sermons or its music, but – for its love. And that's what people are looking for today, a church family who will love them and accept them just the way they are.

Now, how do you know if you're in the family? I John 3:10 says: "*Anyone who does not love other Christians does not belong to God.*" I John 4:20 says: "*Those who do not love their brothers and sisters, who they have seen, cannot love God whom they have never seen.*" And I John 3:14 says: "*But if we love our Christians brothers, it proves that we have passed from death to eternal life.*"

To love God is to love God's family. And we need to spend a great big, majority of our time learning to love one another, because if we don't get this right, who's going to want to be a part of our church. If we don't get this right, it won't matter what kind of youth and children's programs we have; it won't matter what the sermons are like or the music

either. *“By this will everyone know that you are my disciples if you love one another.”*

What’s your level of fellowship like this morning?
Have you chosen to belong? That’s membership!
Are you learning to share? That’s friendship! Are you
doing your part? That’s partnership! Do you love
others like family? That’s kinship!