

Camelback Bible Church



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ELECTION OF A NEW FAMILY

The Plan: Reclaiming All Things for God's Glory (Part 4)
Genesis 12:1-3, Isaiah 42:1-7, 49:6-7, Galatians 3:8, 16, 26-29

The saddest thing ever written. Do you know what it is? Listen to these words – *The Lord was sorry that he made man on the earth and it grieved him to his heart.*

Where does it say that? In the Bible. Right after Adam blamed Eve for giving him the fruit. Right after Cain murdered Abel for producing a better offering. Right after the sons of God lay with the daughters of man lusting after their beauty.

In other words, right after humanity began to implode relationally. Right after men and women began to exchange the glory of imaging God for the vanity of pursuing their own glory. Right after human beings became self-grasping instead of self-giving. Genesis 6:6 – *The Lord was sorry that he made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.*

The Plan of God for this world was so beautiful in conception, but so tragic in execution. Farewell to The Plan.

Not so fast. We've only seen the first installment of The Plan.

Praise God: he's still unfolding The Plan. And wait until you see the next chapter. It will make The Plan even more beautiful than you thought possible.

The next step is the election of a new family.

The Family of God in the Old Testament

Look at Genesis 12:1 – *Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."*

I see three things there. First of all, leave your family. *Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house.* Then, secondly, become a new family. *I will make of you a great nation.* And finally, thirdly, as a new family, minister to the families of the world. *In you all the families of the earth will be blessed.*

In other words, Abraham, I'm going to make you a new family, and with global significance. It's a theme stressed repeatedly in Genesis. Look at chapter 18 verses 17 and 18 – *The Lord said, "Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?"*

And look at chapter 22 verse 18 – *"In your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed."*

And look at chapter 26 verse 4 – *"I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed."*

And look at chapter 28 verse 14 – *"Your offspring will be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed."*

Do you see what's happening here? It's so beautiful. God is executing The Plan he set out in Genesis 1. Remember? You shall *be fruitful and multiply*, Adam and Eve. Now he's giving the same promise to Abraham. You will be fruitful and multiply like the stars of heaven, like the dust of the earth, and you will fill the world, spreading abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south.

But fill the world with what?

Do you remember? With his image. With people who image him to the four corners of the compass. You can only image God – the triune God who said, *Let us* (plural) *make man in our* (plural) *image* – through a family.

And how do you image God? You image God as a family. That's why he's called Abraham out and said, "Be my family in the earth!"

How do you image God as a family? We saw two weeks ago, when we looked at the Son in the triune Godhead. We saw that in Jesus, who, because he was in the form of God, because he was in the image of God, he emptied himself. He took on the form of a servant. He gave up his life for others on a cross. We saw in Jesus the capacity to give himself to others infinitely, and in so doing to image God perfectly.

When we're called to image God, we're called to image the one who images him perfectly, namely Jesus, who expresses self-giving love in the context of a family.

This is absolutely brilliant, isn't it?

Humans were slow on the uptake. Indeed, they fell short of the glory of imaging God and instead pursued their own glory. Rather than self-giving, they became self-grasping.

And the two members of the first family became self-conscious. They covered themselves up with leaves because they noticed they were naked. Before, they were too self-giving. They were pouring themselves into each other. They were so other-oriented they didn't even notice their individual selves. But as soon as they grasped for themselves and pursued their own glory, they became self-conscious.

And so, after Adam and Eve sinned, God said, "I'm not going to chuck my plan. It's a good plan. All this world has ever needed is what I created it to image, my own self-giving love. I'm going to make a provision for that."

So what does God do? He elects a new family who will image him, who will multiply and fill the earth with his self-giving image. In you, Abraham, and your offspring will all the families of the earth be blessed.

Oh how the world needs a family like Abraham's that shows it how to be a family, that rescues them from the curse of inter-relational discord, and blesses them with a picture of a family that reproduces God's glory – the unifying glory of self-giving love. "I'll tell you, Abraham," says God, "when the bruised and battered families of this dark world catch an eyeful of my glory in you, they'll come running."

The prophet Isaiah predicted such a day: *The glory of the Lord has risen upon you. Darkness has covered the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord has arisen upon you and his glory is seen on you and the nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes all around, and see; they are all gathering together; they are coming to you. The wealth of the nations is coming to you* (Isaiah 60:1-5).

They see the glory of God in this self-giving family and, with desperation, want a piece of it.

There's only one thing wrong with this world. It is relationally dysfunctional. We don't get along with each other. There is interpersonal discord and societal strife at every turn. But, finally, here's a family to which people can look and see what it means to be relationally like God.

I am electing a family to beam my self-giving image into this fractured world in order to reclaim the world for my glory. It's not about the promise of land – not ultimately, only secondarily. The possession of the land gives Abraham a launching pad into the rest of the world for God's glory. It's not about conquest – not ultimately, only secondarily. The conquest of darkness enables God's light to shine.

Arise, Abraham, and shine. For your light has come. Beam the glory of the triune Family into every corner of the world. Image me and my self-giving glory.

Well, how did Abraham and his family do? There were some high points - Abraham's faith, Joseph's loyalty, David's godliness, Elijah's courage, Isaiah's hope. But this brutally honest book called the Bible sends out the report that the failures are far more abundant. The treachery of Jacob, the jealousy of Joseph's brothers, the incest of Judah, the anger of Moses, the murmuring of Israel, the syncretism of Gideon, the lechery of Samson, the spinelessness of Eli, the fears of Saul, the adultery and murder of David, the greed of Absalom, the avarice of Solomon, the wickedness of Israel's kings, the idolatry of the people of Judah.

There is not much of the glory of God in the family of Abraham. It is a family marooned in the same darkness that engulfed the family of Adam. Far from showing the world a better way, imaging a self-giving God, the family of Abraham also becomes mired in the sin of self-grasping.

Just like Adam and Eve. It's the same old tune. And once again The Plan, so beautiful and so radiant, becomes imperiled. We humans just can't seem to get it right. We keep exchanging the glory of the immortal God for the dim spectacle of worshipping ourselves and making icons of the image of God. We become self-grasping and the whole human race plunges into relational dysfunction and ruin.

But still, even though we have briefly canvassed almost an entire Old Testament, the unfolding of The Plan is still in its early stages.

Listen to the prophet Isaiah. He gives us tantalizing glimpses into what is to come. Look at Isaiah 42:1 – *Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit on him; and he will bring forth justice to the nations; he will be a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon; new things I now declare.*

And then Isaiah 49:6 – *“Is it too light a thing that you should be my servant. I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”*

These are prophecies of a future time when a true expression of God's image on earth will at last be fulfilled, when the light of the glory of God really travels to the ends of the earth and reaches all nations. Adam and Eve didn't do it. Abraham and his progeny didn't do it. But it will happen. It will happen, says Isaiah, through one called “my servant.”

When will it happen? How will it happen?

The Family of God in the New Testament

Yes, says Isaiah, it will happen through a servant. Problem is, we can't tell immediately who this servant is. The last third of the book of Isaiah, chapters 40-66, is often called the Servant Songs. The Servant Songs look into the future and predict the arrival of a servant, sometimes regarded as an individual and sometimes as a people, a family, the family of God. It becomes rather

confusing. How can a servant, the promised servant of Isaiah, be both an individual and a family? It doesn't seem possible.

But it is possible. It's possible precisely *in The Plan of God*.

God's plan for this world has been gathering momentum, moving inexorably towards a superlative climax. If the families of man can't get it right, can't manifest this self-giving image, then there's only one hope for the families of earth. It may be an unlikely hope, and it's going to take all of God's resources to pull off. It will cost God everything. It will even cost God a member of his triune Family. It'll cost him the Son.

When the families of the world fail to image the family of God, does God jettison The Plan? No. He takes The Plan to an unthinkable next level. In a work of unspeakable grace, he adopts us into his own family. He does so by sending his own Son to gather us up in his nail-imprinted arms and carry us into the family of God, redeeming human families for the glory of his image.

This is what the apostle Paul says in the New Testament. *In the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman* (in other words, born into a human family) *to redeem those who were under* [the curse of human families], *so that we might receive adoption as sons* [and daughters into the family of God] (Galatians 4:4-5).

Look also at Galatians 3:26 – *In Christ Jesus you are all sons* [and daughters] *of God, through faith*. I'm going to send my Son finally to make of you what you have not been able to make of yourselves – true members of my family. So that you reflect the self-giving love of the triune Family. I'm going to send a member of my heavenly Family to die on a cross, to die for your sins, and then to crawl into your heart and make you, from within, that self-giving image of me I created you to be. In Jesus Christ you will become true sons and daughters.

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Galatians 3:27). You have put on what Christ essentially is. You have put on the infinitely self-giving Christ. You have become what God created you to be. You have become fully human. You have become image-bearers of the triune Family.

Galatians 3:28 – *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*. There's no more division. There's no more fracture. There's no more strife. Because *you are all one in Christ Jesus*. We're no longer divided. We are one in the self-giving image of Christ because we have put him on.

When we are self-giving, we cannot divide ourselves off from others. It's self-grasping that causes all the division in this world, from the micro level of marriages to the macro level of international conflicts. It is all a result of self-grasping. But when we put on Christ, we become self-giving, and everyone, whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, becomes one.

The Plan is being worked out in Christ. Look at Galatians 3:29. *If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise*.

And we remember what that promise was, the promise made to Abraham, that from him a family would be formed to bless all the other families of the earth with the image of God. In Christ, the promise has come true. The second person of the triune Family, whom God sent to earth, has recovered the families of earth for God's glory, by redeeming them for an image of God's own self-giving love. This servant, the Son of Man, did *not* come *to be served* (Mark 10), *but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many* – so that we can now serve within our new family and empty ourselves into others and thereby become a light of divine glory to the families of the world.

The Family of God Today

Is this what we are?

Has Jesus, the Son of God, adopted you into the family of God on earth? Are you imaging your heavenly Father by serving the members of your family? Are you creating, through your self-giving behavior, a profusion of divine glory for the families of the world to behold?

As they look in on your family they say, “That’s the kind of family we need to be. Do you see how self-emptying they are towards each other? What a huge spark of glory in this loveless world, in this relationally dysfunctional world. At last, I see a family that’s hitting on all cylinders.” And they start running to you (Isaiah 60). The nations will run to the family of God, attracted by a better way, a brighter light, a radiant glory. Are we showing the world a better way? Is Christ in us, and is he coming out of us, out of us as the glory of his self-giving heavenly Family?

Talk about your family. Because it is always in the context of family that the self-giving glory of God comes to expression. For all our talk as Christians in this country about focusing on the family, we don’t do it very well. In America, we are so individualistic. I love America, but America was built on the principles of rationalism, at the height of the Enlightenment. The creed of rationalism is individualism. It is autonomous thinking. It is free-thinking – do your own thing, pursue your own happiness. We even enshrined these individualistic principles in our founding documents. It is an inalienable right to pursue our individual happiness.

In modern times, we create social networks, post our résumés and pictures electronically, compile multitudes of so-called friends, but it’s really for the purpose of promoting our individual selves and leering into the individual lives of others. There’s not much self-giving in these social networks, in modern relationships. It’s mostly self-grasping.

And that’s the way it’s supposed to be, say the behavioral biologists. We are constructed to pursue our own self-interest. In fact, we’ve even enshrined it into our doctrine of life – the most important thing for living organisms is to propel their genes into the next generation. This is a very self-centered pursuit. Indeed, everything we are and do is justified on the basis of whether it promotes our interests. Anything we do as humans that cannot be justified on the basis of selfish criteria does not promote the human good.

We want our way. We assert our will. We flash our power. This is the essential stuff of our human constitution, proven by biological observations. Self-grasping is the most essential human trait of all. “The selfish gene,” said Richard Dawkins who coined the term, is what makes the world of humans go around.

“I’ve built my walls
Their fortress steep and mighty
That none may penetrate
I have no need of friendship
Friendship causes pain
Its laughter and its loving I disdain

I have my books
And my poetry to protect me
I’m shielded in my armor
Hiding in my room
Safe within my womb
I touch no one, and no one touches me

I am a rock
I am an island

And a rock feels no pain
And an island never cries.”

The song is by Simon and Garfunkel.

And what has the selfish gene delivered to civilization? We inhabit a world careening out of control, plagued by pain and despair. Broken lives and shattered relationships litter our bedrooms and boardrooms. The principles of evolutionary biology and self-promotion have not produced the world we all long for. We know things ought to be better.

This isn’t The Plan.

We’ve learned about God’s plan in Jesus. In Jesus things can be better. Better inside you and, because he’s living inside you, better outside you, in your family where you image the self-giving image of God. Because of Christ, you bring to your family the exact opposite of the selfish gene. You image the glory of a self-giving God.

Did you know that it’s in your family where you make the greatest impact and leave the greatest legacy? It’s the way God designed it. Family. It’s his Plan.

That’s where you leave your mark. In the family. Is it the mark of God’s image? Is it a self-giving mark?

What does it look like?

Well, what did it look like for the triune Family?

If we take a careful look at the Son of God, we will immediately detect that Jesus put something down and he picked something up. He put down what he was doing in heaven and he came and picked us up. And when we put on Christ, we do the same.

The Family of God in Practice

What are you putting down?

And who are you picking up?

Would you permit me to provide another example from my family? I know I've talked about my dad quite a bit lately. Since he was called to his heavenly home, he has been on my mind a lot.

In the last two or three years, Dad would inquire curiously about God's plans for his life. He was at the point in life where he'd reached his mental prime. My dad was very bright, even in his mid eighties. And he thought God might want him to translate a lifetime of prayer and biblical insight into books meant for the encouragement of others. He had several writing projects on the docket.

Then, surprisingly, my dad begins scrubbing floors, cleaning dishes, doing laundry, cooking meals, and engaging in simple conversations with my mom, her brain riddled by Alzheimer's Disease and unable to care for herself or for him. Here's a man who grew up in a home with maids and butlers. He has never had to lift a finger domestically. All of sudden, at the end of his life, when he wants to write a few books for the Lord, he assumes the domestic duties in the home.

And what is his reward for his new labors? A back riddled with the mind-numbing pain of micro-fractures – because of lifting Mom – and the postponement of projects he felt might be a lasting legacy. And when Mom dies, and Dad can finally turn to those projects, he is only three months later called to her side in heaven.

How sad! What a waste!

That's not the way he looked at it. "Mommy and I have never been happier!" is what he would say to me the last two years when I asked how he was doing. "The Lord is giving us the sweetest times together!" "The fellowship we are enjoying now, just being together, very simply, with me caring for her, is so rich!"

I'm wondering, "Really?"

After Mom died, I wrote Dad a letter:

"Dear Dad,

I want to say again how grateful I am to you for the way you cared for Mom. As she declined mentally and was not able to care for herself, you presented her with a beautiful expression of Christ's love as you emptied yourself into her for her nurture, putting your own goals on hold and attending compassionately to hers. This may have been, from God's perspective, your life's greatest work. We are only disappointed that it cost you so much. Doubtless the micro-fractures in your spine are the result of lifting Mom. I cannot think of how you could have cared for her better and as your son, I praise you and I thank you for all you did."

"This may have been, from God's perspective, your life's greatest work."

Hidden away from public eyes, taking care of a woman with Alzheimer's – your life's greatest work. It was a bold statement on my part. Did I really believe it?

It wasn't until we came to the graveside for my dad and we let every family member say a word in memory of him that I discovered how believable it was.

In caring for my mom, the glory of God shone bright in Dad. So said the grandchildren, without scripts or prepared thoughts, as they stood at their grandfather's grave. They spoke not about how successful Dad was in business, nor about how knowledgeable he was about politics and history. Nor did they speak about how fun Dad was to be around, how they loved to play with him and learn from him. Rather, every grandchild, with tears, stood up and talked about how much Granddad loved their grandmom, about how he put down his life and picked up the crumbling life of his nearest neighbor. "So much like Jesus," they all said in their own ways.

The beauty of the glory of God in their grandfather, seeing what he put down and what he picked up, had smitten the hearts of six young men and young women who will, in memory of the image of their grandfather, who was himself the image of God, seek to go boldly into their world reflecting the same self-giving love.

When people see the image of God at work in us within our families, it's the most beautiful thing they will ever see. It's what they seize on when they talk about us. They say, "The self-giving love in that man, in that woman, is overwhelming! It's changing the way I think about life! I want to put on Christ and live like that too."

And the world will see God's plan for families. This is our greatest legacy.

What are you putting down? Who are you picking up? Tell me about life in your family.

You say, "My family's a mess. This sermon is really discouraging. My father is just a sperm bank." That's what a guy told me this week when I told him I lost my dad. He said, "Well, my dad is just a sperm bank. I haven't seen him for twenty-five years."

What if the nuclear family is not hitting on all cylinders in your life? With the glory of Christ radiating in your heart, you are hope for your family. The self-giving love in you, poured into them, can bring new life to your nuclear family.

But did you know that, for God, there is an even more important family than the nuclear family? It's called the Family of God.

We mistake the term family, when we interpret it only as the nuclear family. When Jesus was told that his mother and sisters were waiting outside, he said to his disciples, "These here are my true family; the ones who do the will of God." Brothers and sisters in Christ, as they are gathered in the local church – this is the most important family, in which each of us has scores of fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters. We mistake this word 'family' when we confine to describing only the nuclear family.

The local church is the principal family of God in this world. Among brothers and sisters in Christ, then, what are you putting down here and who are you picking up?

I got this great letter from a brother here at Camelback Bible Church named Hank Martin. He used to sit on the board of U-Haul here in town, representing its insurance business, and he's also involved in our church outreach to Camelback High School. This is what he wrote to me.

"The post-game report for Camelback Bible Church after last Sunday when you made the announcement calling for us as a church to reach out to the soccer team at Camelback High School, becoming mentors for those disadvantaged lads, is remarkable. So far, twenty-one people from our church family have signed up for classes training us how to take Christ to these young students. Two individuals approached the coach and asked how we could help him. One of these people bought all the jerseys for the team and the other bought every player a soccer ball."

There was pathos and excitement in Hank's note. Yes – what's more beautiful than a church family putting down its busyness and picking up people in need?

The coach was nearly in tears. He said he couldn't believe the generosity and the warmth of Camelback Bible Church.

I overheard one of the players asking why the church family would do this and the answer given was, "We love Jesus Christ. We want to reflect his self-giving love."

Coaches don't cry. We got a coach to shed tears because he's seen the image of God in us and it's beautiful to his eyes.

The glory of God. The glory of the self-giving image of God. They see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. This is The Plan.

We, the local church, are the offspring of Abraham, as we learned in Galatians 3, and we are taking the self-giving image into the world. Amen! So good.

Imagine what the Lord can do through you. In the name of Jesus, what are you putting down? As you put on Christ, who are you picking up?

[PRAYER]

Father, we pray that you would make us more like Christ with our spouse, with our children, with our parents, with our siblings, with our church family, with people in our community and world. Forgive us for our selfishness. Make us more like Christ, for your glory and for the good of those who will receive our self-giving love.