This is Family

Marali Watson 12 March 2019



I was surprised, in today's day and age, to find a reasonably neutral and untainted definition of family:

family
/ˈfamɪli, ˈfam(ə)li/

noun
"A group consisting of two parents and their children living together as a unit." [1]

As people, we have distorted the picture of what family is. Our broken world and broken relationships have also shattered God's original design of what family should look like: pure, beautiful and purposeful. Most of us were born into our families, some of us have been adopted into our families, but all of us have been adopted into God's family.

For a long time, I experienced church as a Sunday school class; a download of information with no real relationship with God or people. Like a fashion show or a theatre production, I would put on my Sunday best, cover up all my sin, flaws, questions and hurts with a thick concealer of a smile and an 'I'm fine, thank you'. When the Holy Spirit revealed who Jesus, and God, really were, when I made a commitment to follow Jesus with my entire life and with every breath, He adopted me as His own child – a daughter of the King. Coming to Joshua Generation Church was daunting but refreshing. Relationships were deep and real. The leaders that surrounded me and the friends that walked with me, in as much as I allowed them, became like the sisters and

brothers I never had.

> Now that the Four12 Conference registration is open, the Lord reminded me that when He adds people to my family, He is not restricted by many waters or far borders.

When you ask a little child how long they've waited for their brother or sister's arrival, they may respond with 'Forever', but we know it generally is only about 9 months. In church life, however, this works very differently. God has added so many people to my family through our community (life group/ cell group/ home group), our local congregation, the wider Joshua Generation Church, and even across oceans, in an instant. Instead of borrowing a cup of sugar from my neighbour, members of my community would come drop it off at my home, just so that I can carry on baking. When I have been ill, they would come and sit on my bed and help me do my school planning or bring my family a meal. When we couldn't fall pregnant, they prayed for us, encouraged us and carried me while I sobbed my heart out. And when our daughter was about to arrive and I went into a flat spin because we couldn't provide her with everything the baby magazines claimed were essentials, they calmed me down, spoke some clarity and blessed us abundantly. This is family.

Now that the Four12 Conference registration is open, the Lord reminded me that when He adds people to my family, He is not restricted by many waters or far borders. About 7 years ago now, we had the privilege of hosting a lovely couple from the Isle of Man. Within days we were family and I had gained a sister, brother and new family. We could laugh together, I could cry on her shoulder and share my deep hurts of not being able to fall pregnant, we prayed together, and we could watch movies in our pajamas. It was like I had known them my whole life. After the week staying with us, my heart ached when they had to leave, and we carried a great hope that one day we would see them again, hopefully on the Isle of Man.

> Taking people from strangers to friends to family is all in a day's work for the Lord – literally in a day.

Then the 2018 Four12 Conference in the Isle of Man was announced and, with God's blessing and provision, we made our way there. From the moment they fetched us at the airport, it felt like home. Like no time had passed at all since we last saw them. We had gained 3 children between the two families, and celebrated many victories and shed tears over hurts and loses, but still it felt like just yesterday that they left South Africa. But God is good all the time and it doesn't stop there. After great big farewells and more tears, we carried on with our journey to Horsham,

where more hearts were entwined together. Again, here we were welcomed in with open arms, so open that our hosts camped in the garden so that our family would have a space to stay. Taking people from strangers to friends to family is all in a day's work for the Lord – literally in a day. I have never experienced family like this, a joining of hearts, dreams and desires. I pray for my family across the water often. Whoever claimed that blood is thicker than water could not have scratched below the surface.

I know that in all of this, far distances and long times apart, a part of my destiny lies with these new members of my family, and a part of theirs with me. We share an inheritance, but more than that, we share in family. I trust and pray that this year at the Four12 Conference in South Africa, we can open our homes to our newest family from far away, to love them as Jesus did us.

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[1] **Source:** Google Dictionary