Pat & I were married late August of 1974. In September of that same year we moved to Salt Lake City where I was to be the youth pastor for a year.

The pastor there was an older gentleman – not quite as old as I am. When my folks and I were driving through from California on our way to the wedding, as we had arranged, we stopped to drop off my belongings.

With difficulty we connected with the pastor via telephone and he told us there was no space at the church to store anything, but there was a shed at the school that would have space.

He also warned me about Merlin, the 7th and 8th grade teacher. He told me he was a rather free spirit and was not very supportive of the church. The Pastor thought it would be a good idea for Pat and I to avoid getting involved with him or his family.

So we headed to the school where I found the principal – and Merlin. I told them the pastor had told me I could store my stuff in their shed.

They looked at me with disbelief and then started laughing. They didn’t know anything about my coming and the shed was leaky and full of mice – not a good place to store anything of value.

They were happy for me to store my things there at the school. They found a spot in the school building and assured me it would be safe until I returned. Then they stopped what they had been doing and helped me unload my stuff.

My folks and I headed on towards Colorado full of questions regarding the place and the people I had felt called to come and serve.

What Does God Want?

This afternoon we will begin the process of evaluating where we are as a church and where we should be headed.

The ultimate questions is: “Who does God want us to be?”

When people interact with us by visiting here at church or by knowing you and I as church members, what does God want them to see?
Does He most want loyal subjects? Is He after people who see Him as their king and will render Him unquestioning obedience and respect?

Is His first priority to find warriors – people who are unafraid to stand up and fight for God and His principles? Is He looking for an army of people who are willing to jump into the battle without considering personal consequences?

Is it His greatest desire to have obedient servants? People who will be in tune to His every wish and do everything in their power to serve and please Him?

Or is there another option? What does God really want from us?

A Family Created

At Creation God established two institutions that were intended to be pillars in that perfect society. These give us a big hint into what God is looking for.

After creating an environment that perfectly met the needs of the people He was planning to create, God said:

“Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness ...”

So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female.

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it ...”

(Genesis 1:26-28, CSB)

When God created a representation of Himself, He created a family. When you look at an ideal family, you see all the elements needed to enable people to know God and to create an environment of love, security, and support.

Families were to be the basic building block of society.

Then, God set aside a special time – the Sabbath – to nurture the relationships He had just created.

These were to be the pillars of a perfect world.

We know that sin soon entered the picture and because these concepts were so central to God’s plan, they have been ruthlessly attacked by Satan from the very beginning.

As the story of God unfolds throughout the Old Testament, He continues to use the imagery of family – often referring to Himself as the Father and to His people as His children.
A Family Demonstrated

When Jesus came to this earth, He almost always referred to God as His Father.

At the moment of His greatest need, in the Garden of Gethsemane, He cried out:

“Abba, Father …” (Mark 14:35-36, NLT)

At that point, God was not just a Father, He was Daddy – the One Jesus turned to in desperation. And His Daddy responded, providing Him comfort and strength.

Not only did Jesus have a good relationship with His Father, He revealed the Father’s heart in all He did. On the night prior to His arrest and death, Jesus said:

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you had really known me, you would know who my Father is. From now on, you do know him and have seen him!

“… Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! … The words I speak are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work through me.” (John 14:6-10, NLT)

This is something Jesus repeated several times throughout His ministry. He often said He was acting and speaking on His Father’s behalf. This means that:

- That when we see Jesus rescuing a wedding from the embarrassment of running out of wine, we see the Father’s interest in the details of our lives.
- When we see Jesus gently reaching out to touch and heal a leper, we are seeing the Father’s heart of love in action.
- When we see Jesus cast out a demon tormenting a little boy, we are seeing the Father’s desire to bring freedom to all of Satan’s victims.
- When we see the indignant anger of Jesus at those who would take advantage of people coming to sacrifice at the temple by selling things at extra high prices and cheating them in the exchange of temple coins, we see the heart of the Father.
- When we see the anguish of Jesus in Gethsemane and on the cross, we are also seeing the Father’s heart of love breaking for the suffering of His Son.

“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.” (John 3:16-17, NLT)

The more we understand and know about Jesus, the more fully we will know and understand God.

On resurrection morning, He had an encounter with Mary Magdalene where she originally thought He was the gardener.
When she finally figured out it was Jesus and threw herself down at His feet, He said:

“... Go find my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” (John 20:17, NLT)

Jesus identified as our brother stressing that we all have the same Father.

We are family!

The rest of the New Testament is full of references to God as our Father and we who have given ourselves to Him as His children. The Apostle John, writing many years later, said:

*See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are!*
(1 John 3:1, NLT)

*Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has become a child of God.* (1 John 5:1, NLT)

**Our Church as Family**

Back to the question we started with: “Who does God want us, as a church, to be?”

When people interact with us by visiting here at church or by knowing you and I as church members, what does God want them to see?

The Biblical pictures of faithful subjects, courageous soldiers, and willing servants all help us see important aspects of our relationship with God. But, they all fail to present the depth of love and connection God wants to have with us.

More than anything else, in God’s eyes, we are family.

He is the wise Father who truly knows what is best for each of us as His children. He loves us so much He could not imagine an eternity without us and, together with Jesus, took the steps necessary to make eternal life with Him a real option available to us as a gift.

He want us as His children to love Him back and to trust His heart of love for us. He asks for our obedience, not so He can be the boss, but so He can spare us from consequences of making bad choices. He invites us to talk with Him, to communicate with Him, even to argue with Him – and always to trust Him.

And, He wants to expand His family. He doesn’t want anyone to be lost. And this happens best when we function as a loving family. Freely accepting and loving others, including those we don’t agree with. It is expanded as we extend this love to all we come in contact with, pointing them to our Father, who wants to be their Father too.

The power of family, united in purpose and love, is one of the most powerful forces on this earth. And when bathed in God’s Holy Spirit, it becomes an unstoppable influence for good.
Salt Lake City

After our wedding, Pat and I moved to Salt Lake City. We found an apartment, moved in, and started getting to know the people we would be serving.

While the pastor and his wife were cordial, we were never invited to their home for a meal or had much contact outside of our work relationship.

As is often the case, he used me to do many of the things needing to be done – but that he didn’t like doing. I have no complaints about it, it’s just the way things usually work. Aside from the quality of my work, it did not feel like he was especially interested in us.

Merlin and his family was a different story. They had four boys, the oldest only a year or two younger than Pat and I. The younger two because active members of our youth group.

They immediately opened up their home and made us feel a valued part of their family. We spent most Friday evenings there with them. They included us in family outings. They helped us each time we moved. They loved and cared for us.

It’s true, Merlin was a bit of a free spirit – but, unknown to the pastor, so was I. Merlin, and his family, was supportive of all I was doing there at the church and became more engaged. As they became more involved in church, the pastor was amazed.

When I became the principal and 9th & 10th grade teacher shortly after Christmas that first year, Merlin became a mentor to me. He was one of the best teacher’s I’ve ever been associated with.

Through the years, his family became our family. Together we went through good times and rough times. I’ve mentored a couple of his boys. I presided at some of their weddings. Last year, I was invited to speak for the ordination of one of his sons who is now the principal of Campion Academy.

About three years ago we got some new neighbors. They moved here from Maryland, but she had grown up in Salt Lake City. About a year after they have moved in, Pat and her were talking and discovered that she knew Merlin and his family as well. She was one of his granddaughter’s best friends and had spent a lot of time in their home. Her experience was similar to ours.

As I look back at the influence these two families had on my life, one had hardly any influence at all. When the pastor moved, we lost touch and I have no idea what transpired with them through the years.

But, I can attribute many of the successes in my life to Merlin’s influence and example. We have kept in touch with their family. Their love made a huge impact.

Which Family Will We Be?

According to God’s Word, we are family. The question is: Which family are we? And, which family do we want to be?
Do we want to be the family that at best, doesn’t make much difference – just takes care of business and stays out of trouble (kind of)?

Or, do we want to be the family that people will love being a part of? Do we want to be the family that loves and accepts people where they are, but loves them so much that we draw out the best in them?

I know which family I want us to be. How about you?
Note

Most everything you find in this color is a hyperlink that will lead you to more complete references, different translations, or pertinent websites.

Scripture References

Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 (CSB): In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. 3 Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” There was an evening, and there was a morning: one day.

6 Then God said, “Let there be an expanse between the waters, separating water from water.” 7 So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above the expanse. And it was so. 8 God called the expanse “sky.” Evening came and then morning: the second day.

9 Then God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. 10 God called the dry land “earth,” and the gathering of the water he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good. 11 Then God said, “Let the earth produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds.” And it was so. 12 The earth produced vegetation: seed-bearing plants according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. 13 Evening came and then morning: the third day.

14 Then God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night. They will serve as signs for seasons and for days and years. 15 They will be lights in the expanse of the sky to provide light on the earth.” And it was so. 16 God made the two great lights – the greater light to rule over the day and the lesser light to rule over the night – as well as the stars. 17 God placed them in the expanse of the sky to provide light on the earth, to rule the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. 18 Evening came and then morning: the fourth day.

20 Then God said, “Let the water swarm with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.” 21 So God created the large sea-creatures and every living creature that moves and swarms in the water, according to their kinds. He also created every winged creature according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. 22 God blessed them: “Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the waters of the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth.” 23 Evening came and then morning: the fifth day.

24 Then God said, “Let the earth produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that crawl, and the wildlife of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. 25 So
God made the wildlife of the earth according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that crawl on the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.”

27 So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female.

28 God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth.”

29 God also said, “Look, I have given you every seed-bearing plant on the surface of the entire earth and every tree whose fruit contains seed. This will be food for you, 30 for all the wildlife of the earth, for every bird of the sky, and for every creature that crawls on the earth – everything having the breath of life in it – I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. 31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good indeed. Evening came and then morning: the sixth day.

2 So the heavens and the earth and everything in them were completed. 2 On the seventh day God had completed his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. 3 God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, for on it he rested from all his work of creation. (Genesis 1:1 – 2:3, CSB)

Psalm 103:3–18 (NLT): Let all that I am praise the Lord; with my whole heart, I will praise his holy name. 2 Let all that I am praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things he does for me. 3 He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. 4 He redeems me from death and crowns me with love and tender mercies. 5 He fills my life with good things. My youth is renewed like the eagle’s!

6 The Lord gives righteousness and justice to all who are treated unfairly.

7 He revealed his character to Moses and his deeds to the people of Israel. 8 The Lord is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. 9 He will not constantly accuse us, nor remain angry forever. 10 He does not punish us for all our sins; he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve. 11 For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. 12 He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west.

13 The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. 14 For he knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust. 15 Our days on earth are like grass; like wildflowers, we bloom and die. 16 The wind blows, and we are gone – as though we had never been here. 17 But the love of the Lord remains forever with those who fear him. His salvation extends to the children’s children 18 of those who are faithful to his covenant, of those who obey his commandments! (Psalm 103:3-18, NLT)
Isaiah 41:10 & 13 (CEV): “Don’t be afraid. I am with you. Don’t tremble with fear. I am your God. I will make you strong, as I protect you with my arm and give you victories.

“I am the LORD your God. I am holding your hand, so don’t be afraid. I am here to help you.” (Isaiah 41:10 & 13, CEV)

Matthew 5:43–48 (NLT): “You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. 44 But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! 45 In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. 46 If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. 47 If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. 48 But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5:43-48, NLT)

Matthew 6:6-13 (NLT): But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

7 “When you pray, don’t babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. 8 Don’t be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! 9 Pray like this:

Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. 10 May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. 11 Give us today the food we need, 12 and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. 13 And don’t let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.” (Matthew 6:6-13, NLT)

Matthew 6:31–33 (NLT): “So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. 32 Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.” (Matthew 6:31-33, NLT)

Matthew 7:9–11 (NLT): “You parents – If your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? 10 Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! 11 So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.” (Matthew 7:9-11, NLT)

Matthew 10:19–20 (NLT): “When you are arrested, don’t worry about how to respond or what to say. God will give you the right words at the right time. 20 For it is not you who will be speaking – it will be the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.” (Matthew 10:19-20, NLT)

Matthew 10:40 (NLT): “Anyone who receives you receives me, and anyone who receives me receives the Father who sent me.” (Matthew 10:40, NLT)
Matthew 11:25-30 (NLT): At that time Jesus prayed this prayer: “O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding these things from those who think themselves wise and clever, and for revealing them to the childlike. 26 Yes, Father, it pleased you to do it this way!

27 “My Father has entrusted everything to me. No one truly knows the Son except the Father, and no one truly knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

28 Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.” (Matthew 11:25-30, NLT)

Matthew 12:48-50 (NLT): Jesus asked, “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” 49 Then he pointed to his disciples and said, “Look, these are my mother and brothers. 50 Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother!” (Matthew 12:48-50, NLT)

Mark 14:35-36 (NLT): He went on a little farther and fell to the ground. He prayed that, if it were possible, the awful hour awaiting him might pass him by. 36 “Abba, Father,” he cried out, “everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.” (Mark 14:35-36, NLT)

Luke 2:41-52 (NLT): Every year Jesus’ parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. 42 When Jesus was twelve years old, they attended the festival as usual. 43 After the celebration was over, they started home to Nazareth, but Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents didn’t miss him at first, 44 because they assumed he was among the other travelers. But when he didn’t show up that evening, they started looking for him among their relatives and friends.

45 When they couldn’t find him, they went back to Jerusalem to search for him there. 46 Three days later they finally discovered him in the Temple, sitting among the religious teachers, listening to them and asking questions. 47 All who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

48 His parents didn’t know what to think. “Son,” his mother said to him, “why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been frantic, searching for you everywhere.”

49 “But why did you need to search?” he asked. “Didn’t you know that I must be in my Father’s house?” 50 But they didn’t understand what he meant.

51 Then he returned to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. And his mother stored all these things in her heart.

52 Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and all the people. (Luke 2:41-52, NLT)

Luke 11:11-13 (NLT): “You fathers – If your children ask for a fish, do you give them a snake instead? 12 Or if they ask for an egg, do you give them a scorpion? Of course not! 13 So if you sinful people
know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.” (Luke 11:11-13, NLT)

Luke 12:29-34 (NLT): “And don’t be concerned about what to eat and what to drink. Don’t worry about such things. These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers all over the world, but your Father already knows your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and he will give you everything you need.

32 “So don’t be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom.

33 “Sell your possessions and give to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven! And the purses of heaven never get old or develop holes. Your treasure will be safe; no thief can steal it and no moth can destroy it. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be. (Luke 12:29-34, NLT)

Luke 23:44-46 (NLT): By this time it was about noon, and darkness fell across the whole land until three o’clock. The light from the sun was gone. And suddenly, the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn down the middle. Then Jesus shouted, “Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!” And with those words he breathed his last. (Luke 23:44-46, NLT)

John 2:13-16 (NLT): It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. In the Temple area he saw merchants selling cattle, sheep, and doves for sacrifices; he also saw dealers at tables exchanging foreign money. Jesus made a whip from some ropes and chased them all out of the Temple. He drove out the sheep and cattle, scattered the money changers’ coins over the floor, and turned over their tables. Then, going over to the people who sold doves, he told them, “Get these things out of here. Stop turning my Father’s house into a marketplace!” (John 2:13-16, NLT)

John 3:14-17 (NLT): And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.

16 “For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.” (John 3:14-17, NLT)

John 3:34-35 (NLT): The One sent from God speaks with the very words of God and abounds with the very Spirit and essence of God. The Father loves the Son and withholds nothing from Him. Those who believe in the Son will bask in eternal life, but those who disobey the Son will never experience life. They will know only God’s lingering wrath. (John 3:34-35, NLT)

John 4:21-23 (NLT): Jesus replied, “Believe me, dear woman, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for
salvation comes through the Jews. 23 But the time is coming – Indeed it’s here now – when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. (John 4:21-23, NLT)

John 5:19-23 (NLT): So Jesus explained, “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does. 20 For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he is doing. In fact, the Father will show him how to do even greater works than healing this man. Then you will truly be astonished. 21 For just as the Father gives life to those he raises from the dead, so the Son gives life to anyone he wants. 22 In addition, the Father judges no one. Instead, he has given the Son absolute authority to judge, 23 so that everyone will honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son is certainly not honoring the Father who sent him.” (John 5:19-23, NLT)

John 6:35-40 (NLT): Jesus replied, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. 36 But you haven’t believed in me even though you have seen me. 37 However, those the Father has given me will come to me, and I will never reject them. 38 For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will. 39 And this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them up at the last day. 40 For it is my Father’s will that all who see his Son and believe in him should have eternal life. I will raise them up at the last day.” (John 6:35-40, NLT)

John 8:28-29 (NLT): So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man on the cross, then you will understand that I AM he. I do nothing on my own but say only what the Father taught me. 29 And the one who sent me is with me – he has not deserted me. For I always do what pleases him.” (John 8:28-29, NLT)

John 10:37-38 (NLT): Don’t believe me unless I carry out my Father’s work. 38 But if I do his work, believe in the evidence of the miraculous works I have done, even if you don’t believe me. Then you will know and understand that the Father is in me, and I am in the Father.” (John 10:37-38, NLT)

John 12:49-50 (NLT): “I don’t speak on my own authority. The Father who sent me has commanded me what to say and how to say it. 50 And I know his commands lead to eternal life; so I say whatever the Father tells me to say.” (John 12:49-50, NLT)

John 14:1-14 (NLT): “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. 2 There is more than enough room in my Father’s home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? 3 When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. 4 And you know the way to where I am going.”

5 “No, we don’t know, Lord,” Thomas said. “We have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?”
Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. 7 If you had really known me, you would know who my Father is. From now on, you do know him and have seen him!”

Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”

Jesus replied, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don’t know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you? 10 Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I speak are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work through me. 11 Just believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or at least believe because of the work you have seen me do.

“I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father. 13 You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, so that the Son can bring glory to the Father. 14 Yes, ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it!” (John 14:1-14, NLT)

John 15:1-4 (NLT): “I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn’t produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. 3 You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.” (John 15:1-4, NLT)

John 15:9-10 (NLT): “I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. 10 When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father’s commandments and remain in his love.” (John 15:9-10, NLT)

John 20:13-18 (NLT): Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. 12 She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. 13 “Dear woman, why are you crying?” the angels asked her.

“Because they have taken away my Lord,” she replied, “and I don’t know where they have put him.”

14 She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn’t recognize him. 15 “Dear woman, why are you crying?” Jesus asked her. “Who are you looking for?”

She thought he was the gardener. “Sir,” she said, “if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him.”

16 “Mary!” Jesus said.

She turned to him and cried out, “Rabboni!” (which is Hebrew for “Teacher”).

“Don’t cling to me,” Jesus said, “for I haven’t yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”
Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, “I have seen the Lord!” Then she gave them his message. (John 20:13-18, NLT)

Romans 8:14-17 (NLT): For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God’s Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, “Abba, Father.” For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God’s children. And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God’s glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering. (Romans 8:14-17, NLT)

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 (NLT): Don’t team up with those who are unbelievers. How can righteousness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness? What harmony can there be between Christ and the devil? How can a believer be a partner with an unbeliever? And what union can there be between God’s temple and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God said:

“I will live in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

Therefore, come out from among unbelievers, and separate yourselves from them, says the LORD. Don’t touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you. And I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty.” (2 Corinthians 6:14-18, NLT)

Galatians 4:4-7 (NLT): But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.” Now you are no longer a slave but God’s own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir. (Galatians 4:4-7, NLT)

Hebrews 12:7-10 (NLT): As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Who ever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father? If God doesn’t discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children at all. Since we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn’t we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits, and live forever?

For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God’s discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness. (Hebrews 12:7-10, NLT)

1 John 2:28 – 3:24 (NLT): And now, dear children, remain in fellowship with Christ so that when he returns, you will be full of courage and not shrink back from him in shame.

Since we know that Christ is righteous, we also know that all who do what is right are God’s children.

See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are! But the people who belong to this world don’t recognize that we are God’s children because they
don’t know him. ² Dear friends, we are already God’s children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is. ³ And all who have this eager expectation will keep themselves pure, just as he is pure.

⁴ Everyone who sins is breaking God’s law, for all sin is contrary to the law of God. ⁵ And you know that Jesus came to take away our sins, and there is no sin in him. ⁶ Anyone who continues to live in him will not sin. But anyone who keeps on sinning does not know him or understand who he is.

⁷ Dear children, don’t let anyone deceive you about this: When people do what is right, it shows that they are righteous, even as Christ is righteous. ⁸ But when people keep on sinning, it shows that they belong to the devil, who has been sinning since the beginning. But the Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil. ⁹ Those who have been born into God’s family do not make a practice of sinning, because God’s life is in them. So they can’t keep on sinning, because they are children of God. ¹⁰ So now we can tell who are children of God and who are children of the devil. Anyone who does not live righteously and does not love other believers does not belong to God.

¹¹ This is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another. ¹² We must not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and killed his brother. And why did he kill him? Because Cain had been doing what was evil, and his brother had been doing what was righteous. ¹³ So don’t be surprised, dear brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.

¹⁴ If we love our brothers and sisters who are believers, it proves that we have passed from death to life. But a person who has no love is still dead. ¹⁵ Anyone who hates another brother or sister is really a murderer at heart. And you know that murderers don’t have eternal life within them.

¹⁶ We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion – how can God’s love be in that person?

¹⁸ Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions. ¹⁹ Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before God. ²⁰ Even if we feel guilty, God is greater than our feelings, and he knows everything.

²¹ Dear friends, if we don’t feel guilty, we can come to God with bold confidence. ²² And we will receive from him whatever we ask because we obey him and do the things that please him.

²³ And this is his commandment: We must believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he commanded us. ²⁴ Those who obey God’s commandments remain in fellowship with him, and he with them. And we know he lives in us because the Spirit he gave us lives in us. (1 John 2:28 – 3:24, NLT)
1 John 4:7-21 (NLT): Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

9 God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. 10 This is real love – not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

21 Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.

13 And God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us. Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 All who declare that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God. 16 We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love.

God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world.

18 Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love. 19 We love each other because he loved us first.

20 If someone says, “I love God,” but hates a fellow believer, that person is a liar; for if we don’t love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see? 21 And he has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their fellow believers. (1 John 4:7-21, NLT)

1 John 5:1-5 (NLT): Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has become a child of God. And everyone who loves the Father loves his children, too. We know we love God’s children if we love God and obey his commandments. 3 Loving God means keeping his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome. 4 For every child of God defeats this evil world, and we achieve this victory through our faith. 5 And who can win this battle against the world? Only those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God. (1 John 1:1-5, NLT)

Other References

Desire of Ages, pages 826-827: In Christ is the tenderness of the shepherd, the affection of the parent, and the matchless grace of the compassionate Saviour. His blessings He presents in the most alluring terms. He is not content merely to announce these blessings; He presents them in the most attractive way, to excite a desire to possess them. So His servants are to present the riches of the glory of the unspeakable Gift. The wonderful love of Christ will melt and subdue hearts, when the mere reiteration of doctrines would accomplish nothing. “Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God.” “O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high
mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! ... He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom.” Isaiah 40:1, 9-11. Tell the people of Him who is “the Chiefest among ten thousand,” and the One “altogether lovely.” The Song of Solomon 5:10, 16. Words alone cannot tell it. Let it be reflected in the character and manifested in the life. Christ is sitting for His portrait in every disciple. Every one God has predestinated to be “conformed to the image of His Son.” Romans 8:29. In every one Christ's long-suffering love, His holiness, meekness, mercy, and truth are to be manifested to the world.

The first disciples went forth preaching the word. They revealed Christ in their lives. And the Lord worked with them, “confirming the word with signs following.” Mark 16:20. These disciples prepared themselves for their work. Before the day of Pentecost they met together, and put away all differences. They were of one accord. They believed Christ's promise that the blessing would be given, and they prayed in faith. They did not ask for a blessing for themselves merely; they were weighted with the burden for the salvation of souls. The gospel was to be carried to the uttermost parts of the earth, and they claimed the endowment of power that Christ had promised. Then it was that the Holy Spirit was poured out, and thousands were converted in a day.

So it may be now. Instead of man's speculations, let the word of God be preached. Let Christians put away their dissensions, and give themselves to God for the saving of the lost. Let them in faith ask for the blessing, and it will come. The outpouring of the Spirit in apostolic days was the “former rain,” and glorious was the result. But the “latter rain” will be more abundant. Joel 2:23.

All who consecrate soul, body, and spirit to God will be constantly receiving a new endowment of physical and mental power. The inexhaustible supplies of heaven are at their command. Christ gives them the breath of His own spirit, the life of His own life. The Holy Spirit puts forth its highest energies to work in heart and mind. The grace of God enlarges and multiplies their faculties, and every perfection of the divine nature comes to their assistance in the work of saving souls. Through co-operation with Christ they are complete in Him, and in their human weakness they are enabled to do the deeds of Omnipotence. (Desire of Ages, pages 826-827)