

Fanning it into Flame
Sunday, February 6, 2011
We are Family

It was my privilege to be invited to speak at The Tabernacle in Orchard Park, NY this morning on the theme of being a family. My cousin Mary Gramaglia is a member of this great church as well as a member of the church board. Pastor Tommy Reid's vision for this year was for his church to experience a fresh revelation of being a family and asked me to come as a representative of the extended family. This was music to my ears because this theme is something we stress all the time here at Grace.

I shared my testimony of growing up in a Roman Catholic family and having a deep sense of spirituality as a kid, even thinking that I would become a priest. But as I entered my teen years my appetite for what the world had to offer drowned out those feelings of divine destiny and purpose. Music was a huge part of my life and a major factor in moving to a 200 acre farm in Kunkletown, PA with a band writing our own music with dreams of stardom. The hippy movement was in full bloom which we embraced along with the drugs and the Eastern Mysticism. It was all very exciting until a major crisis arose. My wife, Debbie, gave birth to our firstborn son two months premature. The doctors gave him a 50/50 chance to live. Our belief system offered no help for this frightful dilemma. What will be, will be was the mindset. The negative and positive are both equal and opposing forces that must exist. Well my heart would not accept the coldness of this perspective. After confronting a nurse on why there were no lights on the incubator my son was in, only to find out that it was not plugged in, I knew we needed real help. I prayed to the God I knew as a kid and said, "If you are real and the God and Father of Jesus Christ I need your help..."

God came through and my son, Raymond, just shy of his 40th birthday, married with three children is as healthy as can be. Praise the Lord. Two Scriptures come to mind of how God treats us: **Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)** ¹¹ "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." **Romans 8:28 (NASB)** ²⁸ "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." God has plans for us, but allows us to make our free will choices, but then works all of it for our good as we respond to the nudges of the Spirit in our lives. Many of us have had a wrong picture of how God sees us, which keeps us from embracing him as a loving Heavenly Father. But that's exactly who he is. He does not treat us as our sins deserve, but sent his son to die in our place so we might be changed into the people he created us to be, and that is just like Jesus!

When God said, "Let us make man in our image," that's just what he did. The image of God is a loving relationship: the Father loving the Son, the Son loving the Father, and the Holy Spirit as the love between them and yet a person as well. That's why he created man male and female. It took both to be in his image. He always intended us to be family. God is personal. He has emotions, thoughts, will, creativity, and even a sense of humor. He is not looking for us to be so conscious of the "rules" that we lose sight of the love. In fact when we open our heart to him he fills us with his Spirit and enables us to do the right thing. He becomes our strength and our ability as well as our desire to do his will. It becomes our nature. We become a new creation in him with joy resonating within us. The loss of joy comes from a preoccupation with ourselves apart from him. He told us that apart from him we can do nothing. And nothing means nothing!

If you are going through difficult things in your life, God cares. If you are struggling with sin and can't seem to break free, it may be that your focus is all wrong. Don't look through the eyes of what you need to do for him. See it through the mindset of what he has done for you. He loves you and delights in the potential he has placed within you. We are more than conquerors through him who loves us! (Romans 8:37) God wants us to truly be part of his family. Let's believe him to work in us the way he said he would if we would just believe.