

Family Feelings

Dee Bowman

I grew up in a loving family. My dad was quiet, but strong of character. My mom was more gregarious, but also of strong character. I don't remember when we didn't attend the worship services with those who shared our commonality in Christ. I remember when my little brother laid on a pallet between the benches (they weren't near good enough to be called "pews") and how we later went to classes on the Lord's Day with the others our age. We had Sunday dinner for almost everyone—sometimes twenty or thirty—because we felt close to all of them. I never doubted, even for a minute, my parents' love for me—even when I was being disciplined (and there was a considerable amount of that!).

I enjoyed my growing up years with my brothers, singing, playing baseball on vacant lots, watching Hopalong Cassidy or Roy Rogers or Lash LaRue or The Three Mesquiteers at the old Rose Theatre on Saturday afternoons, playing "kick back" with a football in the unpaved street in front of our house and running after one another in a "replay" of the Saturday matinee just as the sun began to hide behind the horizon in the evening.

My mom and dad were very supportive of our school activities and left no doubt that we were to do the best we could, no matter the subject (even in math!). We worked at it, even if just because we loved them and didn't want to disappoint them.

It was hard to see them leave this life; but I never had any doubt about their destination. My dad just dropped dead in the hall (I know now it was a blessing how he went); and my mom just went to sleep one night and died (she still lived alone at 89 years old). I still miss them. Sometimes when I pass the mirror I see them in my own visage. I'm kind of glad. It reminds me that something of them still lives in me. I sure hope to see them again one day when we'll all be better and can love even more. And for as long as we want.

I love my own family. I'm not sure that I've given them all the memories I had, but then maybe their memories are sweet like mine and refreshing to contemplate once in a while. I've loved them all the way. I remember when Russ was born and how proud I was. He was sort of pudgy and didn't look much like me, but I could tell he was mine the first time he cried (he nearly took the roof off the hospital). I turned around about three times and it was Little League, about three more times and it was college, about three more times and I was hearing him preach the gospel, about three more times and there was Tracy, then Haley, then Tori, and now—who knows? He sure has made me proud.

I remember looking through a two-paned window at the hospital's birthing unit seeing a

red, wiggling little thing as the nurse pointed to her and mouthed the words, "It's yours!" I was shocked at her being a girl; there weren't any girls in my family. Then one day she rode off on a pink bicycle, one with little plastic strings hanging from the handle bars and a purple basket on front, her pony tail fluttering behind. Then one day she rode away to school, then to the university. Now she's a teacher, somewhat like her daddy, but probably better. And she writes little children's stories. And she's always been a joy to Norma and me.

We are family at Southside. I have lots of memories of our family here, some good, some not. I remember when Jared was born, and when Matt and Rene got married. I remember when Chuck Durham came to learn with us, and Lawrence Kelly, and how Jason stuttered so when he first came. I remember godly men—men of influence in our family—men like Brother Summers and Rex Cottle, and Jim l'Anson and G.W. O'Neal (he once referred to someone's automobile during his announcements as a "Pyotie"). I remember when I first loaned Bro. Usrey the \$5 he still owes me. I remember lots of happy times, lots of sad times, lots of time of anxiety and pain, lots of times of consternation and regret because some beloved brother or sister left the family for the world. It still hurts to think about it sometimes.

We are family. I'm glad. The concept of family is one of the richest biblical descriptions of the Lord's church (1 Tim. 3:15). "We be brethren" (Gen. 13:8), according to the Scriptures. We share a common bond (1 Cor. 12:12), worship a common Father (Matt. 22:37), imbibe of a common Savior, share a common hope (Heb. 6:17-20), and fight against a common enemy (2 Pet. 5:5-8). We strive to protect the family, both from within and from without (2 Thess. 3:6). The family here is constantly striving to educate the brethren, practice sincere and loving discipline, and warn against the foe with all his outside influences (Phil. 1:9-11). We're together in this most important enterprise of all, God's family.

It is a joy to be with the family in reunions such as we are having today. A joy to commune with the saints (1 Cor. 12:23-26). A joy to sing together, "teaching and admonishing one another" (Eph. 5:19). A joy to be with those who love to hear the word (2 Tim. 4:2), with those who pray together (1 Thess. 5:17). All of it, mind you, is done together for we are family, the family of God, one in Christ Jesus. Enjoy.