

St James UMC—

The church with a warm heart, and a vision to be disciples of Jesus Christ, sharing God's love with others to transform the world!

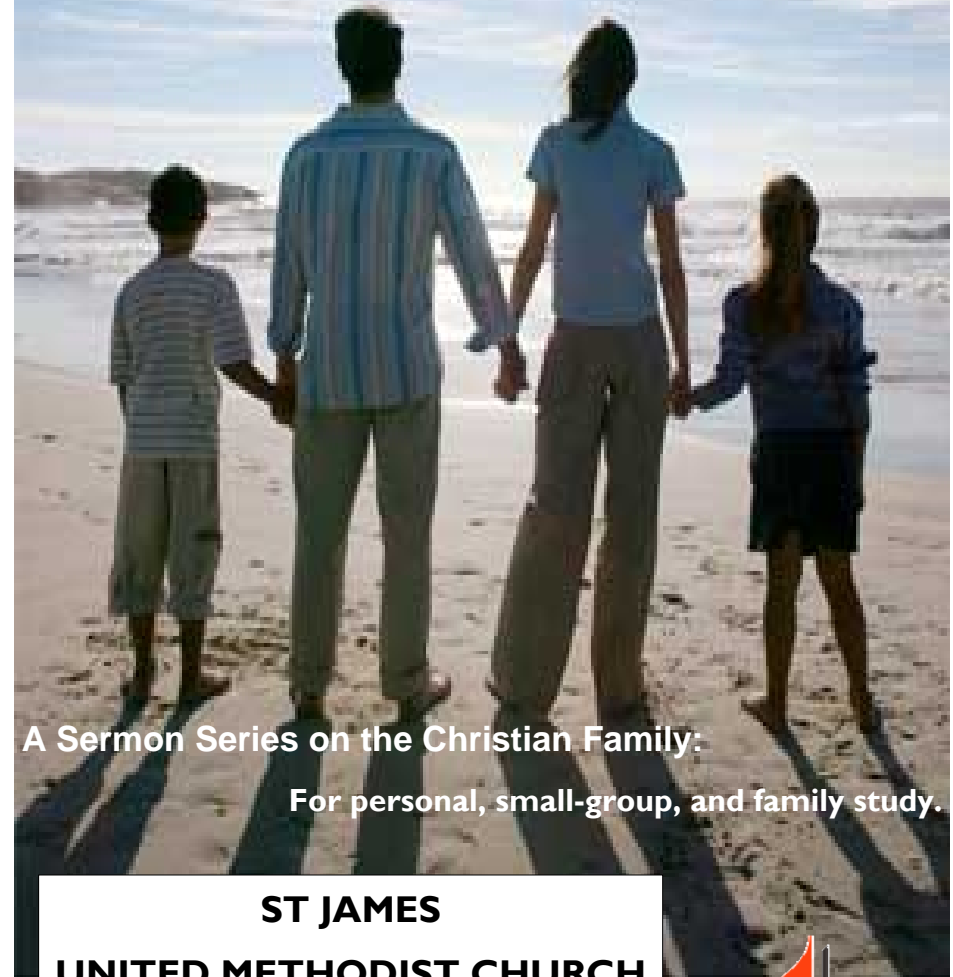


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THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

May 3rd–June 28th



A Sermon Series on the Christian Family:
For personal, small-group, and family study.

**ST JAMES
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

Bellevue, Nebraska
www.come2stjames.org

"One Congregation. . . Two Locations"



By Pastors Russ Tompkins and Jason Kennedy

“LIVE A LIFE THAT MATTERS”



A Vision for St. James in 2009

“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise” (Proverbs 11:29).



When church feels like it's something we just do or a place we've always gone, when we feel like we keep giving, but are never getting anything back, and when we think we're discovered all there is to learn and experience in our Christian Faith... That is when we have the most need to step out of the old and into a new understanding of what it means to be the church!

Our vision at St. James is to be disciples of Jesus Christ, sharing God's love with others. Although we struggle with things that feel like routine duties, and at times we just don't know how, where, or with what we could do more with what we have, each of us is truly called to *live a life that matters*. We see this kind of passion and commitment in every aspect of Jesus' life as he changed the way the entire world would know itself. As we grow in our discipleship and increase the love of God we share with others, we will find ourselves truly living lives that matter.

This year, we are encouraging and challenge all people of faith at St. James to *live lives that matter*. We talk about our faith often; now let's see it make a difference in the world. With this focus, we intend to find new ways and new inspiration to take our faith beyond the book and into our lives and world. Each week we will bring in practical ideas and tools for doing so. Not only will those around us, far and wide, feel the impact, but we too will feel in our hearts the effects of living lives that make changes in the world!

“For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead” (James 2:26).

~Pastors Russ & Jason

But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop. (Luke 8:15)

3 John 1:4

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

Matthew 7:24, 25

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

Deuteronomy 6:6,7

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Matthew 18:6

But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

Psalms 103:17,18

But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children- with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.

Thoughts That Matter: Your Family, Your Scripture

Family Ties

*Family Ties Are precious things
Woven through the years,
of laughter, love and tears.
Family ties are cherished things
forged in childhood days,
by love of parents deep and true,
by tradition, by family ways.
Family ties are treasured things
and far though we may roam,
the tender bonds with those we love
still pull our hearts toward home.
~Unknown*










 **The “Family”:**

Why an entire sermon series on the family? We truly believe that God has called us into community as Christians and people of faith. We are told that God is love. Although it is nice to have solitary moments in our lives, God is most clearly evident in our lives when we experience the bond that binds us together. This bond is love. It is the kind of love that can only be witnessed in the interactions between God’s people. Whether your “family” is biological or composed of friends, whether it is a typical family or one that breaks every mold, we earnestly believe that the family is at the very foundation of our survival and lively-hood as humans and as Christians. Thus, we provide helps, guides, and prayers for you and your family, in the hopes that blessings, strength, and unity may be upon you for the greater good of the church, community, and world.

THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY:

A Sermon Series

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THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

From Adam and Eve, to Sarah and Abraham, and beyond, God has shown a strong preference for the family through extraordinary blessings. Jesus too has much to say about the family and challenges us to consider once again who our brothers, sisters, and parents are. But Jesus also exemplifies the power and value of familial living. Our families, whether biological or social, are the core of our existence. We’ll spend the next several weeks at St. James exploring the value, power, and vitality of the Christ-led family. There is much to learn and remember about why we have family and what we can do to enhance that family with God’s blessing! Enjoy your studies!

The Landscape:

Belonging to a family is more than just being born into it, is more than just living with it, is more than simply sharing the same name.

At The Root: Ephesians 5:21-6:5

Branching Out:

From Ephesians comes one of the most used texts for weddings as a traditional way for us to understand the dynamics of a Christian family. Although some have differing opinions of how family power dynamics should be, the key focus of this passage is submission and respect. We begin with instructions to submit to one another out of reverence to Christ. While we often focus on who will be the leader of our family, this text also begs the question as to who will submit to another. The answer is that all must submit to each other in order to live into the notion of the family that Christ sets before us. The leader of the family must submit his love for his wife or children rather than withholding it. Wives are asked to submit, even as they are responsible for the very upbringing of the family. And children too, even in their predisposed weakness must submit, so as to receive the blessings of the family. Let us pray: “Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with families. Let us submit ourselves to you so that we may be a blessing to our families, and that you may be the center of them. In the strong name of Jesus we pray. Amen.”

But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop. (Luke 8:15)



Sun and Rain:

1. What are some problems you can think of related to aging?
2. What are some myths about aging?
3. What are some benefits of being older?

**Thoughts That Matter:
Living a Full Life**

The Landscape:

Along every step of our walks in life we find both challenges and blessings. With age come many blessings we often overlook. Yet, God has designed each of these parts of our lives.

At The Root: Psalm 37:25

Branching Out:

The psalmist says, "I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging bread" (Psalm 37:25 RSV). The stage of life we know as old age has been called "the sunset years". To call these our "sunset years" gives them a touch of class – they can be very special. This time period can be a significant chapter in our human pilgrimage – a time for growth, learning, and greater maturity. Sometimes we get the idea that our later years must be that time when we are put on a shelf, but that should not be. The sunset years are not isolated from the rest of life. We are becoming now what we will be in old age. May we be a culture that honors age. Let us pray, "Father, forgive us when we become overly familiar with holy things, including worship. May we hold you in awe and respect one another as your children. Hide great hopes within us and give us a vision of yourself. Show us your will and make it the desire of our hearts. In Christ's name we pray. Amen."

But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop. (Luke 8:15)



Sun and Rain:

1. How has Jesus been a blessing in your family?
2. In what ways have you submitted to others in your family?
3. How might you be able to add blessings to your family?

**Thoughts That Matter:
Being a True Member of My Family**

The Landscape:

The mothers in our lives and world provide the foundation upon which we all stand. They are direct witnesses to God’s miracle of life, and capable of caring like none other in the world can.

At The Root: 1 Kings 17:7-24

Branching Out:

In this particular text, we read a truth-telling account of the strength and passion of a mother. Faced with her own difficulties and trials, she is reluctant to let anyone come between her son and her ability to care for him. We see the grace-filled and patient ways in which God cares for us and leads us into His kingdom reflected through the prophet Elijah. God asks much from us and even requires us to make sacrifice in the most dear parts of our lives. Yet, God assures us we will be okay. We see that the widow in this story, over time, comes to trust Elijah and the God that he serves, and when the child she was asked to make comprises over is sick, she calls on Elijah to pray for healing. We find a blessed example of a mother and her faith in this story from which we too can learn much. Let us pray: “Lord Jesus Christ, even you, God in the flesh, man as deity, have lived into the life of motherhood. We pray that your examples in our lives will teach us how to care for others. In the strong name of Jesus we pray. Amen.”

But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop. (Luke 8:15)



Sun and Rain:

1. In the story of Luke 15, the eldest son stayed home. How have you felt slighted by staying home and being obedient to your father?
2. The younger son ran off and squandered his father's inheritance. How have you felt you have disappointed your father?
3. In what ways in this story does the father represent God?

**Thoughts That Matter:
Gratitude for Our Fathers**

☀ The Landscape:

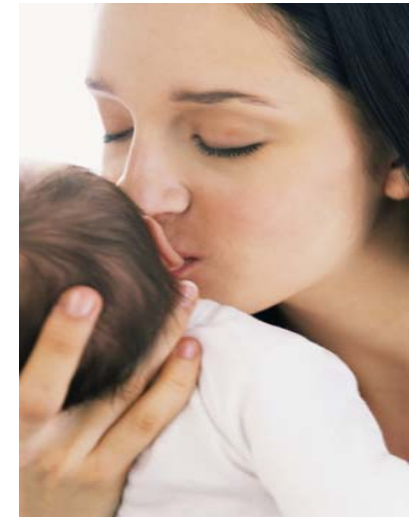
We recognize the fathers of our lives. To them we look for guidance, strength, and protection. To them we look for leadership, compassion, and wisdom.

☀ At The Root: Luke 15:11-32

☀ Branching Out:

Father's Day is not a conspiracy of the shirt and tie manufacturers of America, though one could suspect as much. Nor is Father's Day the invention of men jealous of the attention given to women on Mother's Day. Fathers have a bad press image, as do all authoritative figures such as teachers, police, and military officers. Fathers have been caricatured in comic strips and sitcoms. Frankly, I wouldn't choose any of these for my ideal father! I don't mean to sound defensive but being a good father is one of the toughest jobs around. The typical father is forty-two inches around the chest, thirty-six around the waist, ninety-eight around the golf course, and a nuisance around the house! The family complains that Dad is never home and then when he is, he is underfoot and in their way. He fouls up the family's schedule like a French chef making McDonald's burgers. Let us pray: "Lord, we thank you for our hard working and big hearted fathers. We thank you for those you were like fathers to us and we thank you for those who tried to be our fathers but who just couldn't. Most of all we thank you for being the best Father of them all. Amen."

But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop. (Luke 8:15)



☀ Sun and Rain:

1. Who in your life has been a motherly figure?
2. Who have you been a motherly figure in others' lives?
3. How might you show your thanks to those who care for us?

**Thoughts That Matter:
Honoring the Motherly in Your Life**

☀ The Landscape:

Time is one of our most valuable resources. Even when everything else seems to be at our fingertips, time is often the one thing of which we always wish we had more.

☀ At The Root: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, 11

☀ Branching Out:

“He has made everything beautiful in its time” (Ecc 3:11a). From Ecclesiastes comes one of the most dizzying meditations on our purpose in the world and the value of our faith and work. To many, the writer’s words seem far too disillusioned to be of any help. And yet, there in the midst of such heavy pondering, we stumble upon a half-confession, half-profession of the beauty of our lives. In our worlds and in our families, it is true that there is a time for everything. There will be good and bad, joy and pain. And yet, as we meditate on how this applies to our families, we realize that they too will go through the good and the bad, the ups and the downs. The reminder is there that God has made everything beautiful in its time. From this, we are encouraged not to hurry through the moments too quickly. Even the trials can be meaningful parts of our family histories. Let us pray: “Lord Jesus Christ, your time is not our time, nor is your way always something we can understand. Bless us with clarity as we reflect upon the times in our families that you have given us. In the strong name of Jesus we pray. Amen.”

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☀ Sun and Rain:

1. How do you define Middle Age?
2. How do you feel pulled in several different directions?
3. What is the potential of the middle years?

**Thoughts That Matter:
The Journey Continues**

☀ The Landscape:

The journey is long and constantly changing. As we stand at the crossroads of half-way through and yet half-way toward our destination, we are able to move yet forward, yet rely on the wisdom of our past experiences.

☀ At The Root: Psalm 91:1-6

☀ Branching Out:

Psalm 91 has a wonderful line in verse six that talks about the “destruction that wastes at noonday”. Sometimes when we have put a few miles on this life of ours we can well identify with the increasing waste (or waist!). A popular song of the seventies tells of a young woman who tried everything in life and concluded each experience with a haunting refrain, “Is that all there is?” She failed to find significance in anything. She would probably ask the same question of St. Peter on Judgment Day. “Is that all there is?” That can become the theme song of the middle years. We are witnessing the graying of America. Mickey Mouse is now more than 75 years old. And even Charlie Brown is more than 50. We are not as young as we used to be either. Let us pray, “Father we offer our praise for your grace and love. We offer our silent adoration. We need to hear a clear word from you to be assured that there is more to this life than what we have seen and experienced. We pray this in the Master’s name. Amen”

But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop. (Luke 8:15)



☀ Sun and Rain:

1. When has time been a blessing in your or your family’s life?
2. Why is it difficult to be patient at times?
3. How will time be a blessing to you or your family?

**Thoughts That Matter:
Making Time Sacred**

OUR FAMILY: DO YOU REMEMBER?

May 24

☀ The Landscape:

Our memories are our greatest resources when it comes to counting our blessings and seeing the value of our lives. Remembering can be painful, yet God blesses us with the past to enrich our continuing journey forward.

☀ At The Root: 2 Timothy 2:8-9

☀ Branching Out:

Paul recounts the journey and trials of his own life as he shares his inspiration for living his life for Jesus Christ. It is clear that he is convicted about serving others and sharing the good news with them. Yet, in his account, he more importantly recalls the worthy life of Jesus. It is because of this memory that Paul is able and inspired to do what he does. Clearly, Jesus' life was no ordinary life if it caused Paul to live his own life in such extraordinary ways. Paul goes so far as to say that he is willing to live in the captivity of chains if it means that the world doesn't have to. This is the value of remembering. Imagine what Paul's life would've looked like had he forgotten or let go of the powerful history of Jesus. And yet, Paul cannot forget. Jesus' story is written so deeply in Paul's own heart that it is simply all he knows. Let us pray:

"Lord Jesus Christ, let us always remember your life, the love you shared, and the sacrifice you provided in order for us to have freedom. In the strong name of Jesus we pray. Amen."

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☀ Sun and Rain:

1. As a youth what problems do you encounter?
2. What is the potential you see in our youth?
3. What is the will of God for your life?

Thoughts That Matter: From Whence Does Wisdom Come?

☀ The Landscape:

Youth have the kind of energy and enthusiasm we long for when we aren't able to cultivate it in our own hearts. Even those of us who are teachers and sages have much to learn from the youth in our world.

☀ At The Root: Mark 10:17-22

☀ Branching Out:

In 1 Timothy 4:12 we read, "Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity." (RSV) The story of Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler shows us how the Master looks at youth. Jesus himself was a young man, barely thirty. Neither were the apostles very old. John was just a teenager. Jesus led a youth movement full of excitement, enthusiasm, and the idealism of the kingdom of God. Let us fully support our youth for they are not just the future – they are our present as well. Let us pray: "Father, we offer our best to you, including our youth. They bring you their enthusiasm and energy, their dedication and potential. As you accept the gifts of our hands, accept as well the gift of ourselves – our total selves in your service. Father, show us your will and give us the courage to walk in it. We give our all to you. In Jesus' name. Amen"

But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop. (Luke 8:15)



☀ Sun and Rain:

1. What memory of someone who served do you celebrate today?
2. How has Jesus' life inspired you to serve?
3. What memories do you have of others serving you?

**Thoughts That Matter:
Remembering is Blessing Others**

☀ The Landscape:

What could a child possibly contribute to the changing or a suffering world? Everything—even eventually his or her own entire life. Let us never forget the blessings and anointments that God has placed on the children of the world.

☀ At The Root: Mark 9:33-37

☀ Branching Out:

Proverbs 22:6 says, “Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it.” (NIV) One of my earliest memories from Sunday School is the picture of Jesus blessing the little children. He had one on his lap and the other boys and girls standing or seated all around him. Do you remember that picture? Even before we learned to read or write we could look at that picture and learn that Jesus is a child’s friend. We learned the most wonderful lesson of all: God loves us and cares about us, and we have worth – even as children. Let us pray: “Lord Jesus Christ, you chose to enter your world as a baby and we give you thanks for the gift of childhood with its openness and trust. In the strong name of Jesus we pray. Amen.”

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☀ Sun and Rain:

1. How important are your children in your life?
2. What rights do children have?
3. How should one best discipline a child?

**Thoughts That Matter:
Today’s Children, Tomorrow’s Future**
