

What's the point of gathering as church? 2. In

discussion guide based on **Matthew 12.46-50** (Linked to sermon from 16/2/20) which can be accessed at www.stjamesbythepark.org/sermons

This was the second part of a series looking at the point of gathering as church, especially in our digital age, with reference to our Up-In-Out discipleship triangle.

Intro: Do you use social media? Why / why not?

Summary of sermon:

- Jesus' redefinition of who constituted his family was deeply shocking in his culture
- What he said here ties in with what he said elsewhere about putting him above family (eg Mt 10.37) and about the new family we gain when we become Christians (eg Mt 19.29)
- The idea of 'church family' became pivotal in the early churches
- The NT priority order for relationships is 1) God's family, 2) blood family, 3) others
- Jesus isn't saying we need to ditch our blood family (although sometimes they will abandon us)
- Social media can be useful for *making / maintaining* church family relationships – eg cell group whatsapp groups; sharing with missionaries abroad; connecting with those who are ill or unable to come to church; finding other Christians in your particular circumstances
- Social media can prevent *deepening* of church family relationships – eg making us shallower emotionally; eating up time that could be spent face-to-face; encouraging us to spread ourselves too thinly over many online 'friends'; giving priority to friends of our choosing rather than the brothers and sisters God has given us; tempting us to pursue the relative ease of online friendships over the comparative difficulties of real-world friendships
- The danger of not devoting ourselves to real-world church family is that we may well stop growing as Christians – most Christian discipleship happens through the 'friction' between people.

To think through / discuss with others:

1. What is your instinctive reaction to Jesus describing us as brothers and sisters? Why?
2. Do you agree that when church family and blood family are in some sort of conflict, church family takes priority? Why / why not?
3. Discuss one or two examples from within your group of where church family and blood family seem to be in 'conflict' (eg when family members aren't Christians). How do you hold these tensions? How can you support each other through these tensions?
4. What would it mean to be a sister or brother to someone whose blood family have abandoned them because of their faith in Christ?
5. In what ways have you found social media useful for deepening or maintaining Christian fellowship?
6. In what ways do you think social media could be damaging to Christian fellowship? What did you make of the dangers that Dan outlined in the sermon?
7. If you're a social media user, what rules / guidelines do you try to live by online? Are there any adjustments you think you should make in the light of this discussion?

If you want to delve into this area more, Tim Chester's "Will you be my facebook friend?" is a very quick but perceptive read. Tony Reinke's "12 ways your phone is changing you" is longer and even more enlightening.