

## Unbelieving Family

The disciples of Jesus had many natural relationships. James and John were brothers—like Peter and Andrew—and all four were business partners. How wonderful when relatives believe in Jesus.

But our families do not always believe. Too often, despite hearing the gospel, a spouse, sibling, parents, or children do not trust Christ.

### An Unfortunate Encounter

Jesus knows how relatives can refuse salvation.

One time, Jesus entered a house, and the crowds began to gather again. Soon, he and his disciples couldn't even find time to eat. <sup>21</sup> When his family heard what was happening, they tried to take him away. "He's out of his mind," they said (Mark 3:20-21 NLT).

Let's think the best here. The family saw the crowds mistreating Jesus, so he couldn't get the food he needed. But Matthew 12 gives more details:

As Jesus was speaking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. <sup>47</sup> Someone told Jesus, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, and they want to speak to you."

<sup>48</sup> Jesus asked, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" <sup>49</sup> Then he pointed to his disciples and said, "Look, these are my mother and brothers. <sup>50</sup> Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, sister, and mother!"

Really? Mary thought Jesus was crazy and Christ would not acknowledge her also as his "spiritual mother"? Didn't Mary trust in Jesus? Surely, if *anyone* believed in the virgin birth, Mary did! But the text doesn't say that Mary did not believe. Mark's "He's out of his mind" need not include Mary.

### Things Got Worse

It was his brothers that did not believe. This is clear in John 7.

After this, Jesus traveled around Galilee. He wanted to stay out of Judea, where the Jewish leaders were plotting his death. <sup>2</sup> But soon it was time for the Jewish Festival of Shelters, <sup>3</sup> and Jesus' brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, where your followers can see your miracles! <sup>4</sup> You can't become famous if you hide like this! If you can do such wonderful things, show yourself to the world!" (NLT).

Their sarcasm went beyond typical brotherly banter. Rather than silence about their famous older brother, the four younger brothers railed at him. They spoke down to him from their self-appointed lofty position. Every family in Galilee typically would travel to the Passover in Jerusalem together for unity and safety, yet they distanced themselves from Jesus. None offered to take the treacherous journey with him. Jesus remained an outsider even in his own family. Can you relate?

### Thick Blood

The brothers of Jesus also saw his followers—not themselves—as the real family of Jesus. Perhaps we should admit that our unbelieving family members feel as strange with us as we do with them. The adage, "Blood is thicker than water," argues that family bonds are the strongest. But *which* family? The spiritual family of Jesus comprised his "brother and sister and mother." Even on the cross, Jesus entrusted Mary to John, not his brothers (John 19:26-27).

As members of the family of Jesus, we must respond with radical commitment. Jesus called us not to a philosophy or religion but to himself: “If you want to be my disciple, you must, by comparison, hate everyone else—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26 NLT). What other leader in business, government, or any other organization ever made such a demand? No other person is worthy of asking for this level of sacrifice. After all, no other leader is God.

### What About You?

Jesus said that a prophet never receives respect in his town. Maybe you relate to this all too well. Take heart. The brothers later believed (Acts 1:14). James and Jude even wrote Scripture!

Do you feel like you do not fit in this world—especially when you interact with your family and the things that they value? This may mean that you have not been sucked into worldly values, just as Peter referred to his readers as “strangers” (NIV) or “aliens” (NASB) in 1 Peter 1:1. These readers lived in their home provinces—and yet they did not fit. This is a good thing.

We should consider ourselves duly warned that our family often will not trust Christ.

“Don’t imagine that I came to bring peace to the earth! I came not to bring peace but a sword.

<sup>35</sup> I have come to set a man against his father,  
a daughter against her mother,  
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

<sup>36</sup> Your enemies will be right in your household!” (Matt. 10:34-26).

Disappointment stems from unrealistic expectations. Too often, we deceive ourselves into thinking that our common family heritage will result in like-minded beliefs. So, it is better to heed Jesus’ warning that polarization frequently happens within the same home.

Can we be assured that our unbelieving family will eventually trust Christ? Some argue this based on Acts 16:31, where the promise is, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household” (NLT). But this verse is directed towards the Philippian jailer, whose entire family believed even in those wee hours of the morning (Acts 16:25, 32-34). It is not a promise to every believer.

But you, as a believer, can still have a sanctifying influence on your unsaved family members. Peter exhorted this positive impact on Christian wives and non-Christian husbands (1 Peter 3:1-6). Paul also exhorted both a believing husband and believing wife to witness to their unbelieving spouse through a godly life (1 Cor 7:12-16). The same principle can be said for any Christian towards other family members, whether parents or siblings or children or others. Trust God to help you be “salt and light” to those you influence (Matt 5:13-16).

### Think About It

1. Which relatives of yours have yet to trust Jesus?
2. What attitude toward them should you have?