

Our Way

Michael J. Nielsen / General

Family Life / Family Life and Relations; John the Baptist / Luke 1:57–66

- › Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our Coming Advent King. Amen.

Introduction

Maybe you've heard about the little six-year-old boy who announced one day, "I'm running away from home!" Shocking yes, but then his parents asked him: "What will you do when you run out of food?" "That's easy," the boy replied, "I'll come home for more." Mom asks, "What will you do when you run out of money?" The boy answers, "That's easy, I'll come home for more." Dad is now listening even more. Mom asks another question "What will you do when your clothes get dirty?" The boy looks at her and says, "That's an easy answer, I'll come home for clean clothes, and for you to wash them." His father turned to mom and says, "This boy of ours, he isn't running away from home. This kid is going off to college 12 years early."

Running away from home

Did you know that people - of all ages - are running away from home, and this is in record numbers? The pain of sick families is so great that people will run almost anywhere to experience love and acceptance. Husbands run to bars and go on achievement binges. Women run to extramarital relationships that offer a listening ear, a loving touch, or more - this doesn't even have to be sexual in nature. Some children run from their family pain that so infects them, that later on in their twenties and thirties, an awful sickness wells up inside of them. Then their entire life is up for grabs!

We're in a series called "Family Life." We began last week with Zechariah and Elizabeth. Remember their devastating circumstances? Longing to have a child, but couldn't. While friends and relatives delighted in children and grandchildren, Zechariah and Elizabeth had nothing but shattered hopes and dashed dreams. There must have been times when each of them simply wanted to run away-run away from the pain.

Homes can sometimes be tough places, can't they? We all live in one in some way. Someone once said that marriage goes through three stages: "The Happy Honeymoon." "The Party's Over." "Let's make a deal."

Conflict in the family

Maybe your conflict concerns money; there is just never enough or you can't agree on how to budget it. Or maybe it's raising children, you're either too strict or too lax. Or perhaps it's where you are going on vacation in between the busy farming seasons or for us the summer. "We always go where you want to go!" Or perhaps it's not vacation, but it's who you will spend the holidays with...your family or the in-laws. The holidays are yes a trying times for many families...especially when it is virtually impossible to see them anytime around the holiday season.

Family conflict, though, is not the issue. Let me repeat that. *Family conflict is not the issue.* How we handle family conflict - now that's the issue!

My way

When conflict strikes our first is **my way**. "Let me make this clear. This marriage is all about my agenda, my needs, and my wants. After all, I'm always right and you are always wrong. That's why my way is the best way and my way is the only way. And if you don't like it, then I guess you can hit the highway." "My parenting style is the best. We should do this my way. After all I've read all the books on it." "Mom and dad, it's not your way...it's actually my way...I run the show here, you listen to me."

No way

Then there is **no way**. I back away. I ignore the problem and avoid it all costs. I don't like conflict. And discussion killers come out, "Oh, grow up!" "Give me a break!" "I can't believe you're making such a big deal out of this." Nothing is ever resolved because the discussion is killed off. Sometimes you and me, we won't engage. The silent treatment comes out. I run to my room and lock my door. And does this solve the conflict... "No way!"

Your way

Another option for handling conflict is **your way**. I give in, I roll over and play dead. I give in to your way. There's an epidemic in America called the passive detached husband and father. At an alarming rate more and more men are becoming detached, distant, and disengaged. They are actually not fulfilling their vocation and they shrug their shoulders and say, "Fine, have it your way."

Another way

Zechariah and Elizabeth, though, decided on another way. And what is that? That would be **our way**.

English Standard Version Chapter 1

59 And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, 60 but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." 61 And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name." 62 And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called.

Zechariah had doubted the Angel Gabriel's promise that God would give him a son, so Gabriel told him he wouldn't be able to speak until after his son's birth. So for nine months Zechariah was unable to speak to anyone. (possibly really good for Elizabeth). And any pastor's worse fear.

Then, when his son was born, in the midst of all the hullabaloo regarding his son's name, Zechariah

English Standard Version Chapter 1

asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John."

Amazing! When it came to naming their son, for Zechariah and Elizabeth it wasn't my way, no way, or your way. It was **our way**.

Our way means I care about solving our problem. In this instance "What are we going to name our son?" But I especially care about healing our relationship. **Our way** attacks the issue. It doesn't attack the person. It emphasizes reconciliation, not resolution. There's a big difference.

Reconciliation means my first priority is our relationship. And why is that? You are more important than our problems. Let me that again. You are more important than *all* of our problems. Don't get me wrong. We don't bury the issue. But we do bury the hatchet. We keep talking about the issue, but we talk about it together. We can disagree agreeably. We can walk arm in arm without seeing eye-to-eye.

Why did *both* Zechariah and Elizabeth insist on naming their son "John"? Because that's what the angel said in Luke 1:13. "John" means "The Lord is gracious." The angel told them to name their son "John" because in the midst of conflict the only way Zechariah and Elizabeth would get **our way** would be through **God's way**; and **God's way** is the *way of grace*.

Because of grace, God gives us new life, forgiven life, and eternal life. John 1:16 says that God is full of grace. Romans 6:14 says we are under grace. Ephesians 2:9 says we are saved by grace, and 1 Peter 5:10 call our God, "the God of all grace." Hebrews 4:16 says that God's

throne is a throne of grace, and James 4:6 says, "God gives more grace." Grace reconciles us to God. Grace reconciles us to each other.

Missing big news

On December 17, 1903, yes about 114 years ago, Orville and Wilbur Wright got their flying machine off the ground. The airplane was born! In their excitement, they sent a telegraph to their sister Katherine. It simply said, "Flew 120 feet. Will be home for Christmas." When Katherine got the news, she ran to the local newspaper in Dayton, Ohio and showed the telegraph to the editor. He glanced at it and said, "How nice, the boys will be home for Christmas." He completely missed the point! "Yes it was nice that the boys would be home for Christmas, but a person had flown an airplane for the first time. That was big news!

How often do we miss big news during Advent and at Christmas time? Too often we get caught up in the tinsel and toys, trees and trimmings. Those things are nice...i like my toys at Christmas. Just like it was nice that the Wright brothers would be home for Christmas. But that's not the big news. The big news of Christmas is that God took flight. *DID HE EVER! God took flight and traveled from heaven to earth.* The Word became flesh and dwelt among us! And he did it to show us the full meaning of grace.

"John" means "The Lord is Gracious," But Jesus is the Lord of grace. You see, when it comes to grace, Jesus nailed it! Perfectly! But before the nails, he wanted to run away. Did he ever! Three times in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus asked the Father to remove the cup of suffering. But the Father didn't. So Jesus went! And finally he went willingly. Jesus went to Calvary where he took upon himself all of our sin - including those sins we have committed against our spouses, our kids, our parents, our sibling, our extended family, and yes even our in-laws or outlaws. Rising on the third day, Jesus now lives as the gracious Lord of heaven and earth. Grace. Jesus nailed it! Perfectly! And FOR YOU!

Forgiven by grace, overflowing with grace, forever in grace, when family conflict comes we are empowered to renounce, **my way, no way, and your way** and say, "Yes" to a better way, *God's way*. It's Zechariah and Elizabeth's way. And would that be? You know it, don't you? It's...**OUR WAY!**

In Jesus name. Amen.

- › Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.