



Dear Friends,

We received news recently that our son and daughter-in-law are expecting their first child next April. Needless to say, Kathryn and I are delighted. Grandchild number two! Our joy has been doubled by their decision to move in with us from next month. When our son asked how long they could live with us, Kathryn said, "I would recommend no more than five years." I am hoping they will choose to stick it out with us for at least twelve months.

Early in our marriage, Kathryn and I experimented living with my parents for a few months. I can't say it worked brilliantly. We were very conscious of being in their space. And I suspect it was more our idea than theirs. I am hoping we learnt a few things from that experience that will help us do better with our own kids.

If Kathryn could have her way, she would have all our kids, spouses and grandchildren move in with us or next door to us. It's what I call. "living the Greek dream." It would be a joy to live in a multigenerational household surrounded by family. Though if I am being honest, it would also have its challenges.

My greatest challenge will be me. Fighting off my selfish impulses. Resisting being critical. Being generous sharing the kitchen. Overlooking minor bugbears. Having hard conversations instead of resorting to passive aggressive behaviour.

If you have lived with family or in a shared household, you know what I am talking about.

It's no different belonging to a church. We may not live in the same accommodation with our Christian brothers and sisters, as we might with family or housemates. But the same principles apply.

You might say that in church, you learn to get along with one another. However, to merely "get along" is a fairly low bar. God calls us to a higher standard. The standard is love. God's love.

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Eph 5:1-2)

How do you practice love for fellow believers in church? By putting off your "old self, which is being corrupted by deceitful desires," and putting on "the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:22-23).

That looks like putting off telling lies and instead, speaking truthfully to your neighbour (Eph 4:25). Its to not let unwholesome talk come out of your mouth – gossip, putdowns, criticism – and instead, to say only what is helpful for building others up (Eph 4:29). Its to get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice, and instead, to be kind and compassionate to one another (Eph 4:31-32).

I love the way Scripture calls on believers to not only stop bad behaviour but to replace it with good behaviour.

When we were on holidays, I didn't want to just sit on my phone in the evenings. Instead, Kathryn and I read books out loud to each other. I replaced bad with good behaviour.

So, I will be less likely to criticise others if I speak positively about them. I am less likely to be irritated by others if I actively try to spend time with them to get to know them better. But I will only be moved to act in these loving ways, if God, by his Spirit, first impresses upon me how much I am loved by Jesus.

God Bless,
Mark Adams