

When Home Doesn't Feel Like Home

Psalm 127:1 · Matthew 16:13–20

In the series “Family Strong: Building a Home that Works”

Today we begin a new series called Family Strong. Over the next five weeks we're going to talk honestly about the relationships that shape our lives — marriages, parents and kids, siblings, roommates, close friends, the family we were born into and the family we've chosen. Because here's the truth: every single one of us is trying to build something. A home. A life. A set of relationships that can actually hold weight when things get hard.

So before we open Scripture, let's start with a quick gut check.

By a show of hands, I'd like you to respond honestly to this question: How many of you would say your household's calendar is more organized than your household's conversations? If you're online, post raised-hand emoji or one-word response in the comments. (*Pause – give a response.*) That's exactly where we're starting today.

Some homes are not falling apart. They are simply running so fast that no one inside has time to be known.

You know the rhythm. It's August, which means backpacks by the door, school forms that need three signatures, fall sports schedules stacking up like Tetris blocks, work picking back up after summer's looser pace, and a group text that never stops buzzing: Who's picking up whom? Did anyone start dinner? Where are the cleats?

None of that is bad. Most of it is simply what love looks like on a Tuesday — getting people fed, transported, and cared for. But somewhere in the middle of running a tight, well-managed household, it's possible to look up and realize you're really good at logistics and a little unsure how your own people are actually doing.

In late 2025, a winter storm knocked out power to thousands of homes in East Palo Alto, California, for three straight days. CBS News interviewed families who were cold, frustrated, and out of patience with the whole ordeal. But one detail stood out. One resident, Selina Latu, told the reporter that with the phones set aside — no charge,

nothing to scroll — her family found, in her words, one small silver lining: more time to bond as a family.

Nobody planned that. Nobody scheduled it. It took the power going out for that family to have the thing a functioning home doesn't automatically produce: undistracted time with each other.

Here's the question underneath that story, and it's the question underneath this whole series: What would it take for your home to feel connected — not because the power went out, but because of what it's actually built on?

(9:30) Another question for you: What makes for a strong family, whatever your family looks like? There are different kinds of families: parent or parents and children; empty nesters; single parents with kids; grandparents with children; single adults; multigeneration homes with grandparents, parents, and children all under one roof; friends or roommates sharing a place. So, what makes for a strong family or household? *(Get responses: A well-managed calendar. Financial stability. A nice house in a good school district. Kids who are doing well. A marriage where nobody's fighting. Keeping the peace. Being the family other people look at and think, they've got it together.)*

Those are all good responses. *(go to yellow below)*

(11:00) Another question: What makes a strong family, whatever your family looks like? There are different kinds of families: parent or parents and children; empty nesters; single parents with kids; grandparents with children; single adults; multigeneration homes with grandparents, parents, and children all under one roof; friends or roommates sharing a place. So, what makes for a strong family or household? We would probably answer with a list, and it's not a bad list: a well-managed calendar; financial stability; a nice house in a good school district; kids who are doing well; a marriage or relationship where nobody's fighting; keeping the peace; being the family other people look at and think, they've got it together.

None of those things are villains. They can be genuine gifts. The problem isn't that we want them. The problem is when we quietly ask them to do a job they were never built to do — to be the foundation that holds our relationships together.

A house can be beautifully managed and still be a place where people are strangers under the same roof. You can pay every bill on time and still not know how your spouse is really doing. You can get every kid to every practice and still not know what's actually going on inside them.

And it's not just pastors who say this. Since 1938, researchers at Harvard have been running the longest study of adult life ever conducted — following the same people for more than 80 years, through marriages, careers, illness, and old age, tracking everything from income to brain scans. Dr. Robert Waldinger, the study's current director, sums up eight decades of data in one line: “Good relationships keep us happier and healthier. Period.” Not money. Not achievement. Not a spotless house. Relationships.

Even the best secular research in the world keeps landing on something the Bible said a long time ago. Which brings us to our scriptures.

“Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain.” — Psalm 127:1

Psalm 127 is what scholars call a Song of Ascents, one of the songs Israelite pilgrims sang while walking uphill, literally, toward Jerusalem to worship. And right at the start, the psalm names two kinds of exhausting labor: building a house and guarding a city. Both represent our best human effort to secure what matters. And the psalm says: unless the Lord is behind it, all of that labor is in vain.

Notice what the psalm is not saying. It's not saying work is bad. It's not saying planning, saving, parenting, or showing up every day is a waste of time. It's not blaming the parents whose kids are struggling or the couple whose marriage ended in divorce. This isn't a psalm about who tried hard enough.

It's a psalm about where the weight ultimately rests. You can do everything right — plan well, work hard, love sincerely — and still discover that human effort alone cannot manufacture the kind of deep, secure connection your soul is actually longing for. Building a house and building a home are not the same project.

So if the foundation isn't our effort, what is it? For that, we turn to Jesus. In our Gospel reading, Jesus and his disciples went to the area around Caesarea Philippi. He asked them, *“Who do people say the Son of Man is?”* And then he followed up with, *“But what about you? Who do you say I am?”*

Caesarea Philippi was a strange place for this question. It sat at the base of a mountain associated with the worship of the Greek god Pan — shrines, temples, competing gods everywhere you looked. Jesus takes his disciples to the one place in the region crowded with rival answers to the question of ultimate allegiance, and asks them point blank: with all these options in front of you, who do you say I am?

Peter answers: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus responds with something remarkable: “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

Jesus is the builder. Not us. And what he's building can't be finally undone — not by failure, not by estrangement, not even by death. That's a word of hope for every one of us carrying a relationship that feels too broken to fix.

But here's what I don't want us to miss: this question was never just theological trivia for Peter, and it isn't for us either. If Jesus really is Lord — not a religious idea we agree with, but the one actually building our lives — then he has something to say about the tone of our voice at home, the grudges we're still nursing, the apologies we've been withholding, the attention we give to the people sitting across the table from us.

Jesus is not a religious ornament we add to an already-built life. He's the foundation who reshapes how we speak, how we listen, how we forgive, and how we love.

I invite you to join me in these brief words of affirmation: **“Jesus, you are the foundation. Build something deeper in us.”**

So what does it look like to actually build on that foundation this week? Not a five-step plan. Not a total life overhaul. One practice: CONNECT.

Here's the invitation. Sometime this week, give ten undistracted minutes to one person who matters to you. Put the phone somewhere else. Turn off the television. And ask two questions:

“How are you really doing?” and “What's one thing I could do this week that would help you feel loved?”

Then here's the hard part: don't fix it. Don't correct it. Don't turn it into a lecture or a to-do list. Just listen.

And if you're sitting here thinking, I live alone — this isn't for married people with kids. This is for everyone. Family, in this series, is intentionally broad: married and single, widowed and divorced, empty-nesters, roommates, chosen family, the friend who has become family, the church family sitting around you right now. Your ten minutes might be a phone call to your mom, coffee with a neighbor, a text to an old friend that says more than “hey,” or a visit to someone at the assisted living center down the road. Name the person. Make the call.

Let's pause for a moment and listen for God's Spirit to show us one person we'll give 10 minutes to this week. Write that name down or post it in our comments or send yourself a text so you'll have it as a reminder. Pray this simple pray with me: **God, show me who you want me to connect with this week. Amen.** *(Pause)*

Here's what I want you to imagine. Homes where people don't have to pretend everything is fine. Kitchen tables — or coffee shop tables, or church fellowship-hall tables — where kids and grandkids watch adults actually apologize to each other instead of just moving on. A congregation where the person who lives alone is never treated as an afterthought, because we've decided family means more than an address.

That's not a fantasy. That's what happens, slowly, when a community keeps choosing to build on Christ instead of just trying harder. Not because we're getting it perfect — none of us will. But because we keep coming back to the foundation.

You do not build a strong home in one grand moment, one perfect sermon, or one great vacation. You build it in small, repeated choices — the ten minutes, the honest answer, the put-down phone — laid one on top of another, on a foundation that was never up to us to build in the first place.

Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. So this week, let's stop laboring in vain, and let's let God build something deeper.

Let's pray: **Jesus, you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Build your life in us. Teach us to connect, to listen, to speak truth with grace, and to love the people you have placed in our lives. For those of us with a hard relationship to face this week, go ahead of us. For those of us who feel like family has let us down, remind us that you are building something that cannot be overcome. Amen.**

One question to carry into the week: ***Who needs ten minutes of my undivided attention?***

Sources & Notes

Robert Waldinger quote and Harvard Study of Adult Development (Grant & Glueck Study, est. 1938) — Harvard Gazette, “Over nearly 80 years, Harvard study has been showing how to live a healthy and happy life,” news.harvard.edu.

East Palo Alto power outage / family bonding illustration — CBS News San Francisco, “Dayslong power outage wears on East Palo Alto families,” [cbsnews.com/sanfrancisco](https://www.cbsnews.com/sanfrancisco).

Exegetical background: Caesarea Philippi context, Psalm 127 commentary, and Matthew 16 wordplay drawn from Week 1 exegetical summary (Working Preacher, BibleOdyssey, Enduring Word commentaries).

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