



May/June 2025

Today

refresh, refocus, renew

Family of God

ALSO: OUR TRUE IDENTITY

Dear Friends:

“Why am I here?” This is a question that nearly everyone asks at some time in their life. Sadly, in our frail human efforts to find meaning and our place in this world, we often grasp at money, power, status, luxury, and other things that do not last.



In May, Pastor Dan Jongsma explores our true identity and purpose in Jesus Christ. As the Bible teaches, we find our true identity by discovering that Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life”—and this truth comes only as a gift from God. Knowing who we are in Christ gives us not only peace and hope for living each day but also assurance for eternity.

And in June, Pastor Joe Huizenga ponders—using stories from his Chicago neighborhood—how we’re called to live as part of God’s family through Jesus Christ. For many people, the word *family* evokes some of their most important relationships and treasured memories. Sadly, though, families can also include broken relationships and bitter, painful memories. The family of God, however, can provide a sense of belonging that transcends our connections to broken family relationships. That’s because Jesus’ sacrifice to make us right with God also makes us part of one big family that includes God’s children all around the world. And this means that whatever the circumstances, we belong to God and to each other in Christ Jesus, now and forever.

May God’s Word refresh, refocus, and renew you each day!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kurt Selles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kurt Selles

Today

May/June 2025

refresh, refocus, renew



“Our True Identity”
Dan Jongsma



“Family of God”
Joe Huizenga

Managing Editor: Jeff Bulthuis
Executive Editor: Kurt Selles

TODAY (USPS 185-140), Volume 75, Number 3, published bimonthly by ReFrame Ministries, formerly Back to God Ministries International, at 300 East Beltline Ave NE, Grand Rapids MI 49506-1208. Periodicals postage paid at Grand Rapids, Michigan, and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Today, 300 East Beltline Ave NE, Grand Rapids MI 49506-1208.

Copyright © 2025, Reframe Ministries. Printed in U.S.A.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations in this publication are from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Photo: unsplash.com
(Tasha Kostyuk)



ReFrame
Ministries

is the new name of
Back to God Ministries International

june

Family of God

Joe Huizenga

When we think of family, we often imagine the people we are born to, raised by, and live with or alongside. But in Christ our understanding of family grows deeper and wider. We are not simply defined by biological or custody relationships but by the love of God that draws us into a larger, eternal family. Each of us, no matter our background or story, is invited into the family of God.

These devotions take us through stories of community, love, and grace within families—both biological and spiritual. From the waters of baptism where promises are made, to homes of refuge, to friendships that feel like brotherhood, we see that God's family is expansive and diverse. This family, bound together by Christ's love, transcends what we might expect.

We also confront the pain of loss encountered through tragedy—and yet, in the midst of sorrow, God's promises hold fast. The same love that claims us in baptism carries us through death and into God's presence. These stories remind us that no matter the circumstances, we belong to God in Christ Jesus, now and forever. Through it all, may you find comfort in God's faithfulness and in the families God has given you.

Joe Huizenga serves as pastor and executive director of Roseland Christian Ministries in Chicago, Illinois. He and his wife, Cate, have four children.

PART OF GOD'S FAMILY

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. —1 John 4:9-10

James and Tyesha stand at the front of the church sanctuary with their daughters, Brooklyn and Layla, who gaze up at their baby brother, Hakeem, cradled in their father's arms. Brooklyn stands on tiptoe to peer into the water of the baptismal font; then her eyes look up to meet mine. She is captivated by the mystery, the ritual, and the weight of the promises on this day.

I address the congregation: "If any family would like to join Brooklyn, Layla, James, and Tyesha as we baptize baby Hakeem, you are invited to come forward." Expecting a few grandparents to join us, I am stunned when the whole congregation steps forward, surrounding them in love.

Together we listen to God's promises. James and Tyesha

make vows, and the congregation promises to stand with Hakeem in Christian community. Then come the words of baptism: "For you, Hakeem, Jesus Christ came into the world; for you, he died; for you, he conquered death. . . . We love because God first loved us. Hakeem Elzy, I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

Hakeem, a child of God, is part of God's family. And because of Jesus you have the right to be part of God's family too (John 1:12-13).

Loving God, thank you for making us part of your family through Jesus Christ. Help us to share your gracious love with others faithfully each day. Amen.

WHO IS MY FAMILY?

“Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”
—Matthew 12:50

When you hear the word *family*, what usually comes to mind? Where I grew up, a family was generally made up of a husband and wife and their biological children. Some families also had adopted children. Some couples did not have children, and some parents were divorced. But the most common family in that time and culture was the nuclear family. In the Bible and in today's world, though, it's less common to find families fitting that description.

When Jesus' family tried to get a message to him as crowds gathered around him, he saw an opportunity for a teaching moment and said, “Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

Jesus was helping his followers to describe a new kind of family, a community bound by

something more powerful than the blood in our veins. This is not a rejection of the biological family. It's an invitation to a bigger, richer family—the family of God, with whom we live in the kingdom of God.

This month you are invited to meet family members in the Roseland community where I work and live, in my biological family, and in other family groups that I am a part of. May God's Spirit work in us all to recognize the beautiful gift of his family in the relationships and communities we are a part of—no matter how different or diverse they might be.

Father, thank you for the gift of our broader family in Christ. May we keep growing together in faith and grace. Amen.

MS. SABRINA'S HOME

Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.
—Romans 12:13

Ms. Sabrina has raised four children. Her daughters work in medical professions, and her son serves as a police officer in a nearby suburb. Her mom and sister come to church with her, and her extended family gathers regularly for reunions. She has a special family. But her family and her home extend much further.

She calls her house in the Roseland community a "home of refuge." She has taken in young women who have needed housing, stability, and the wisdom of a woman who has been through some things. She has created her own application process for residents to come and live in her home, including a referral from her pastor. But in her home (which she purchased and rehabbed in partnership with Hope Christian Reformed Church 30 years ago) she has

housed young, single moms and their children. She has made room for a sister of hers who was in between jobs. She has rented a room to women who were ready to move out from our shelter for women and children. In the practice of Christian hospitality, bonds form and a family is created.

Where are the places and who are the people who have formed bonds in your community? Which coffee groups, basketball leagues, men's groups, and shared living spaces have been like Ms. Sabrina's "home of refuge"?

Lord, thank you for places of refuge where hurting people can find comfort and peace. Bless people who open their homes and hearts, creating safe havens of your love and healing. Amen.

MARLENE AND DWIGHT

I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.
—2 Timothy 1:5

Marlene's daughter has bounced around the streets for decades. Marlene and her husband, Dwight, have custody of her daughter's children. To make matters more complicated and beautiful, these grandchildren are not Dwight's biological grandchildren. Dwight and Marlene found each other later in life. Dwight has cared for these grandchildren as his own. He chauffeurs them around. He also bought a car and fixed it so that the oldest grandson has a vehicle to drive during his college years.

I have never heard Dwight complain, roll his eyes, or shoot an exasperated look to suggest to Marlene, "*These are your grandkids.*" And as a family they are thriving. Marlene has been an advocate for getting each child into various schools and programs so that they can succeed.

Marlene and Dwight have transitioned from the role of grandparents to parents because that's what circumstances have called for. It wasn't their plan, but they have formed a family that is a gift to each other.

Whom has God brought into your life because circumstances have required a different way of being? Where have you been called to be a surrogate parent, brother, sister, child, or friend? May God bless those relationships!

Lord, thank you for grandparents and surrogate families who step in with love, guidance, and care. Bless them as they reflect your grace and compassion. Amen.

A FATHER TO THE FATHERLESS

“Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.”

—Isaiah 1:17

On January 1, 2004, our neighbor Brenda Smith was shot four times while walking home at night, and I witnessed the aftermath. At that time I was an intern at Roseland Christian Ministries, and I was living near the church with my coworker and friend, Steve Turner. We soon learned that Brenda’s three children—two teenage girls and a 10-year-old boy—were home alone, without family support.

The Bible calls us to care for widows and orphans, and Steve exemplified this teaching. He took it on himself to care for the children, reaching out to relatives and case workers, regularly driving the kids to the hospital where their mom lay in a coma for four months. During that time the children ate at our dinner table four nights a week. Steve made sure they had groceries, and

he gave the youngest, Vincent, haircuts, offering stability during their time of need.

Steve wasn’t a blood relative, but he became a protector to these children. Vincent, now grown and a father himself, still calls Steve regularly, a testament to the lasting impact of his care. Steve’s compassion made a difference in that family, stepping in as a father figure when that was needed most. He became a true advocate, reflecting God’s heart for the orphaned, abandoned, and vulnerable.

Lord, thank you for advocates who help to support children not their own. Fill them with compassion and strength, reflecting your love as they nurture and guide young ones in need. Amen.

MEMBERS OF GOD'S HOUSEHOLD

You are . . . fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household. . . .
—Ephesians 2:19-20

A special group of four or five misfits started coming to church. They were invited by Deacon Watts, who met them at Sunday breakfast and welcomed them into her Sunday school class.

The group's leader, Clifton, wears an eye patch and is quick to hand out flyers for neighborhood events. They stay in group homes and shelters but come daily for our meal programs. What stands out most is how much they support one another and have each other's backs. Being homeless in Chicago is dangerous, and trust is rare. Most are loners, constantly on guard, but Clifton and his group share resources and information, looking after one another.

One day Clifton told me that Jeff, a group member, had received a warrant for his arrest and decided to stop running

from the law. Talking with the group gave Jeff the strength to face his fear. We prayed together, and we all went with Jeff to the police station so that he could turn himself in. It was bittersweet and a reminder that doing the right thing can often be the hardest.

On the way back, as we rode in the church van, Clifton said, "He came here all alone, and he left with a family." By God's Spirit and grace, all of us broken misfits can be transformed into a family.

Loving God, thank you for embracing all who feel like misfits. Help us find belonging in your community, knowing we are cherished and accepted. May your love guide us to discover our purpose in you. Amen.

ADOPTED

In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ. . . .
—Ephesians 1:4-5

Jorie loved her daughter, Sarah, deeply, but amid the challenges of trauma and poverty she couldn't care for Sarah in the way that was needed. Sarah's father was in prison. Lacking the support and tools she needed for raising Sarah, Jorie faced a tough decision.

Enter the Millers. With four biological children, a steady home, and an abundance of love, they became foster parents to Sarah through a foster/adoption agency. Later, after much thought, Jorie made the decision for Sarah to be adopted by the Millers. Although the drop-offs and pick-ups between Jorie and the Millers can sometimes be awkward, all agree that this arrangement is best for Sarah.

Followers of Christ are adopted into a bigger family than the one they are born into, and Sarah has experienced this

firsthand. She knows the love of both her birth family and her adoptive family. Recently, on Jorie's birthday, they all gathered at a Chicago pizzeria. As Sarah left the celebration, she said to her adoptive mother, "I'm so glad my mom didn't abandon me. She found you, and now my family is even bigger."

God often expands our families in ways we don't expect, providing love and support in unexpected forms. I'm so glad that God doesn't leave us on our own but surrounds us with a bigger family than we could ever have imagined.

Father, thank you for adopting us into your family. Help us embrace all of our brothers and sisters in faith, knowing we are united by your love and grace. Amen.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. . . .
—Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

When I was an intern at Rose-land Christian Ministries, Phil Walker was one of the first people who befriended me. Recently home from prison, Phil was working at a church summer camp. I was the only white person working there, but Phil made me feel welcome. “This is my brother,” he’d say, with his big arm around me—and he meant it.

Phil would invite me to his grandmother Joellyn Walker’s apartment after church on Sundays, where we’d eat and watch football. When I arrived, Ms. Walker would say, “Oh, my other grandson is joining us today.”

After 25 years Phil and I remain brothers. He’s looked after my sons. I officiated at his grandmother’s funeral. We’ve both had our struggles. Ecclesiastes 4 says, “Two are

better than one. . . . If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.” That’s been true for both of us.

There’s the family you’re born into, and the family you choose. I’m grateful that Phil chose me as his brother.

I hope you have had a brother, sister, or friend whom God has placed in your life to help you up when you’ve needed it. Thank God for them, and be sure to tell them and others you are grateful for them.

Father, thank you for the gift of friends who lift us up when we fall. Their love reflects your grace. Bless them for their kindness, and strengthen us to be there for others in their times of need. For Jesus’ sake, Amen.

RESHAPED

The pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.
—Jeremiah 18:4

Donald sold drugs, and Felisha was one of his customers. When she was arrested, she was pressured to reveal his name, but she refused, taking a hit to the head for her silence. Years later, Donald went to prison, where he surrendered his life to Christ. Felisha also got clean and gave her life to Christ. When Donald was released, he and Felisha crossed paths again unexpectedly. This time, a spark ignited between them. Each saw the transformation in the other, drawn by the change God had worked in their lives.

They began dating, and a few years later they were married. Today Donald and Felisha are inseparable, ministering together to people who are sick and hurting. When the cook at Roseland Christian Ministries resigned, Donald volunteered to take over, and Felisha

stepped in to do the dishes. They attend church faithfully, and Felisha has reconnected with her children. Both she and Donald have helped her sons find jobs and apartments and develop life skills.

Their relationship, which began so marred and misshapen, has been transformed into something beautiful and life-giving. Just as a potter can remold damaged clay into something new, God has reshaped their lives. They serve as instruments of God's grace, showing how broken lives can be transformed to honor God.

Lord, reshape whatever is broken in us into something that reflects your love and purpose. In Jesus, Amen.

CLOUD OF WITNESSES

Surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us . . . run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. —Hebrews 12:1-2

Each year, our church community holds a solemn celebration. We set up tables at the front of the church and place unlit candles on them. Church members come forward with photos of loved ones who have died. One by one, people approach the microphone, announce the name of a loved one, and light a candle. Sometimes they also share a story.

We've lit candles for grandmothers who died of natural causes, young men killed on the streets, babies lost to miscarriage, and loved ones taken by overdoses. Each name carries a story; each candle represents a life that touched ours.

God's family includes not only we who are living right now but also the many who came before us and who have gone on to eternity. They live on in the stories we tell, and it's important to stop and remember them.

In Hebrews 11 we find many examples of people who make up the "great cloud of witnesses" who have gone before us. All of these examples encourage us to walk in faith.

We all do well to pause and remember: Who came before you? Who inspired you? Who are the people for whom you are grateful, knowing that God sent them to be part of your faith journey? Take a moment to name them and to thank God for each one.

Father, we thank you for all who have gone before us, paving the way with faith and sacrifice. May their legacy inspire us to walk humbly and serve others, reflecting your love and grace. Amen.

FELLOWSHIP

Every day they continued to meet together. . . . They broke bread . . . and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. —Acts 2:46

For the first seven years of my life, we lived in a small town on the Mississippi River, and most Sundays included a family gathering. After church, we'd gather at my grandma's house. My dad, one of six siblings, was part of an extended family with more cousins than I could count. The kitchen soon filled with casseroles, chicken, pies, and Jell-O while the sound of football played in the background. Laughter echoed as we played at a nearby park, and the sense of belonging was palpable.

As years passed and family members moved away, our gatherings became less common. When my grandma died, it felt like the end of an era, but the bonds we made have remained strong—much like the unbreakable ties that God gives his people. Though I have moved to Chicago to em-

brace new surroundings, I still miss those gatherings at times.

When I go back to that small town today, it's often for funerals, and yet as our family members gather again, it feels as if no time has passed. We pick up familiar conversations, share stories, and laugh, just as God's family does when gathered in his presence.

"Family" should be a verb. It's about gathering, sharing meals, talking, praying together, and supporting one another. God's people are called to "family," actively living in community and love.

Lord, thank you for the joys of gathering together. May we cherish these connections as reflections of your abundant grace. Amen.

FAMILY OF VOLUNTEERS

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace. . . . —1 Peter 4:10

Jim and Mary live down the street from Roseland Christian Ministries (RCM). Retirees, they pour their heart and soul into our thrift store, sorting clothes, stacking furniture, doing what they can to help our little store thrive. The store earns money that helps to support our programs. Working with them are Arlene, Amalia, Marlene, Sue, Ruth, Ms. Green, Bruce, Jan, Terry, Arlo, Randy, and more. They use their gifts to create a community that does a lot of good in the neighborhood.

Jack is our board president. He serves wonderfully in his role of setting policy, vision, and development. But on a Monday morning you'll often see Jack deep cleaning the kitchen stoves or mopping floors. Over the years I've watched him listen and learn—forming

bonds and trust with people in the community.

All of the people I have mentioned here are retired. It inspires me that in retirement they live lives of service *and form bonds with each other*. It's not simply that they are serving, but that they are serving alongside one another, each with different gifts.

Who are the people you have formed bonds with while serving? Who are the gifted people with whom you serve?

Heavenly Father, thank you for the deep bonds we form while serving together. Strengthen our unity as we work side by side, reflecting your love and building Christian community together. In Jesus, Amen.

CO-WORKERS

We are co-workers in God's service. . . .

—1 Corinthians 3:9

On Sundays as I stand in the pulpit at Roseland Christian Ministries, I see DeWitt Casey at the congas to my left, Ryan Krestel at the drums, and David Walker to my right at the keyboard. Ryan and I have been friends for 30 years. Every Sunday, the four of us serve at one another's sides, leading the service. We've led hundreds of services together.

David and I have also ministered at funerals in some of the darkest circumstances—for victims of gun violence, overdose, and more. When David's brother was killed, I officiated at the funeral, and when my sons' mom died, David led worship. When I moved into Roseland as a college student, DeWitt was my housemate. We all have history together.

In moments when the pain and hardships of life overwhelm me, I draw strength from see-

ing David, DeWitt, and Ryan faithfully serving. I hope they have found some strength in me as well. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we carry each other as we serve.

Whom has God brought into your life to give you strength in hard times as well as smooth times?

Lord, we thank you for the strength we find in one another. As we walk through challenges together, may we lift each other up, reflecting your love and drawing closer to you. Amen.

BELONGING

In Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.
—Romans 12:5

DeWitt is a beloved part of our church family. He was the first neighborhood kid to meet Rev. Tony Van Zanten, who served at Roseland before me. Seeing nowhere for young people to gather, Rev. Tony threw open the doors of the Roseland Community Center, inviting DeWitt and an entire generation to come in and play basketball and form a community, a family. Over the years, some of those young people moved away, graduated from college, or started businesses. Others died. DeWitt joined the military but returned and settled in next door. For the past 40 years he's been at Roseland nearly every day.

He has cooked meals, hosted volunteer groups, played the congas in church, and participated in countless games of dominoes at the Drop-In Center. He has also sung in

choirs and contributed to our vibrant community life. If you've been to Roseland Christian Ministries (RCM), you've probably met DeWitt. He's kind, fun-loving, and has a beautiful tenor voice (similar to that of Luther Vandross).

I've learned that DeWitt's deepest longing is to be loved and belong—which all of us share. Some people find this in their immediate family or in their marriage. DeWitt found it in Christian community at RCM. I'm grateful that we can belong to God together in this place. Thanks be to God.

Father God, thank you for the gift of belonging. In your love we find our true home. Help us to reflect the unity of Christ's body, where all are welcome. Amen.

FLOWERS

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
—2 Peter 3:18

Megan, Kayla, and Kailyn Flowers grew up as the youngest children in a family of 13 siblings. They became involved in the church during their pre-teen years. Every day, they would walk a block to church, attending summer camp, Bible study, liturgical dance, youth programs, and Sunday worship.

Over the years, I've watched them grow into smart, responsible, caring young women. It hasn't always been an easy journey. There were times when immaturity, misunderstandings, and impulsive decisions caused strain on relationships. I can relate—I made similar mistakes in my younger years. Yet, they continued to show up, listen, and grow.

Now in their twenties, they all lead their families, are active in church life, and contribute in many other ways. I am incred-

ibly proud of the women they have become.

What touches me most is their perseverance. I'm grateful they never gave up on the church, and I'm equally grateful we never gave up on them. Their growth is a testament to the power of God's grace and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Heavenly Father, as we grow and mature, help us to deepen in your grace. Guide our hearts to reflect your love, patience, and wisdom. May we become more like Christ, bearing fruit for your glory. Amen.

FAMILY STORIES

"In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. . . .'" —Exodus 13:14

My father-in-law tells a story about his grandfather returning from Norway with a fresh salmon wrapped in newspaper under his shirt, just to bring a taste of home back to the United States. The act and the retelling of the act have power. Stories shape family identity, weaving together memories and values.

At Roseland Christian Ministries, testimony plays a crucial role in worship. It recounts stories of God's grace, provision, and faithfulness. In testimony, the church bears witness to God's ongoing work in our lives. Testimonies are powerful because they highlight personal transformation and remind the community that God is always faithful.

In the Old Testament, storytelling was central for nurturing the faith of God's people.

God often described himself in terms of liberating actions: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Exodus 2:2). And the people retold this story while celebrating Passover each year to remember God's deliverance. The regular retelling shaped them as a people.

What are the stories in your family or community that remind you of who you are? What stories of God's faithfulness need to be retold to help reinforce your identity as a person of faith in Christ?

Lord, help us in retelling the stories of your faithfulness. May our shared memories of your grace and love inspire and strengthen us, deepening our trust in you. Amen.

SIBLINGS AND FRIENDS

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.
—Proverbs 17:17

Ever since I was born, my brother has been by my side. As kids, we walked to school together, and when we moved to the Chicago area, we had each other's backs. I'll never forget when I was in second grade and the bus driver dropped us at the wrong stop for our first day at a new school. I was sure we'd never find our way home, but my brother stayed calm. He found someone trustworthy, and we made it home safely.

He's always been there for me, especially in tough times. He's defended me in fights, and although we've had our share of arguments, I can always count on him. My younger sister has also stood by me, especially when I was a single dad with young sons, lost and overwhelmed. She was "in it" with us, and we were blessed by her presence.

The Bible shares stories about siblings—some who were rivals, others who were deeply loyal. Proverbs 17:17 says, "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity." I thank God for my brother and sister, who have been with me through it all.

Do you have siblings? A friend who's like family? Take a moment to thank the Lord for the gift of those who stand by your side.

Father, thank you for the gift of siblings, who walk alongside us through life's joys and challenges. Bless our relationships with love, patience, and understanding, reflecting the unity and grace you have shown us. Amen.

WE GO TOGETHER

Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God."

—Ruth 1:16

A few years ago Erika's mother passed away from cancer. Erika's mother was a sister to Stephanie, so Stephanie is Erika's aunt. Despite their loss, Erika and Stephanie share a bond that is exceptionally close for an aunt and niece. They cook together, share meals, and travel from Michigan to Chicago nearly every Sunday for worship.

On the Sunday when Erika and Stephanie became members at our church, we read the story of Ruth and Naomi, focusing on the line "Where you go I will go. . . . Your people will be my people and your God my God." Ruth and Naomi experienced deep grief together; Ruth's husband, who had died, was Naomi's son. Yet they chose to embrace one another and face the grief and unknown together as they sought

community in Bethlehem, Naomi's old hometown.

Grief and hardship can leave you looking around and realizing, "This is it; these are my people. And I can remain bitter, or I can take a step toward healing with the ones God has given me." Some losses cannot be replaced, and yet opportunities and blessings can emerge as new gifts, offering comfort, hope, and companionship. I'm grateful to God that Naomi and Ruth had each other, and that Erika and Stephanie do too.

Whom has God brought into your life, offering gifts and companionship to help you?

Lord, guide and comfort us in our grief, and help us to support one another with grace and love. In Jesus, Amen.

FREEDOM

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.
—Galatians 5:13

A volunteer at Roseland Christian Ministries saw a sign for the celebration of Juneteenth and said, “Why can’t we all just celebrate July 4? What is Juneteenth anyway?”

I took a deep breath and said something along these lines: “I’m still learning, but here’s what I know. After the Emancipation Proclamation was declared in 1863, it wasn’t enforced in Confederate states until 1865. On June 19, 1865, a U.S. general arrived in Galveston, Texas, to inform enslaved people that they were legally free—two years after the proclamation. That’s what Juneteenth celebrates.”

I pushed a little further. “Independence Day might mean something different if your freedom didn’t come on July 4, 1776. And if any of us is enslaved, are we free?”

In the United States, Juneteenth is not just a day for Black Americans to celebrate—it’s a reminder for everyone that true freedom is something we should strive for together. Galatians 5:13 reminds us, “You . . . were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.” I pray for the humility to keep learning and listening. Juneteenth is a time to reflect on the journey toward justice and equality and, as followers of Jesus Christ, to remember that we are called to use our freedom to serve one another.

Lord, grant us the gift of true freedom in Christ. May we serve others with open hearts, walking humbly in your love and grace. Amen.

MOSAIC

I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.

—Revelation 7:9

In 1983, Ulysses left Haiti and arrived in Chicago with some fellow refugees. Stepping off the plane into the cold, he was greeted warmly by Rev. Tony Van Zanten and Rev. Emmett Harrison, pastors who worked with Roseland Christian Ministries. One of them gave him their jacket, a gesture he remembers vividly. Ulysses settled into the Roseland community, and, over time, some of his family members were able to join him.

Our lives are like a tapestry, woven from diverse backgrounds and stories. Just as Ulysses' journey blends different cultures and experiences, the Bible reminds us that we are all part of a larger family. Revelation 7 speaks of a huge multitude from every nation and language, standing before the throne of God.

In North America we are a mix of immigrants, descendants of slaves, recent refugees, and people native to the land. Many of our ancestors faced oppression and hardship and had to find new homes in unfamiliar places. Stories of immigrants struggling to find support in a new homeland, or of families torn apart by slavery, residential schools, and other unjust systems, remind us of the need for new relationships. Together we contribute to the beautiful mosaic of God's creation. Let's celebrate our stories, united in grace through Christ.

Father, thank you for weaving us into a mosaic of your creation. Help us to find unity in your love and grace. Amen.

GRIEF COMPANIONS

Jesus . . . was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept.

—John 11:33-35

When my sons' mother died unexpectedly, my wife, sons, and stepdaughter and I came together in deep, shared grief. The intensity of our sorrow felt profoundly isolating. But I've come to understand our pain in a new light.

Though deeply personal, grief connects us to a broader compassionate community. People have chosen to enter into our pain. It's reminiscent of Jesus' care for Mary and Martha when Lazarus died. Though fully aware of the outcome, Jesus entered their mourning, weeping along with them. His empathy was about understanding their loss and sharing in their suffering and grief.

Similarly, we are part of a community that understands loss all too well. Parents mourn children lost to disease and violence, siblings grieve the

loss of siblings to addiction or accidents, and young children mourn lost parents. It's a fellowship we haven't chosen, but in it we find support, solace, and strength.

My sons and I meet with a grief counselor every other week, sharing our pain and memories about their mother. Our counselor, who has also experienced tragic loss, stands with us in our grief. Together we find strength in this shared experience, navigating sorrow with a sense of communal support and understanding.

Father, thank you for the bonds formed through shared suffering and trauma. May we reflect the comfort and grace of Jesus, who shares in our suffering and grief and brings healing. Amen.

FEAR AND LOVE

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.
—1 John 4:18

Elen, a single mother of three, lives in our shelter for women and children. Tiny but with a tough veneer, she survives through her own means. Her children, with their big brown curls and bright eyes, bring warmth to our community. Her youngest child finds comfort in the arms of a young woman without children in the church pews, and her son sits with our family during church services.

Elen often stands apart, her demeanor distant. One day, during a prayer circle before lunch, something changed. As we shared our goals for the New Year, Elen's voice broke in, her lip trembling, "People think I'm really angry, but I'm really just scared." Her fears have to do with finding permanent, safe housing; her children's father; worry that her children could

be taken away; and the chaos she faces daily.

In this moment of vulnerability, Elen took a step toward trust and connection. As 1 John 4:18 reminds us, "Perfect love drives out fear." By being in a safe environment and allowing herself to be vulnerable, Elen began to build deeper bonds and trust with the people around her. In shared suffering and openness, we form a family of support and compassion, reflecting the unconditional love of Christ. May we all embrace our vulnerabilities to foster true, loving connections within our community.

Lord, drive out our fears with your perfect love, building a family of support and care that reflects your grace. Amen.

STAND WITH ME

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress. . . .

—James 1:27

Getting into drug rehab is not so simple as one might think. Charlene, Mary, and Demetris, women who had spent their adult lives on the streets, wanted to get clean. We might imagine they'd be dropped off at a facility, given a room, and soon headed on the way toward healing. But the reality is more complicated. Just getting into a facility can take weeks.

The first hurdle for these women was to fill out forms—simple, right? Not when hands shake uncontrollably from withdrawal or concentration fails due to decades of drug use. Not when you have a twisted leg and need a cane. At one facility, Mary wasn't allowed entry because of her cane. Twelve hours in hospital waiting rooms, struggling with forms, having nothing to eat, and obtaining identification—these obstacles were just

the beginning. Yet our shelter director, Kadie Verstrate, stayed with each woman, offering encouragement and support. Kadie's presence reflected God's steadfast love.

We need volunteers who can be "on call" to sit with people as they fill out forms, gain proper identification, and go to rehab facilities. God calls us to look after people who are often disregarded, disadvantaged, and in distress. Kadie's work truly embodies this call, and I'm grateful for the Spirit's work through her to support Demetris, Mary, Charlene, and many others.

Lord, teach us to serve as Jesus did, bearing burdens as family, trusting your love to guide us always. Amen.

FEARFULLY MADE

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. —Psalm 139:14

I officiated at the funeral of a man who had grown up at Roseland Christian Ministries. He was raised in the church and had attended Christian schools. But in his early twenties, something seemed to break in his mind. Always kind and smiling, he began to tell delusional stories. He was convinced of an alternate reality that featured celebrities, law-suits, and fortunes coming his way. He had an undiagnosed mental illness, and he self-medicated to try to cope.

His father, a veteran, also self-medicated and experienced mental breaks. Both men had endured severe trauma. They learned to “tough it out” until they broke from reality.

I don't know of any family that doesn't face mental health issues in some form. I know that many don't talk about it. But silence makes us sicker.

Mental illness is not a sign of weakness or failure but a call to lean on God's healing presence. We are invited to walk together in openness, seeking help, and trusting that God meets us in our brokenness, offering hope and restoration for our minds and hearts. I am concerned that many followers of Jesus believe that our struggles can be met only by prayer and through spiritualizing our problems. But in my experience, a strong faith community *and* a trusted therapist are necessary on the journey. My prayer is that you have both available to you.

Lord, we need strong faith communities and good therapists to help heal our mental and emotional wounds. May we seek both, trusting you to guide us toward healing. Amen.

FAMILY TABLE

“When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

—Luke 14:13-14

Ms. Watts bakes hot water cornbread. Ms. Sabrina brings sweet tea. Mrs. Johnson cooks a pot of greens. Elder Bennett prepares spaghetti. David Walker’s mom bakes pies. One of the beautiful things about the Roseland community is how each person has their signature dish, and you’d better not try to compete! When you bring all that food together around the table, it becomes a feast.

What I love even more is that everyone eats. Whether you attended church that morning or were just passing by, everyone is welcome to the meal. There’s even a city bus driver who has stopped his bus at the corner and run in to grab a plate. (His passengers didn’t seem to mind.) It’s a reminder of the abundance and inclusivity found in community meals.

Jesus often gathered around meals with people. And in Luke 14 he talks about inviting people with disabilities, who are usually overlooked, ignored, or even outcast. A shared meal isn’t just about food—it’s about hospitality, inclusion, and breaking down barriers. When we gather to eat, we follow Jesus’ example of welcoming all to the table.

Whom can you welcome to your table this week? What will you prepare? Will you let them give to you as well?

Lord, thank you for the beauty of shared meals where everyone is welcome. May we embrace hospitality and receive others freely. Amen.

LIGHT RISING IN THE DARKNESS

If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. —Isaiah 58:10

The roles of mom, dad, brother, and sister can be broader than traditional definitions suggest. My mom has embodied an expansive view of motherhood throughout her life. She not only raised my siblings and me alongside our father, but she also served as a Christian school principal for 35 years and as an elder in her church. Her influence reached far beyond our home—spending summers in Ukraine, Uganda, and Russia, as well as three years in Bangkok to help establish Christian schools.

When I was a single father with sons ages 7, 4, and 1, my mom stepped in to help me, sharing as a grandmother the same energy and devotion she had shown as a mother. Her love, especially in times of need, reflected God's calling to spend herself on behalf of others. She's always been a square

peg in a world that tries to fit people into round holes, and that uniqueness is her strength. The churches, orphanages, and schools she has served have benefited deeply from her gifts—as have we, her family.

God promises his servants: "You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail." Is there someone in your life whose faith and service reflect God's light and bless others in remarkable ways?

Lord, thank you for all whose love and service reflect your light. Bless those who give generously of themselves. May their lives be like well-watered gardens, ever refreshing others. Amen.

INCARCERATED FAMILY

Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.
—Hebrews 13:3

Debbie Zeigler brings greeting cards to church for members to sign for incarcerated family members of Roseland Christian Ministries. Most are African American men—some young, some old.

If you haven't explored the connections between slavery and mass incarceration in the United States, you may want to research this challenging topic. I've written about this before, and I continue to believe that God desires that we do better in our society. People are not meant to waste away in prison cells.

While personal responsibility is essential, we all share moral responsibility for the societies we help to create. The Jewish theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel noted that in matters of social injustice, "Few are guilty, but all are responsible."

As followers of Christ, we are called to build better communities through our schools, churches, and businesses. We are part of the human family, God's creation, and we must reflect God's love and justice.

By signing those cards at church, we recognize that no one is beyond the reach of grace—and we are called to stand with people whom society mistreats and forgets. How can we stand with these brothers and sisters today?

Lord, guide us to build communities that reflect your compassion and justice, and to stand with people who are mistreated and forgotten. In Jesus, Amen.

SEEING OTHERS CORRECTLY

Love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. . . . Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace. . . .

—1 Peter 4:8-10

In the beginning, God created human beings in his image (Genesis 1:27). This foundational truth shapes how we view all of humanity. Unlike other creation stories, where only kings or rulers bear the divine image, the Bible teaches that *every* person carries God's likeness.

This truth underpins the entire biblical social ethic: Do we truly recognize the image of God in all people, regardless of their status, background, or differences?

We need to see people correctly, as many moral philosophers and ethicists have recognized. In other words, if we fail to see someone as made in God's image, we reduce them to something lesser, even less than human. And if we dehumanize people, that can easily lead to

mistreatment, marginalization, inequality, and injustice.

In contrast, when we learn to view all people—our neighbors, strangers, and even our enemies—with love and justice, we begin to recognize their inherent worth and dignity. (See Matthew 5:43-48.)

As believers in God, we need to see people as God does. May God's Spirit work in us to see correctly all the people we are in community with, wherever we are.

Loving God, open our hearts to recognize the dignity and worth in each person. May we treat everyone with love, justice, and the honor they deserve. Amen.

“TWIN” THE TRIPLET

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace. . . .

—1 Peter 4:8-10

D'Near Scott, known as “Twin,” is actually a triplet—but that’s another story. Today he stands with us in a large circle before lunchtime. Twin has spent much of his adult life working odd jobs, staying in abandoned buildings, and trying to survive. At Roseland Christian Ministries (RCM), Twin has found something more—a place where he is valued. Like a member of any family, Twin takes on roles that help us function together. He’s quick to mop floors, take out the garbage, or shovel snow when necessary. Sunday through Friday, you’ll find him at RCM, smiling, helping with odd jobs, and sharing in the meals we serve.

Today, as 25 to 30 of us stand in a circle before lunchtime, tears well up in Twin’s eyes, and his voice quavers as he

says, “You are my family.” As we go around the circle, each of us shares our name, gives thanks, offers prayer requests, and speaks words of encouragement. Then we pray together, lifting each other up to God in Jesus’ name, and we break bread as a community. In this way we remember that Christ calls us into a new family—his body, the church.

May we always see one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, bound together in his love and grace. We are family.

Father, thank you for the family we find in Christ. Help us to be united in your love. May we serve and uplift each other, reflecting your grace and compassion. Amen.

LAST RITES

Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons . . . nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. —Romans 8:38-39

Dana, 20, from Wisconsin, ended up on Chicago's South Side after she stopped taking her prescribed medications. She began self-medicating with street drugs and eventually found shelter with us for a while. Tragically, Dana died alone in an abandoned building from a fentanyl overdose.

Each year we hold a service for people who couldn't have a proper funeral or were unclaimed at death. Members approach the microphone, sharing memories of God's goodness in the lives of the departed. I'm reminded of a Jason Isbell lyric: "Hardly even know my name anymore/ When no one calls it out, it kind of vanishes away." So, we say the names of these people, remembering we are saved by God's grace and joined together by God's Spirit.

After the names are spoken, we are reminded from Scripture that nothing in this world—neither death nor life nor anything else—can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Near the front, Tyesha cradles her son Hakeem while Layla and Brooklyn sit beside her. Brooklyn's eyes widen as I proclaim, "For you, Dana, Jesus Christ came into the world; for you, he died; for you, he conquered death. Dana, child of God, you are part of God's family."

For you, dear reader, Jesus Christ came into the world, died, and conquered death. You are part of God's family.

Lord, thank you for making us part of your family, adopted in love forever in Jesus. Amen.

think CHRISTIAN

**A website and podcast
exploring God's sovereignty
over pop culture.**

What does it mean to watch, listen,
and play through the lens of your
Christian faith? At *Think Christian*,
we believe there's "no such thing as
secular."

**Check out the thoughtful
articles and the TC Podcast at
ThinkChristian.net**



RETURN POSTAGE GUARANTEED
PORT DE RETOUR GARANTI

Today

refresh, refocus, renew



ReFrame
Ministries

is the new name of
Back to God Ministries International

3475 Mainway
Burlington, ON L7M 1A9
P.O. Box 5070, STN LCD 1
Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8
905-336-2920
info@todaydevotional.com
www.todaydevotional.com
facebook.com/todaydevotional

Periodicals postage paid at
Grand Rapids, Mich., and at
additional mailing offices.

Today

refresh, refocus, renew



ReFrame
Ministries

is the new name of
Back to God Ministries International

300 East Beltline Avenue NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49506-1208
800-626-3060
info@todaydevotional.com
www.todaydevotional.com
facebook.com/todaydevotional
