

Family plays an important role in everybody's life, but it's especially true of how Jeremy and Emily got here today. They both speak very highly of the example they received from their parents. They grew up in households where they felt loved as children and where they could see the strong commitment of their parents' marriage. It wasn't just about them: They learned to put the needs of others ahead of their own. That kind of example gives this new marriage a head start. It doesn't mean it will be easy, but Jeremy and Emily will have lots of experience to draw from as they make their own home. Another reason family plays an important role in this particular wedding is that Emily met Jeremy because her best friend was dating Jeremy's brother, and they're all living happily ever after.

When Christianity was first beginning at the time of Saint Paul, families were very important to the spread of the faith. There is plenty of evidence in the New Testament that new Christians were baptized together as families. There is also evidence that some family members did not agree with others, and friction resulted when some of the people you loved became Christians but others did not. They could tell early on there was a close connection between faith and love. Both these virtues live at the center of the heart.

So when St. Paul tells the Colossians how to live with one another as a church, you can hear the principles of good family life at work. He compares it to clothes that you wear. He says, "Put on. . . heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do." He's talking to the whole Christian community, but you can hear how this would have struck families. Then, as if you really need to bundle up against the cold, Paul says this: "Over all these [virtues] put on love, that is, the bond of perfection."

Emily and Jeremy, God has placed a living faith in your hearts. Throughout your lives you have wanted to please God by your words and actions, and you are anxious to share this faith with children in your family. It is a difficult task, and you need the right tools to do it. But as you have learned from your own families, you have the most important tool of all. You have love. God, who is love, has put love in your hearts. And when you love, you experience all that is important to you; you experience God. Already in your lives you have faced many challenges and joys, so you feel prepared for what lies ahead. You know that the love you have received from God is more than you could ever earn. All you can do is respond to it, by giving that love to others.

Paul says to the Colossians, "whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." The love you feel today will help you through thick and through thin. Thank God for it. Thank God for love, and everlasting joy will fill your days.