



Create a peaceful space to pause, and allow yourself to feel God's presence alongside you, as near to you as your own breath. In following the reflection below, as a church we will draw closer to God and to one another as we grow in faith and deepen our sense of belonging to God.

Ephesians 3:14-15 'Thanksgiving for Our Family'

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,

¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.

At this harvest season, it's great to give thanks to God for all the good things he has given us. And among the most important of God's gifts to us are the families we belong to. When I was little I was taught to call all my parents' friends 'Auntie' or 'Uncle', and for years I assumed they were all relations. If they had been, it would perhaps have been the largest family ever. But no – everyone on earth is one of God's beloved children, so it must be the human race that holds that record!

Most of the time, when we say family it's the one into which we were born or adopted as a baby that we think of. We thank God with all our hearts for our parents who nurtured us, for the brothers and sisters we grew up with, for our grandparents who probably spoilt us, and for aunts, uncles and cousins, for all our wider family. We give thanks, too, for all the love and care within families, young caring for old, and old supporting the young. Our family circle grows as we leave home and form adult relationships – setting up home ourselves, perhaps having children, perhaps marrying.

Then we thank God with gratitude for the friends we are closest to, and know best. There are, too, neighbours that we often chat to, and less familiar faces about whom we know so little and greet with just a smile. We thank God for all these people in our lives.

Of the utmost importance is our vital Church family, which we may have belonged to since birth, or come to when we were older. It's where we not only make friends with one another, but gain precious knowledge about God, and come to know Jesus as our friend and brother. We learn together to listen to God and discern the way he wants us to go.

This is a most crucial family in our lives, and one for which we give God huge thanks.

There are school families, where we form lasting friendships. If we go on to vocational training, or to university, we become part of new families. When we go to work, wherever that might be, we are part of another great family, our work family. And maybe we join societies and clubs, and are welcomed into further new families.

The family is an essential part of our existence. Through God's grace we have the possibility of belonging to so many different families during our lifetime and this is a gift for which we give great thanks and praise.

Prayer:

At this Harvest time,
we praise and thank you, Father God,
for creating us all to belong to families,
and for creating families for us to belong to.

Our Emmanuel family is a snapshot of
humanity, of all ages and colours,
with very differing backgrounds,

We pray for each other
and for everyone in your worldwide family.
Bless their homes and families,
and let your love and peace
so shine within each community
that smiles turn to conversations,
and strangers become friends.

We pray this through Jesus Christ,
who with you and the Holy Spirit
are the family of the Trinity. **Amen.**

