I am a brother

Reflection by Alex Bryan, Walla Wall, WA

This was not my identity when I was born, for I am a first born. For 20 months I was an only child. David's entry into the world on November 20, 1971 changed my identity. And then, on February 1, 1974, Brandon's first breath awakened my nearly four-year-old self to a fractionally-altered situation: my parents were now divided into thirds rather than halves, or at least it seemed.

Identity as a sibling is quite different from identity as child or parent. We can selfishly consider how ancient ancestors, grandparents, parents, and even teachers and mentors have shaped us. These influences formed who we are. And when we tell these stories the focal point often becomes ourselves: "I got my eyes from her, my smile from him, my sense of humor from her, my curiosity from him, etc." And, in a similar way, when we talk about being parents (or how we might influence any child or the next generation) we consider what we have offered of ourselves — our influence, our legacy, poured into the future: "I have invested who I am in who they are; the mark of my life will not fade with me."

It seems to me that being a brother or sister is quite different from identity as child or parent. A generation is defined as a group we share life with for a time (and sometimes struggle with to gain a bigger share of that life). These contemporary boys and girls did not give us life nor do we pass life along to them. Brothers and sisters are simply unique. They share our space. They force us (if we are humble and awake) into humility over arrogance,
into community over individuality, into us over me. We are no longer defined simply by what comes before and what comes after, but by a generation, a moment in history when we did things with (or against, but either way with) other human beings.

Life isn't merely about how the past has ordained my life and how the future will continued my life. I am a brother. My identity is irreversibly marked as a member of a community of three: Alex, David, and Brandon.

But, of course, biological brotherhood is not the ultimate familial reality. The family of Jesus, where we are all identified throughout the New Testament as "brothers and sisters," is where we discover who we really are. This is critical, I think: We are not merely Children of God, we are also brothers and sisters of one another. We share God. We share life. We share work and play, tools and toys. Siblings share the gifts of Christmas, and of Christ. Siblings share the affection of parents, and of Christ. Siblings recognize that Mom and Dad, and God, love others as well as self. And when we realize that God "so loved the world - THE WORLD!" we think of all of our human sisters and brothers with fresh eyes and renewed hearts. Jesus did not come to merely save individuals, but communities. Jesus did not come to redeem only children, but siblings. And I suspect this is a pretty big deal.

Recalibrate

1. Who is your brother and sister?
2. Does every boy and girl, man and woman on planet earth qualify as a Child of God?
3. If so, do all humans rank as your brothers and sisters?
4. If so, how must we think of them? How must we treat them? What new ways of living might this suggest?

Feel free to send any thoughts or comments to Alex Bryan.