

# **Theological Foundations for Developing a Life-Changing Family Ministry**

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## **Theological Foundations for Developing a Life-Changing Family Ministry**

Before a church begins the journey of “Family Ministry” it is essential to establish the right theological foundations and biblical principles upon which to build. Here are seven core convictions that we believe are essential if your church hopes to develop a thriving ministry to and through families. We hope that this article will spark meaningful discussions for you about what the Scriptures say about God’s purpose for the families in your church and community, and how He desires for you to minister to them. We fully expect this article to open some big cans of worms, and we don’t intend to try and put them all back in the can! You may not agree with our convictions, or conclusions. However, it is our prayer that by considering and discussing the concepts presented here that the Lord will deepen and strengthen your convictions about ministering to families.

### **Theological Foundation #1: Family**

God created the institution of marriage and family as the foundation for human life, society, and the faith community (Gen. 1). The family was created by God to be an active and powerful spiritual discipleship center (Genesis 18:18, Deuteronomy 6:5-7, Ephesians 6:4).

Throughout the Scriptures, God uses the metaphor of family to communicate the truth about Himself and His kingdom. Christ is described as the groom and the church His bride (Mark 2:19). The relationship between the first two persons of the Trinity is described with the analogy of Father and Son. Relationships within the body of Christ are described as “brother” and “sister.” Every chapter of the four gospels, except Mark 4, mentions family relationships or uses an analogy to family life.

### **Theological Foundation #2: Marriage**

God created marriage so that we would:

- Reflect His image (Genesis 1:26-27)

- Become more like Christ (Ephesians 5:24-25)
- Experience the blessing of two lives and hearts becoming one (Genesis 2:21-25)
- Take part in God's plan to fill the earth with worshippers through having and raising faithful children (Genesis 1:28)

Marriage is a "discipleship relationship" designed to help each other person grow in every area of their life. Spiritual unity in marriage is critical for impressing the hearts of children with a love for God (Malachi 2:15), so that they might bring the good news of Christ to the world.

With this foundation in mind, we believe local churches should develop intentional ministries to help couples prepare for Christian marriage, enrich and deepen existing marriages, and rally around couples in crisis. Special encouragement and pastoral care should be given to those couples who are unable to have children. In addition, it would be a blessing to the many children at risk and to the couples in your church to encourage ministries of adoption and foster care.

### **Theological Foundation #3: Singleness**

All believers in the local church, regardless of marital status, are of equal importance and worth in the family of God (Galatians 3:28). God gives some people the gift of celibacy (1 Corinthians 7:7). This is a valuable and important gift for the body of Christ. Those with this gift are able to engage in ministry in a way that married people are not (1 Corinthians 7:33). The church has historically understood this gift as meaning that a person does not have a desire for marriage or children and that they are not overwhelmed with sexual desire. The church should encourage those with the gift of celibacy to remain single and pursue their calling in ministry, and should encourage those who do not have the gift of celibacy to prepare for and pursue ministry in and through marriage (1 Corinthians 7).

With this foundation in mind, families in the church should be encouraged to invite singles to fellowship in their homes, and singles should be encouraged to invest in relationships with other generations in the church. Jesus Himself sets the example of a single

person without children intentionally investing in the lives of children and families. When you hold a “family event” at your church, consider inviting those who are single to fully participate as well. Everyone in the church, regardless of marital status, should be called and equipped for living out their faith in their home.

#### **Theological Foundation #4: Parenting and Grandparenting**

The home is the center of faith formation for the next generation (Deuteronomy 6:5-7). Parents and grandparents, in particular fathers, are responsible before God to do all in their power to impress the hearts of children with a love for God (Psalm 78, Ephesians 6:4). His desire is that the people of God will disciple and raise up a generation who will love, worship, and serve Him, and who will then raise up another generation who will love Him (Deuteronomy 32:45-46). God’s desire is that generation after generation of believers would go forth and fill the earth with worship and bring the good news of Christ to the remote parts of the earth (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 2:38-39).

With this foundation in mind, the practice of family worship – families engaged in sharing spiritual life together in the home through prayer, reading Scripture, and creative learning experiences - should be developed as the spiritual center of family life (Deuteronomy 6:5-7). The practice of family worship and spiritual life in the home is the most important “program” that a family ministry seeks to develop and support. In our view, biblical family ministry is not simply getting families to do more programs in your church building, but to see spiritual life and growth occur at home.

When spiritual life is taking place in the home, families can then be meaningfully challenged to engage in service, short-term missions, and the ongoing use of their home as an evangelistic hospitality center in their neighborhoods.

#### **Theological Foundation #5: Relationship between Church and Home**

The Christian church is called by God to provide

support, encouragement, training and accountability for the Christian home (Deuteronomy 30:19-20, 1 Timothy 3:4).

With this foundation in mind, we believe that the church should be wary of too many programs that pull the family in separate directions. Every ministry of the church is, in a sense, a family ministry, in that every ministry should encourage people to live out their faith at home, and equip them for Christ-centered relationships with their family and extended family.

We believe that the primary task of Youth and Children's Ministry is to inspire and equip parents and grandparents to be successful in the evangelization and discipleship of their children and teenagers. Youth and Children's Ministry should increasingly develop a "home centered, church supported" strategy for reaching the next generation. If and when the families within the church take the lead in the discipleship of their own children, more of the children's and youth ministry resources can be focused on reaching children and teens from non-Christian homes.

#### **Theological Foundation #6: Worship in the church**

Throughout the Scriptures we find examples of multigenerational worship gatherings. It is vital for the health of the church, and the spiritual health of children and teens to experience the worship of God in a generational context. (Exodus 12:21-28, Deuteronomy 16:9-11, Joel 2:15, and Acts 20:7-12)

#### **Theological Foundation #7: Leadership**

God's word provides a set of vital criteria for those who are being considered for the roles of elder/pastor/deacon. Many of these qualifications for spiritual leadership within the church focus on the pastor/elder's family life<sup>[1]</sup>:

- He should be the husband of one wife. (1 Timothy 3:12, Titus 1:6)
- He should manage his own family well (spiritual leadership as well as provisional and protective). (1 Timothy 3:4-5, 12)
- His children should obey him with proper respect. (1 Timothy 3:4)
- His children should be believers and not be open to

the charge of being wild and disobedient. (Titus 1:6)

With this foundation in mind, we believe that it is important to encourage all those who hold the offices of spiritual leadership within the church to give their best leadership and effort to the ministry of their home. Lovingly keep them accountable to the practice of family worship in their homes, and to keeping healthy boundaries around their ministry hours outside the home so that their spouses and children receive their best efforts. Your pastors/elders will not be able to lead the congregation in a direction that they are not personally moving in themselves.

Prayerfully follow the criteria that God has provided in the Scriptures for any potential pastors/elders/deacons in your church. Spend time with their entire family during any interview process to assess the state of the family relationships.

### **Final Thoughts**

Building a thriving family ministry in your church begins with the right foundations. We have attempted to lay out a series of biblical and philosophical convictions which we believe are crucial for dynamic family ministry in the local church. It is our prayer that you would search the Scriptures to see if these things are true. Perhaps the leadership of your church will come to different conclusions, and different applications. If there is any way that we can help you in ministry to and through the families in your community, please don't hesitate to ask us.