

Biblical Foundations *for*
Developing a Life-Changing Family Ministry



Family Challenge

A. Introduction

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. The first question is not, “How should the church minister to families?” but “Why should the church minister to families?” It is our conviction that transformational family ministry must be rooted in a clear Bible-driven theology which connects the Great Commission with the family.

Here are eleven theological foundations we believe are essential if your church hopes to develop a thriving ministry to and through families. It is our hope this simple document will stimulate discussion among God’s people around the world and that we will have the opportunity to grow together as we follow Christ.

B. Biblical Foundations

Biblical Foundation #1: God’s Purpose for the Family

God created the institution of marriage and family as the foundation for human life, society, relationships, and the faith community (Genesis 1-2). God chose to move His plan of salvation forward through covenant relationships with families (Genesis 7:1, 17:7). As individuals experience the grace and forgiveness of God through Jesus, entire families can be healed and transformed. God calls the family to be an active and powerful evangelism and discipleship center, shaping the hearts of its members with a love for God and others. (Genesis 18:18-19, Deuteronomy 6:5-7, Ephesians 6:4). Through the institution of family, God brings glory to Himself by advancing His multi-generational plan to fill the earth with His worshippers (Genesis 1:28, Psalm 78, Rom. 11:36).

Biblical Foundation #2: God’s Purpose for the Local Church

God created the institution of the local church to worship God, teach biblical doctrine (2 Tim. 4:1), guard the church from false doctrine (Titus 2:1, 15), disciple believers (1 Timothy 4), care for believers (Acts 4:34, 1 Timothy 5, James 1:27, James 2:15), and equip them for works of ministry in their homes, in their communities, and into the world. (Ephesians 4:12).

Biblical Foundation #3: Relationship between Church and Family

While it is true that the family and the local church are distinct jurisdictions with distinct spiritual responsibilities, the Scriptures unite the mission of the church and the family in a partnership. Followers of Christ are both members of local churches and members of families, and they are called to live for God in both of those spheres.

As noted above, one of the fundamental roles of pastors is to equip believers for the work of ministry (Eph. 4:12). The local church must equip believers for the ministry of honoring their parents, loving their spouses, and making disciples of their children and grandchildren.

Not only does the local church equip believers for ministry to their family members, but God has revealed that the faith community in the Old Testament and the local church in the New Testament brought families together for the purpose of corporate worship and spiritual growth (Exodus 12:21-28, Deuteronomy 16:9-11, Joel 2:15, Acts 20:7-12).

Biblical Foundation #4: Human Sexuality

The three persons of the Trinity exist in unique and perfect intimacy with one another. God created humans in His image - male and female. As a result, we are gifted with the capacity for deep intimacy both with God and with one another (Genesis 2:18-24).

God gives us the gift of sexuality for human intimacy and calls us to use this gift responsibly in accordance with His Word, which is found in the Bible alone.

A special and unique form of human intimacy is found in the physical sexuality between a man and a woman (Ephesians 5:25, 31-32). Sexual experience was created by God for use within the confines of a marriage between one man and one woman, and it is God's desire that the beauty of sexual intimacy within marriage not only unify the bodies of husband and wife, but their spirits as well (Hebrews 13:4, Matthew 19:6, 1 Corinthians 6:13-20, and Genesis 1:27, 2:20-24). Most importantly, the sexual relationship in marriage magnifies the divine intimacy between Christ and His Bride – the Church (Ephesians 5:31-32).

Perversion of the nature and practice of human sexuality including cohabitation, promiscuity, pornography, same-sex activity, and other sexual behaviors contradicting scriptural standards are key forms of spiritual attack in the church today. We are thankful for the grace and mercy of God through Christ, which is sufficient to forgive any sin, and restore any repentant sinner to the image of Christ. (Acts 15:28-29, 1 Thessalonians 4:2-8, Romans 13:13, Colossians 3:5, Romans 1:18-22).

Biblical Foundation #5: Marriage

In the beginning of human history, God created the institution of marriage. He created marriage as a life-long partnership between one man and one woman so that we might:

- Reflect His image and magnify His character (Genesis 1:26-27, Ephesians 5:25,29)
- Become more like Christ (Ephesians 5:24-25).
- Experience the blessing of two lives, hearts, and bodies becoming one (Genesis 2:21-25).
- Take part in God's plan to fill the earth with worshippers through having, adopting, fostering and raising faithful children (Genesis 1:28, Psalm 127).
- Marriage provides a picture of the union of Jesus and His bride, the church (Eph 5:32).

Marriage was designed by God to help each person grow in every area of his or her 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. God created men and women with equal value, worth, and dignity, but also created them differently so that they might fulfill different roles and responsibilities within the family.

God created husbands and wives with equal worth, value, dignity, and importance. The distinct roles of husband and wife are essential and vital for the functioning of the family (Gen. 2:18, Ephesians 5:25-26, 5:33, 1 Corinthians 11:3, 1 Peter 3:1-7).

Marriage is a lifetime commitment, and God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16). God's people and God's church are to pursue every means of healing and reconciliation, but He allows divorce due to the hardness of human hearts, only as indicated in Scripture (Matthew 19, 1 Corinthians 7).

If a local church is committed to the advance of the Gospel, it must be committed to preparing young people for Christian marriage which includes casting a vision for family engagement in the courtship process, teaching a biblical view of sexual purity, and warning believers against the dangers of co-habitation.

The local church enriches existing marriages, supports couples in crisis, and nurtures members who need healing from divorce and loss.

Biblical Foundation #6: Parenting and Grandparenting

The home is the center of faith formation for the next generation (Deuteronomy 6:5-7). Parents and grandparents are responsible before God to do all in their power, through word and action, to impress the hearts of children with a love for God. Fathers and mothers have a shared mission to pass faith and character to their children within their unique roles (Psalm 78, Eph. 6:4, Prov 1:8, Titus 2:4, 2 Tim. 1:5).

God intends generation after generation of believers to go forth and fill the earth with His worship and the good news of Christ (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 2:38-39). In addition, the Scriptures give us a dramatic vision of God's call for grandparents to serve as spiritual leaders and mentors for future generations (Psalm 78).

With this foundation in mind, the practice of family worship (families praying and reading Scripture together in the home) 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 commitment that a family ministry seeks to develop and support.

God's people should embrace the Lord's blessing to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28), see children as a reward from God (Psalm 127), and eagerly desire the blessing of children. For the same reason, God's people are called to protect children from the moment of conception (Psalm 139, Jeremiah 1:5, 20:17). When Christian couples are unable to conceive, we trust in God's sovereignty and His good plan for their life.

God's desire is that families be filled with an atmosphere where God is integrally connected to every aspect of daily life, conversations, and celebrations. 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.

Biblical Foundation #7: Honoring parents

The Fifth Commandment exhorts children to "Honor your father and your mother, so that it may go well with you and you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12). Eight times in Scripture, children are commanded to honor their parents, which is a lifelong commandment. Children are to do all in their power to bless and support their aging parents (1 Timothy 5). As they learn to honor our parents, they learn to honor God (Mark 7:11).

It is God's desire that parents will follow God, and that children will honor their parents by following in their footsteps of faith in Jesus.

Biblical Foundation #8: 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). Everyone in the church, regardless of his or her marital status, should be equipped to live in healthy relationships with family and extended family members. God calls all members of the church, whether single or married, to pursue sexual purity.

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 should encourage those with the gift of celibacy to remain single and pursue their calling in ministry. Similarly, the church can encourage those who do not have the gift of celibacy to prepare for and pursue ministry in and through marriage (1 Corinthians 7). For single individuals who desire a godly marriage, the local church is called to guide and equip them through the marriage preparation process.

With this foundation in mind, families in the church invite singles to fellowship in their homes, and singles invest in relationships with other generations in the church. Older singles can function as

“fathers and mothers in the faith” for those who are younger. Jesus Himself sets the example of a single person without children intentionally investing in the lives of children and families. Every person in the church, regardless of marital status, has an opportunity to shape the faith of the next generation, and should be called and equipped for living out his or her faith in the home.

Biblical Foundation #9: The Dominion Mandate

The Dominion Mandate, first expressed in Genesis 1, directly relates to family ministry in that God calls the godly individual, godly couple, and godly family to exercise biblical stewardship in every sphere of life.

The individual Christian, the Christian couple and the Christian Family are called to:

- Be fruitful and multiply (for those who are called to marriage) (Gen. 1:28)
- Recognize that all creation belongs to God’s (Ps 24:1, Ps. 50: 10-12)
- Be God’s stewards (resource managers), by nature of creation and re-creation through faith in Jesus Christ (Gen. 1; Is 43:1-3, Rom 6: 1-11, 2Cor. 5 14-6:2; Eph. 2:8-10.)
- Be responsible with life’s resources (family, time, money, healthy, work, sexuality, and all creation) and are to joyfully manage them for God. (Ps. 89).
- Share with a servant’s heart (John 13:3-5, Matthew 20:26-28) in the role of stewardship with our family and with the community of faith, for the benefit of the world. (1 Peter 4:10, Gal. 6:7-10, Rom. 12, 1 Cor. 12, 2 Cor. 8 and 9).
- Be in the world, but not be of the world (John 17:15-18), and recognize that the Lord sets us apart from the world (Romans 12:2) but by His power sends us into the world to live out the Gospel (John 20:21-23). This Gospel living glorifies God and blesses others (Gen. 12:1-3, Titus 2:11-14).

The local church should seek to equip the Christian family to live as godly stewards of all that has been entrusted to them which promotes family health. Discipleship includes guiding families to joyfully and responsibly live in such a way that reflects God’s will, love, and grace. Family ministry includes helping families practice biblical principles in every sphere of life, managing time, balancing work and home, caring for their bodies, and practicing biblical money management.

Biblical Foundation #10: Family and Church 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:

- He should be the husband of one wife (if married). (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, 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. The home is the training ground for prospective church leaders. Lovingly keep them accountable to the practice of family worship in their homes, and to maintaining 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.

Biblical Foundation #11: The “Missional” Family

God wants all redeemed families to fulfill His mission of restoration and redemption of the world. Godly marriages are a light and a blessing to family, neighbors, and communities. Missional families protect children in the womb, welcome them as a blessing, and train them to follow God. Children can be used by God here and now, not just when they become adults, to build His Kingdom and advance His Gospel.

Missional families, as part of their identity in Christ, are engaged in service, missions, evangelism, and outreach. By equipping families for spiritual health and success, local churches fill the community with “mission outposts” as every home becomes a beacon of hope, radiating the light of Christ, and engaging in the Great Commission.

Final Thoughts

Advancing the Gospel through family ministry begins with the right foundations. We begin with the conviction that God has given us everything we need in the pages of Scripture for the proper functioning of the family and the local church. We pray that you will join us in this mission of uniting the church and the family in the global Great Commission!

With God’s Love,

Pastor Matthew Ling
Dr. PC Matthew
Prof. Ben Freudenburg
Dr. Scott Turansky
Dr. Rob Rienow

The Transform World Family Challenge Advisory Team

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For more information, please contact Pastor Matthew Ling of **Family Challenge** at matthewling.life@gmail.com.