



Family Church: How to Develop Your Church as a Family

The Family of God: Part 1

In this course we are going to be talking about the power of family. We are not so much focusing on the human family as much as on the spiritual family of God. Family is God's prototype and methodology for transforming the world, which we will address in a moment. As a senior leader, you are called to be a spiritual father or mother. You have a certain responsibility that is very akin to natural fatherhood or motherhood that will produce the kind of outcome that you are longing for in your church.

Three Churches

There are three kinds of churches that exist in the world.

Fantasy Church

The first kind of church is what I call fantasy church. This is where we basically just do simple services. People come and people leave but there is not much measurable change in the lives of the people that we are leading; Nor is there much measurable change in the lifestyle or in the actual impact within the people of the community around them. I call this fantasy church. It is based on an idea that John Wimber had. He said that a lot of churches can be compared to playing basketball without a ball and without a hoop. Much of what we do in church is not really goal-oriented. It does not produce actual fruit or outcome. We just have a maintenance pattern that we have fallen into that makes it feel like we are doing church. But we are not actually achieving any noticeable or measurable outcome. That is fantasy church.

Factory Church

The second kind of church is called factory church. In response to the fantasy idea, many people have tried to engineer church into a set of structures that produce a



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certain cookie-cutter-like response; Almost like a Starbucks franchise. Although, some of what they have pioneered in that direction is helpful. Certain highly-structured movements, like G-12 or house church movements, have actually done a good job, in many ways, of identifying some of the problems in church and remedying those problems. The concern I have is that they have done so in a way that is very ridged and, ultimately, very cookie-cutter factory-oriented. They are producing disciples but not in accordance with the diversity and the multi-faceted dimensions of who those people are. There is much control in many of those organizations and that produces a certain outcome that looks good. But it produces a high burnout rate and leaves many people feeling abused by the structure.

Family Church

The third kind of church is called family church. I believe that God's key idea is family church. Family church is based on a model of family that is based in scripture.

Heavenly Family

When Paul prays his second prayer in Ephesians 3:14-15 he says, *"For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named"*

He then goes on with this beautiful prayer. But, let's focus on the word "family". The word that is used there is the Greek word "Patria". The word "Patria" communicates the idea of a family that is cohesive, walks together, gives birth to new generations, that is extended, has relationship and that expresses a culture of doing "life-on-life" with each other.

What is interesting about this passage is that it says there is family in heaven. In the past, I always thought that family was more like an invention of God to give us a framework on earth to live out our lives in. But that is not what the Scripture tells us. Scripture uses the phrase "the whole family in heaven" which probably includes all of



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the created beings in heaven, the angels, and the different kinds of creatures that exist around the throne. There is a family in heaven and God is the Father.

There is also a family dynamic represented in the trinity to some extent. But, in addition, that dynamic seems to stretch beyond to the multitudes of angelic hosts that are there and also to those saints who have gone before us. There is family in heaven.

God's Method

There is also a spiritual family on earth. This is the entire spiritual family of man/humanity. There are also tribes, tongues and kindred. There are churches, tribal movements and denominational family structures. All of these are expressions of the idea of family that we need to explore and understand. I am convinced that when God created humanity, He intentionally created us to be in family; Family was God's primary methodology. His vision was that we would be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. And, the way to carry out His vision, the actual accomplishment of it, was going to be done through the focus of family. His vision was that a mother and father would have a child who would marry and have their own children. And, that, ultimately, all of humanity that moves out around the face of the earth would produce the fulfillment of God's purpose and vision through family.

Restoration

Of course, we know the story. Sin entered the world. There was a disruption of family. There was a separation between God and man, between man and women, between fathers, parents and children, and between sons and sons. There was a separation of classes, and eventually of races. Sin brought division and strife to the earth. Sin brought war, brokenness, inequity and problems of all kind. But the good news is that in Christ there is restoration.

God's strategy and methodology for *creation* was family. His methodology in *redemption* was family. When sin entered the world, God set in motion a redemptive plan that



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began with Abraham. Abrahams entire goal was to have a son with Sarah. Through that son all the nations of the earth would be blessed. But it was not really that son, it was the future son, Jesus, who would be born 2,000-years later. It was God in the flesh, Christ Jesus, who ultimately brought that blessing to the nations. So, Gods way of restoring humanity after the fall was to build a family that had a son. In turn, that son also had a son. And then that son had 12-sons. Those 12-sons formed 12-tribes that became a nation. When this family, who created a people group through years and centuries of development, were finally ripe and ready they received God manifested in the flesh, Jesus the Messiah.

When Jesus came, He taught, He healed, He blessed, and He changed the world around Him in powerful ways. But the greatest work He did was on the cross when He died for our sins, removing the penalty and the power of sin over humanity for all those who would come into alignment with Him. And, in so doing, after He resurrected and before He ascended, He spoke these words, *“Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.”* (Genesis 1:28)

Well, He did not say those words, exactly. What He said was, *“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples...”*

Matthew 28:18-19

But, see, when He says, “make disciples” He is talking about giving birth, in a spiritual sense, to new babies who start new families; Those new babies grow up in their families to be full-fledged adults that, ultimately, move out and start their own families. The idea of family as a methodology was in *creation*. It was in *redemption*. And, it is also in the *restoration of all things*. Because, when Jesus set in motion this idea that you could be born again, it means you are born again into a spiritual family with spiritual mothers and fathers who will raise you up. Ultimately, they will help you become who God has called you to be and send you out so that you can be a transforming agent in the world around you.



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Beauty of Family

God loves family. Family is a great model. It is a great methodology for how we are called to do church. I want to encourage you, as a senior leader, to think in terms of family as you build. There is an incredible beauty with family. Family is all about relationship, covenant, connection and ultimately the idea of multiplication. All of this takes place in a family. In family, you move people developmentally from immaturity to maturity and from innocence to knowledge. All of this is part of the family concept.

Family is Relational and Developmental

There is a problem in our day in age because of the orphan spirit that is on our land and the strong need for father-heart teaching. I am concerned that in some ways we might have overstepped into romanticizing family in an unhealthy way. People come to church and ask, "Will you be my spiritual father?" thinking that it will make up for all of the lack in their past. Obviously, we have to work against that as we seek to institute family in our churches. We need to be more realistic.

Take a moment to think about a natural family. Yes, there are cuddle up on the couch times in family. There are times when we connect with one another deeply and relationally. But family is not only about that. It is not only about Disneyland and vacations. It is not only about thanksgiving and Christmas. Family is also about cleaning your room, making your bed, clearing the table, mowing the lawn, doing your homework, learning to drive a car and balancing your checkbook, etc. The reason is that, at its highest purpose, family is not about raising children but about raising adults. The same concept is true with spiritual family. Spiritual family is not simply leading people to Christ, but it is developing those people into the fullness of Christ's purpose for their lives.

So, I want to encourage you, as you pursue this concept of family, to think beyond the boundaries of what we have previously known. Understand that family is both a place of incredible fellowship, connection, relationship and friendship, but also a place of



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intentional development. Family is where infants become toddlers; toddlers become teenagers and teenagers become adults. This happens because you as a leader, as a spiritual father or mother, stepped in and created an outcome that produces that result.

I want to encourage you, as a senior leader, that as you go towards creating family do not neglect the developmental side as you also embrace the relational side. Make sure the two come together so that everyone in your church rises up into the fullness of who God has created them to be. In doing this, you will bring transformation to the world around you.