

# Parents at the Heart of Family Ministry

by Ben Freudenburg



When I get to Heaven, I believe my Heavenly Father will ask me: “Ben, how did it go with the gifts I gave you? Do the daughters I blessed you with know and love Me?” I believe King Jesus will be asking **me** this question, not the pastor, not the youth worker, not their teachers. He will ask the church a different question: “How did you support parents in shaping children who love and obey me?”

Ministry to families starts with a philosophy that determines one’s actions, guides the journey, and shapes the response. My philosophical view of family ministry reads like this:

*Parents are the primary shapers of faith and life in their children; and the role of the church is to partner with the home in that process.*

For parents to be successful in their role as primary faith and life shapers, they need a healthy marriage, parenting skills for each age and stage of family life, and skills in teaching the faith. They need resources to shape their family’s view of human sexuality and how to effectively use the resources God has given them. And, if they lose a spouse by death or divorce and choose to marry again, they will need a new set of skills as a blended family.

Therefore, family ministry is creating a Biblical culture at church that impacts the home: a culture that values parents and grandparents as the primary agents of faith formation and a church that sees itself as an intentional training center working to equip them for that role. For me, family ministry is the church equipping the home to be all God intended it to be.

I believe the current church culture has grown parents to believe that the church is responsible for faith formation. I call this “Church Centered-Home Supported.” Family ministry is helping the church move toward a new paradigm, “Home Centered-Church Supported,” in which the church forms the community of faith in a way that agrees with

the Biblical view of being a partner with the home and intentionally shapes the church to be a Christian marriage and family forming center.

Listen to what David shares in Psalm 127: 3-5. He asks, "Don't you see that children are God's best gift?... Children are the fruit of the womb; His generous legacy." Children were not given just to sustain one's lineage but to be added to God's legacy of faith, and, in so doing, grow God's kingdom. How blessed are you parents! What an honor! What a responsibility to receive this gift from God and make sure His gifts return to him.

We know that lifelong Christian marriage is God's plan and the best environment for raising Godly children. I like how the Message translation of scripture makes it so clear. "And what does He want from marriage? Children of God." (Malachi 2:13) God intended the home to produce children who love God with all their heart, soul, and mind, and their neighbor as themselves.

Scripture clearly articulates that the home is responsible for faith and life formation. My favorite is Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Here God is talking to His people and reminding them to love Him with all they have: heart, soul, and strength. The commandments were not to stay on stone, but to be upon our hearts. Why? So that we, the **parents**, could teach them to the gifts our Father gave us: our children. We are to impress them on our children's hearts by talking about God's will and ways all the time. The church must not take over for parents what God intended the home to do.

Thus, family ministry is gently moving the church back to its Biblical roots in supporting and equipping the family for their role of shaping faith and life. The church must build a deliberate and intentional Family Life Education System that supports homes and marriages by way of becoming intentional marriage and family forming centers that partner with the home. The end goal: More kids have a safe and secure place to grow and develop as God's people and finally make it home to the house our Father in Heaven has prepared for them.

*Ben Freudenburg has been a Director of Christian Education for 37 years, working with children, youth, and their families to nurture their love for God and each other through the church. He presently serves Concordia University Ann Arbor as its Family Life Program Director and Professor in Family Life Studies. He has written for a variety of education and youth journals and magazines. He has also written several books including "The Family Friendly Church" by Group Publishing. Ben wishes to thank the Michigan District and the first group of churches who helped pioneer the Family Friendly Partners Network Training (FFPN). Those who have followed them in the FFPN training have appreciated and benefited from your insights and suggestions.*

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