



Ministry Sphere 3 | Building Family Values

Throughout the New Testament, the church is referred to as God's family. The question is, just how much are our congregations like the early church family? What do we lack? How can we grow to become more like Christ to each other and to the world?

Family values cannot simply be voted into the life of a church. They are taught and hopefully they are caught. Family values are best understood when seen. If we live like Christ, people may listen to our words as well — words in a sermon or Sunday School class, or words on a website.

Family to Family | by W.P. Campbell

The debate about whether same-sex attraction is a result of nature (pre-birth factors) or nurture (our environment) is not as complicated as we make it out to be. Mainstream scientists and psychologists who do not have an axe to grind admit almost unanimously that it must be both, at least to some extent. Where then, do people's family of origin fit in? Many would suggest it is one of the biggest factors on the nurture side of the coin. And this is where the conversation becomes quite complex.

And this is also where we as Christians are called by God to move the conversation back to the sublime and simple. You and I, the average church members, leaders, and pastors, are not called to "fix" people, nor are many of us clinical therapists. We do not need to delve into issues related to other people's families of origin to help them experience God's family today. By God's grace, we can demonstrate the healing virtues of Jesus. We are God's family!

When God sends us people who have been broken through a bad marriage, through a drug addiction, or through a wasting disease, our first job is to love them and to show them that God does too. Everyone needs a family. If people also need a medical doctor or a psychiatrist, we can support them in the journey. But they will never cease to need the support of God's family.

The Ministry of Hospitality: Jesus reached into the hearts of the religious leaders of his day with the Story of the Good Samaritan. Read the story again. What does it say to us today (Luke 10:25-37)? I believe it tells us that a Christ-like response to homosexuals is not to hold a huge sign on the street corner that declares that all gays will go to hell. Nor does it allow us to excuse ourselves from this particular ministry because we are too busy with "other godly priorities" as we rush along the road to Jericho. Rather, it calls us to show kindness and hospitality to all people that we might soon gain their ear and tell them about the road to heaven. It recognizes that people need Jesus before they can change.

This welcoming spirit is true hospitality. We are called to bandage wounds and to expect nothing in return. It can be insightful to make a list of things our churches might do to show hospitality to people who experience sexual and relational brokenness.

Family to Family: One of the best places for healing for those whose families of origin were somehow lacking is within the healthy families of a local church. In this way we “show” rather than “tell” what the grace of God can do. In this way also, people can “see” rather than merely “hear” through a sermon what good things the Lord has in store for them. One pastor told me that he believes the greatest ministry we can have to people who are conflicted sexually is to get them around the dinner tables in our homes. Why? Because it was in their own homes that many of them were wounded, and the home is where healing can truly begin.

Sermon Ideas | by W.P. Campbell

For several years, I’ve been observing successful ministries in congregations that are impacting the lives of people with homosexual attractions. One of the essential aspects of these ministries is the pastor’s sermons. Here is what I’ve learned from their examples and from my own experiences:

Some General Considerations

1. Those who are successful in such ministry can deal with the topic of homosexuality as naturally as they deal with sermons on prayer life or stewardship. They have come to recognize the frailty of all humans and they have come to respect the God-given potential in the worst of sinners. These pastors speak with true compassion. Those who hear their sermons know that the pastor recognizes his or her personal flaws and does not talk down to others. (Few pastors, however, have grown spiritually to the stature of the Apostle Paul who recognized himself as the chief of sinners.)
2. When such a pastor brings up the subject of homosexuality, therefore, it is not held up as a special, secret, or indescribable abomination. (Think of it this way: If you were assigned to preach this Sunday on the sin of gluttony—a sin we rarely talk about—would you describe it as worse than the sins, or would you admit as you preach that we all have our issues?).
3. The successful preacher on this topic, however, is willing to call sin for what it is: sin. When we try to redefine sin or steer away from the plain teaching of Scripture, we lose the respect of our congregations and we lose the blessing of God. But there’s more. We lose the opportunity to minister to gays and lesbians. We drift downstream with the world’s current, and leave our visitors also drifting until they can find a church that has some good news to offer. Abundant are the testimonies of people who have left homosexuality behind after being influenced by humble, transparent, loving and truthful sermons that didn’t skirt around the topic of homosexuality.

4. Each pastor's preaching style and leadership approach is unique. Some attack sin with the sword of the word brandished and flashing. Others utilize the sermon to draw the sinner out for a casual walk with the Shepherd, believing that Jesus knows best how to lead others into paths of righteousness. Follow your God-given approach. You and the Lord know best the context and needs of your congregation.

Having a Specialist Tackle the Topic

The easy way to handle this topic from the pulpit is to avoid it altogether. The second most easy way to deal with it is to hand it off to a guest preacher who has personally overcome homosexuality and who now has a spouse and children and who can be gone on Monday morning to everyone's relief.

But easiest isn't always best. I recommend bringing in the specialist to guide your leaders to build ministry, and perhaps also to offer in-depth teaching for the congregation through seminars and other formats. If the specialist is to bring a message from the pulpit, however, it is important that such a message be placed like a diamond in the safe and secure setting already established by in-house sermons that build family values.

The pastor cannot shrink from the task of preaching the whole council of God for the people of God. It is what happens Sunday after Sunday that will most greatly impact the church members from Monday to Friday.

Sermon Samples

The following links bring you samples of sermons preached on homosexuality and sexuality in general. We plan to add many more over the coming years, and invite you to send us your own recommended links and actual sermons, whether in electronic text or downloadable audio files. We reserve the right to review and post the sermons that we believe to be fitting with this ministry focus. Thank you!

- Sermon Cloud: Sermons about Homosexuality (<http://www.sermoncloud.com/sermons-about-homosexuality/>). This site provides a large array of sermons from a large variety of sources.
- OneByOne (url: <http://www.oneby1.org/articles.cfm>) More than thirty sermons, largely from Reformed pastors.
- John Piper (<http://www.desiringgod.org/topics/homosexuality/messages>). Find here three messages on homosexuality, which lead to related messages about biblical values.

- Higher Praise: Homosexuality – A Christian Perspective (<http://www.higherpraise.com/outlines/hom.htm>). A series of sermon outlines based on one preacher's approach.

Sermon Series Ideas

One doesn't necessarily need to mention words like "homosexuality," or "adultery" from the pulpit to create a worship environment that fosters family values in the hearts of God's people. When biblical family values are encouraged in sermons and when the leaders of a church are embracing such values for themselves, the whole church is practically destined to begin living these values over time. Upon such values, solid ministry is built.

Perhaps the following series ideas will stimulate your thinking. Send us your ideas as well. What series has worked well in your congregation?

Series: The Church as a Family

The Call to be Family (Hebrews 2:10-18)
 Love in the Family (Ephesians 3:14-19)
 Sharing as a Family (Galatians 6:7-10)
 A Family for Families (1 Timothy 3:4-5)

Series: What God Values

Compassion (Philippians 2:1)
 Transparency (Philippians 2:2)
 Humility (Philippians 2:3)
 Love (Philippians 2:4)
 Christ-like Obedience (Philippians 2:5-11)

Series: Serious Thoughts on Sexuality

For the Married (1 Corinthians 7:1-7)
 For Singles (1 Corinthians 7:29-40)
 For the Divorced (1 Corinthians 7:12-16)
 For All the Rest (1 Corinthians 7:17-24)

Series: Radical Christianity

Our Call to Follow Jesus (Matthew 8:18-22)
 Our Call to Deny Ourselves (Matthew 16:24-27)
 Our Call to Reach All Kinds of People (Matthew 28:18-20)

Series: When Smaller is Bigger

Why Small Groups? (Mark 3:13-14)
 Small Groups in History (Various Selections)
 Small Groups as Family (Colossians 3:12-17)
 Small Groups for Ministry (Acts 2:42-47)

Church Family Values Resources

There are a wealth of resources for families through ministries like **Focus on the Family** (www.focusonthefamily.com) and **Family Life** (www.familylife.com). The resources designed to help local congregations learn to live according to Christ-like family values, however, are not as easy to target. If you have suggestions to improve this list, please contact us.

Resources Specific to Building Church Family Values and Homosexuality

Johnson, Kristin. "The Family of God and Healing Same-Sex Attractions." *Theology Matters: A Publication of Presbyterians for Faith, Family, and Ministry*. Volume 14, No. 3, May/June 2008. (<http://www.theologymatters.com/MayJune081.pdf>)

"Becoming a Listening, Healing Community." *OneByOne Pastoral Care Guide*. Orlando, FL: OneByOne, Inc, 1999.

General Resources on Building Church Family Values

Bonnhoeffer, Dietrick. *Life Together*. NY: Harper and Row, 1954.

Diefenderfer, Richard R, Jr. *Creating Christian Communities*. Crowley, TX: CreatingChristianCommunities.com Publishing, 2003

Eims, Leroy. *The Lost Art of Disciple Making*. Colorado Springs, CO: Zondervan, 1978.

Evans, Louis. *Covenant to Care*. Wheaton, IL: Scripture Press, 1982.

Getz, Gene A. *One Another Series*.

Hanson, Paul D. *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible*. San Francisco, Calif.: Harper & Row, 1986.

Hellerman, Joseph H. *When the Church Was a Family: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community*. Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2009.

Hestenes, Roberta. *Turning Committees into Communities*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991.

Martin, Glen, and Gary McIntosh. *Creating Community: Deeper Fellowship through Small Group Ministry*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997.

Nouwen, Henri J. M. *Reaching Out -- The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*. NY: Doubleday & Co., 1975.

Palmer, Parker. *A Place Called Community*. Philadelphia: Pendle Hill, 1977.

Peck, Scott. *Different Drum*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987.

Shadel, Doug; & Thatcher, Bill. *The Power of Acceptance - Building meaningful relationships in a judgmental world*. Van Nuys CA: New Castle Publishing, 1997.

Shaffer, Carolyn R; & Anundsen, Kristin. *Creating Community Anywhere*. New York: Putman book, 1993.

Trueblood, Elton D. *The Company of the Committed*. NY: Harper & Row, 1961.

Trueblood, Elton D. *The Encourager: Insights to Strengthen Christian Faith and Living*. NY: Harper & Row, 1978.

Trueblood, Elton D. *The Incendiary Fellowship*. NY: Harper & Row, 1967.

Google Books

For a wealth of **free** reading, we recommend logging onto *Google Books*, and doing a search on “Church as Family.”