



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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**Faith At Home**

**September 20, 2009**

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**~ Scripture: Joshua 24:14-15 ~**

### INTRODUCTION

In America, we've become good at building & re-building HOUSES- -maybe not so good at building & re-building HOMES.

We're beginning a series of sermons today that will underscore the importance of "home" and "family" to God. The home and family are God's chief tool for passing faith along to the next generation. You're not alone in that task; the church is here to help. But the home is the primary place where God intends for it to take place; and, like it or not, parents—NOT pastors / youth leaders / S.S. teachers—are the greatest influencers in that process.

However, we all know that home & family are in rough shape. Statistics regarding the health and stability of Christian homes & families are dismal. Many homes & marriages are in trouble, including many right within our cong. We are in need of an **EXTREME HOME MAKE-OVER** (title).

This series is all about re-establishing the home as the place where faith is nurtured. The sermon I'm preaching today is one I wish I had heard when I was a young parent.....because my head was not at home. Oh, I knew the principles and ideals I wanted my kids to learn. . .the spiritual foundation I wanted them to have. But I was busy...busy in ministry...busy doing many "good" things. I missed some opportunities along the way that I wish I had again at my fingertips.

Many of you—your heads are not at home. You're busy. . .in business. . .distracted. . .involved in what's "out there", including a zillion school activities (so you think you are kid-centered). This series is going to take you out of your comfort zone, because it is going to challenge you to make your home the primary place where faith is nurtured.

We all want our kids to grow up healthy and strong. . .to be lifelong followers of Jesus. But are we willing to put in the time and effort it takes? Are we willing to take a step closer to home? Or will we continue putting off the hard stuff (e.g.: re-arranging priorities, schedules, routines)? We want the government to fix things; likewise, we want the church to take care of the spiritual side of raising our kids. But bottom line, it's up to us, parents. The responsibility fall back on us.

So, here we go—Extreme Home Make-Over. . .Building Faith At Home. By the way, there will be HOMEwork (cf. bulletin insert re. creating a mission statement for your family).

One side note: FAMILY = whatever living situation you are in. Your kids may be grown and on their own. . .you may be single with no children. . .you may be a young adult living with some roommates. . .or a retired person living alone. Although there will be many references to mom & dad & kids, "family" is whatever situation we find ourselves in. ALSO, you may be a "single parent" in the sense that you're the only one concerned about your child's spiritual development. This series is especially for you!

~ LET'S ASK GOD'S GUIDANCE [PRAY] ~

## BIBLICAL MODEL

God began human existence with a marriage and a family. The first community that God established was a family and a home. He had a relationship with people in the context of family long before the church came into being. You see, the Israelites didn't have a formal place of worship (like this sanctuary) before the Tabernacle—which came about in Moses' time. Previous to this, the place of worship was the HOME. All worship was directed and led by the head of the home (i.e.: the husband / father).

The Biblical precedent is found in **DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9**—

<sup>4</sup>Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. <sup>5</sup>Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. <sup>6</sup>These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. <sup>7</sup>Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up (i.e.: in your day-to-day living). <sup>8</sup>Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. <sup>9</sup>Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

All this took place in the home. Even when the CHURCH came along, Christian families still taught the ways of God in their homes every day. Parents were expected to model a Spirit-led lifestyle for their children, and families were to make their home a sanctuary for God. In a sense, the home was the Early Church—supplemented by larger gatherings in the Temple and elsewhere, but never supplanted by what took place in the homes of believers. [cf. George Barna in *Revolution*, p. 24]

Things have changed since then. These days, we “outsource” the spiritual formation of our children to the church. That is, we make the church responsible for leading our kids to Christ. . . for teaching them what they need to know to live for Christ in a secular world.

**It looks for all practical purposes like we have replaced what should rightfully take place in the HOME with the programs of the CHURCH. It was never meant to work that way.**

For many Christians and their families, all spirituality is exercised IN church. . .all prayer is IN church. . .all teaching is IN church. . .not the home. Parents take their kids to daycare / soccer practice / piano lessons / even church—but never pray with them. In too many Christian homes there has been a scarcity of godly leadership, family worship and spiritual discipleship.

Search Institute conducted a nationwide survey of >11,000 participants from 561 congregations. Let's see how we stack up today against the model given us in Deuteronomy. . .

- 12% of youth have regular dialogue with *mother* re. faith and life issues;
- 5% have such dialogue with their *father*. . . . . these are [church kids \(!\)](#);
- 10% of parents who [regularly attend church \(!\)](#) read the Bible together, pray together or participate in some kind of service together as a family (e.g.: Alpha House).

How do we get back to God's original intention for the home to be the primary place for nurturing faith? Let's look at our Scripture for the morning—**JOSHUA 24**—Joshua's farewell speech. His last words for the people of Israel were for them to get serious about the Lord. What he tells them is good for us as well. He directs them to:

- MAKE A CHOICE (vv. 14-15)
- MAKE A COMMITMENT (vv. 16-24)
- MARK IT WELL (vv. 25-27)

### A. MAKE A CHOICE

In vv. 14-15, we read: <sup>14</sup>"Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. <sup>15</sup>But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then *choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve*, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amor-ites, in whose land you are living. *But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.*"

Joshua told the people they had to choose between YHWH (God) and the gods of Egypt. The people liked all of them. They wanted to mix the best of both. Like us, they wanted to serve the Lord and serve the world. But that's what JAMES called “*doublemindedness*” == trying to look both ways at the same time.

God wanted them—and us—to choose. Will you choose to make your home His home?

It involves much more than just saying:

- My home is “Christian”. . .as opposed to Jewish / Muslim / or some other ethnic group;
- I’ve had my children baptized, but never bring them to Sunday School or VBS;
- Our family belongs to such-n-such church, and we’re there faithfully every Christmas Eve. ☺

There’s such pressure on Christian homes today to put our highest spiritual values on the back burner. By choosing, I’m talking about making Jesus the center of your home. I’m talking about modeling before your children an authentic relationship with God no matter how difficult things become. I’m talking about taking advantage of every “teachable moment” to instill your faith to your children.

### B. COMMIT YOURSELF TO IT

The People of Israel did make a choice. They recalled all the things YHWH had done for them—how He brought them out of slavery...gave them a land of their own...caused them to flourish—and then decided to follow Him. But they seemed to be on a burst of enthusiasm (i.e.: “Yeah, yeah, we will serve the Lord”). But talk is cheap, and Joshua wanted more than lip-service, more than words. He wanted actions! commitment! So in v. 23, he said: **“Throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel”**

You see, God had proven himself over & over. Now it was their turn to prove themselves. . .to show by their actions that they meant business. . .that they were going to follow through on their choice to make the Lord their God #1.

**Commitment follows choice. One you have chosen, you must commit to stick with it.**

The very next thing that occurs, Joshua says (in effect): “Let’s get this down in writing.” And he recorded all the laws & decrees of the covenant. Then the record says, **“Joshua took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the Lord, and said to the people, ‘See, this stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the Lord has said to us’”** (vv. 26-27). He made a marker to remind them of the commitment they had made.

### C. MARK IT WELL

Do you remember the day it all became real to you (i.e.: when you opened your heart to Christ)?

Do you remember the day you declared that newfound relationship by being baptized?

And later confirmed?

I remember those and other “markers” in my spiritual journey:

- Central Ohio Campgrounds (e.g.: call to ministry)
- Mackinac Island
- Cemetery where Carol is buried

Let me ask you this morning:

- Have you made the **choice** to follow the Lord? If you are the head (or co-heads) of a household here today, have you made that determination that Christ will be the center of your household?
- Have you made the **commitment** to make the spiritual development of every member of your family a matter of top priority?
- Are there **markers** in your life (or your family’s life) that you can look back at?

Do you know what will really make a lasting impression on kids?

Seeing their parents actively involved in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ (even if they themselves are not perfect. . .and struggle). Kids need to see your passion, not your perfection.

No matter how good a Sunday School or youth program is, if they don’t see godly living modeled and fleshed out in their home...if they don’t hear and participate in discussions of faith & values—whatever faith they do gain here is less likely to stick when they grow older.

### PRACTICAL APPLICATION

So, should we quit doing all that we’re doing in youth and children’s ministry? Should we lay off Jeremy and Kimberly? ☺ Should we stop doing Sunday School, VBS, youth groups, camp retreats, et.al.? God forbid! I just

need you to see that the home is more influential than the church. . .and is therefore the place where faith is best nurtured.

Our church is a partner, not a replacement. More than anything, we want to come alongside you—to equip, support, pray for you. We are a “regional equipping center” (reaching outward to the unconnected 1000’s). . .but we’re also a “family equipping center” (reaching inward).

### **Let me make a couple suggestions. . .**

ONE, I’d love to see a small group or two form—made up of parents committed to bringing Christ and Christ-like living into the center of their homes. We’ve got some great resources to help—whether your goal is to make your home more Christ-centered OR to grow in your own personal faith. Afterall, you can’t nurture your kids if you don’t first nurture you.

TWO, Equip yourself as parents (or, as those who serve others).

- Maybe you can’t name all 12 of the Disciples (or even 8, or 4).
- Maybe you’re not sure if Acts is in the Old Testament or the New Testament.
- Maybe you can’t tell the story of Daniel in the Lion’s Den.

I know many of you don’t feel qualified to teach in Sunday School, let alone at home. That’s OK. You can learn. We have lots of Bible Study opportunities (give examples). We can mentor, tutor, even offer “on the job training”.

Roland Martinson of Luther Seminary: *“The church’s role is to be equippers of families. What we ought to do is let the kids drop their parents off at church, train the parents and send them back to their mission field, their home, to grow Christians.”*

THIRD, Plan to come to a series we’re going to have in weeks to come entitled *Take It Home Events*. They’re designed to teach some faith skills:

- How to bless your child
- How to have family devotions
- How to enjoy going to church
- How to pray together
- How to read the Bible together
- How to worship together at home. . .etc.

### **CONCLUSION**

You’ve been given an amazing opportunity to instill faith in the next generation (OR the one after if you’re a grandparent; OR your own, if your family situation does not include children in the home). It’s up to you; but we can’t take your place. Mom & Dad, you are the primary faith influencer; the church ~~is~~ a lifelong partner.

The salvation of our homes is of paramount importance. I hope that you will structure a home according to the design God gave us in His Word. Of course, your kids will make their own choices; but your job is to point them to Jesus, the Savior.

One day the children will leave home. One day they will set up their own home.

Pray that one day they, like you, will declare: *“As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.”*