

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(February 24, 2013)

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Building Faith at Home

Your Home, a Jesus Oasis Study #4

(Lots of passages. Really.)

Introduction: Oases in the desert...

Last weekend, with Jeff ably manning the pulpit, I took a weekend off to go backpacking with my brother-in-law, Bob.

We traveled seven hours to the garden spot of the Southwest, otherwise known as Big Bend Ranch State Park. The park is a 300,000 acre playground just to the west of Big Bend National Park (and yes, it is a bit more desert-y than the very desert-y National Park).

We've been to this place. So, yes, we went back on purpose. (☺)

We go for the solitude (a normal three day trip brings us in contact with just about nobody) and the vastness of the place. Both the weather and the terrain are harsh and extreme.

Of course I love the rivers and forests of the mountains. But I've also come to love the desert - mainly because of the oases.

In the middle of this small chunk of the forbidding Chihuahuan desert Bob and I have discovered a few of the one hundred plus springs that bubble up out of the parched ground.

In the desert, water is life.

And there is nothing more refreshing than to be on your last water bottle, and then to take a turn in a canyon that reveals a stream of clear, clean water cascading from one pool to the next. The oasis is all the sweeter for the surrounding dry.

Now, imagine your home a life-giving oasis. Imagine your home:

- a welcome sight for you as you round the corner to come home after a long day in the desert of work or school.
- seen as an oasis, offering refreshment and rest and joy to everyone who lives in your home - your spouse, your children, your roommates.
- experienced as an oasis of spiritual nurture to everyone who visits your home.

Sounds mouth-watering, doesn't it? I believe that this is God's design for our homes and we're going to explore a few passages today that will reveal some homes that were as life-giving to the people of their day as a deep pool of cool, clean water in the middle of a desert.

A few months ago, Jeff and I decided that we would bring messages in February built around the theme, "Building Faith at Home."

Well, over the past three Sundays, that is what we've done.

Review what we have seen thus far:

You may recall that I began by laying out a vision for a home that is a *Grace Place*.

A *Grace Place* home is a home where Jesus reigns in the hearts of those who live there.

But I reminded you then that the only sovereignty any of us have to ensure that Jesus reigns is the sovereignty we each have over the one person we see in the mirror every day.

That's right. Having a *Grace Place* home starts with me. It starts with you.

We each need to respond to God, the One who has reached out to us with loving grace with submission and obedience. That's the first step toward establishing a *Grace Place* home.

Then, on week #2, Jeff spoke about the marriage relationship.

He brought a helpful message for those who are married OR who will one day be married OR who wish to encourage those who are married!

From Ephesians 5, Jeff reminded us that marriage is a relationship that works best when both husband and wife freely give themselves to each other.

The wife submits herself to her husband as to the Lord; the husband sacrificially loves his wife as Christ loved the church.

And last Sunday Jeff spoke to the theme of parenting.

He encouraged all those who are OR who ever will be parents AND to those who now have parenting roles with those younger than themselves to model our parenting style after the best Parent ever.

Our heavenly Father loves perfectly and disciplines wisely. So, with Him we say to the next generation, *“I’m crazy about you - AND no, you can’t have your own way.”*

This morning we are wrapping up our “Building Faith at Home” series - and I’m targeting everybody. No exceptions.

Singles and married folks, adults, teens and children, women and men, working or retired are all in my sights today.

Some of you live alone. You may be a young single just starting out, a middle-aged single, or elderly. You may be happy to be on your own or not.

Some of you are a part of a nuclear family with a mom, a dad, one or more children, and two pets in the yard.

Some of you here today have kids at home without a partner. You are living the life of a single parent - either temporarily, due to a deployment, or more permanently due to divorce or death.

Others are a part of a blended family, with children from former marriages in your home.

Some are married, without children - without them yet, without them by choice, or without them because they have grown and are out on their own. Some of you have roommates.

It doesn’t matter what your exact situation is because what we’re thinking about together today applies equally to all of us.

Each of us would love to have a home that is an oasis home in the harsh conditions of our world today. And better than cool water in a dry desert, by God’s grace our homes can become JESUS OASES that provide spiritual refreshment to all who enter.

This morning we are going to look at a bunch of stories from the Bible and will find evidence that homes can be oases for Jesus.

They certainly were in the days of the early church. And God’s Word today will fuel a vision of your home becoming an oasis for Jesus, too, in 2013.

So, when it’s all said and done, what is a home good for? Well, certainly a home is good for providing shelter from bad weather and protection from a storm and a place to put your stuff.

It turns out that a home can be much, much more. Be it a mansion or shack a home can be a great context for serving the cause of Jesus.

For Exhibit A, check out the service rendered to Jesus by a family who lived in the Jerusalem suburb of Bethany two thousand years ago.

The Home That Serves Together

One Home that Served Jesus

This home was home to three siblings. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus are famous for a couple of scenes in the Gospels.

Over in John chapter 11, not long before Jesus gave up His life on the cross, we read how He went to their home and raised the girls’ brother, Lazarus, from the dead!

Much earlier (Luke 10) Jesus was in their home. He commended Mary for her worshipful attention as He spoke while Martha busied herself with preparations for supper.

Now Martha is often dissed for her fuss and bother over meal prep. But what I want to draw your attention to is that it was Martha who put out the WELCOME mat to Jesus in the first place.

Here is how Luke tells the story: *[Luke 10:38] Now as they were traveling along, He (Jesus) entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home.*

The honored place the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus had in Jesus' story all started because Martha took the initiative to invite Him to stay with them while He was passing through their town.

Their home served Jesus. Others serve Jesus' followers and gave them first-rate treatment.

Homes that Served Those Who Served Jesus

The Twelve in the homes of friends (Luke 9)

For instance, when Jesus sent out the Twelve on a preaching and healing tour, He told them to look for homes where there was an open-door policy to Gospel-preaching strangers.

He told them that they weren't to take any provisions with them, but were to live off the generosity of their hosts while they were in any given village.

Evidently, such hospitable hosts surfaced and the disciples were all taken care of. That type of care for those who served Jesus continued after His death and resurrection.

Apostles in the homes of friends (Acts 18; 2 Timothy 1)

Philippian hospitality (Acts 16)

One of my favorite stories is recorded in Acts 16, which tells us of one of Paul's experiences on his Second Missionary Journey.

He had stopped off in the city of Philippi and headed to a riverside gathering of Jewish women to tell them the Good News.

The Lord opened the heart of one of the women - Lydia - to receive the message. After trusting in Christ she then begged Paul to allow her to show him and his companions' hospitality. They agreed and stayed with her the whole time they were in Philippi.¹

Corinthian hospitality (Acts 18)

Later, when Paul was working to establish a church in Corinth he stayed in the home of the wife/husband team of Priscilla and Aquila.² And, after staying with them for a time he moved into the home of Titius Justus, also in Corinth, for an additional eighteen months. (Acts 8)

Roman hospitality (2 Timothy 1)

When Paul wrote the last of his letters (2 Timothy) he mentioned how much help he had received from the household of a man named Onesiphorus.

The thing to note here is that Onesiphorus didn't open up his home to Paul. Paul was in prison at the time. So he brought homey comfort to Paul while he was incarcerated.

Instruction to be hospitable (3 John; Hebrews 13; 3 John)

The author of the book of Hebrews tells us that we should practice hospitality because, who knows, we just might be entertaining angels...

And the Apostle John told his readers (3 John) that we should support and receive as guests into our homes those who have gone out for the sake of the Name (Jesus!).³

¹ Except for the time they spent in jail; after their release they returned to Lydia's house before leaving Philippi.

² Significantly, Priscilla's name is almost always given first. She was evidently the more prominent of the two.

³ When the Apostle John wrote his second little letter, it was evidently common practice to show hospitality to traveling preachers and evangelists because John had to warn his readers to NOT extend Christian hospitality to those who taught heresy.

These homes that served the cause of Christ in the first century serve as models for how God might use our homes today.

Homes That Serve the Cause of Jesus TODAY

If this is the first time you've given thought to the idea that your home might be a service center for the cause of Christ, you may wonder how to get there. Good question.

Here's Step One: PRAY.

PRAY that God would use you and the people in your home to serve those who serve Him.

PRAY that God would grow the grace of hospitality in your heart and home.

PRAY for opportunities to further Jesus' cause by the home resources with which God has blessed you.

PRAY with those in your home, asking God to open your eyes to creative uses to which you could put your home for Jesus' sake.

Then, Step Two: ENVISION your home a haven of rest for all who enter. DREAM about the beauty of providing, in Jesus' Name, oasis-like restoration to those who are beat up by life. IMAGINE your home being a cool spring God could use to spread the word of Jesus.

And the sky is the limit as to how you might choose to serve the cause of Jesus in your home.

I have seen some of you open your home to traveling missionaries and unwed mothers and recovering addicts.

I have seen you provide meals and entertainment in your homes. Sometimes it is to share Jesus with some who are far from God. At other times it is to share soul-nurturing fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ.

I know of some of you who have an over-the-top willingness to lend out tools to neighbors, a lending policy that can open doors to redemptive conversations.

And finally, Step Three: If you want this "*home as a ministry place*" thing to really work, it needs to be about more than just you. Get everybody involved!

Husbands and wives need to talk about it. Agree on a mutually enjoyable initiative. Just one. And then try it. Bring the kids in on the conversation and let them help decide how your home will serve Jesus.

If you've got roommates, have a roundtable discussion about how you all - together - might shine for Jesus to all who enter.

Your home can be a Great Commission setting where the impact of you PLUS those who live with you is greater than all of you would be alone.

When we open up our homes to serve the cause of Jesus we are standing in a long line of those who have done the same thing for the last two thousand years.

Now let's think about homes that are not only oases of refreshment for weary servants, not only places of hospitality, but are also, in the most literal sense of the word - churches.

When the Jesus movement first began, homes were where the action was. Listen as Doctor Luke, the author of the book of Acts, describes life in the early church.

The Church That is in Your Home

The Church: Kicked off in Homes (Acts 2)

[Acts 2:46] Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE (emphasis added), they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart

The first believers gathered in homes. And there was a very good reason for this. There were no church buildings at the time.⁴

⁴ In addition, when the Jesus movement began on the Day of Pentecost most of those who believed were out-of-towners who had come to observe Passover and then stayed in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost. Thousands of those who had

Sure, they sometimes gathered at the Jewish temple. But the major place of worship and community-building and equipping and story-telling and outreach was in homes.

That pattern continued as the Gospel moved into new areas. We know it did because one of the most frequently repeated phrases we find in the New Testament letters is a reference to churches that met in homes.

The Church: Hosted and Nurtured in Homes

New Testament “church buildings”

We’ve already met Priscilla and Aquila, the couple who helped Paul a lot in Corinth. When Paul sent greetings to them at the end of the book of Romans he said to **[Romans 16:5]...greet the church that is in their house.**

When writing to the Colossians he asked that those reading the letter would **[4:15] greet...Nympha and the church that is in her house.**

Evidently Paul’s friend, Philemon, hosted a church in his own home in the city of Colossae. (Philemon 2)

There is no doubt about it. As the Jesus movement expanded there was a continuing reliance on homes to carry out the mission. Throughout the twenty centuries of the church’s story, Christians have never been able to get away from homes.⁵

Good things happen when Christians gather in homes for worship, community, equipping, and outreach.

Evidently, there is just something about home that makes it a particularly fitting place to carry out the mission of Jesus.

Today, when we think about going to “church” we think about getting in a car and driving to a building with a church’s name out front.

trusted Christ had no home in Jerusalem and so had to depend on the hospitality of those who did live there.

⁵ As you may know, there is a current resurgence of emphasis on “the house church”. It’s a wonderful movement, just as are a number of other stirrings these days. It’s just not very cutting edge or innovative. It’s been done before. (☺)

Obviously, such a thought (even substituting “chariot” for “car”) would have been inconceivable to a Christian in the first century.

The size of the New Testament churches

Again, the churches of the New Testament met in homes.⁶ Among other things, that means that the size of the churches of the New Testament were limited by the size of the house.

Of course, some houses are bigger than others. But it is not likely that there were many that could hold more than a few dozen people. There was probably not a church referred to in the New Testament that was as large as a few hundred, and certainly none of a few thousand.⁷

Now, this is NOT to say that big churches (by New Testament standards, ours is a BIG church), or mega-churches are bad. Nor is it to say that church buildings or multiple services or multi-site congregations or Sunday School classes or electric guitars or announcements are wrong.

None of these things are anti-biblical. But they are all non-biblical.

The New Testament leaves ample room for lots of creativity when it comes to the matter of how we accomplish Jesus’ mission. So, having a lot of believers come together once a week for corporate worship and instruction (as we do) is a fine thing.

But, when we are talking about the kinds of things that define “church” we are, for the most part, talking about the kinds of things that happen in groups that are small enough to meet in homes.

And here I’m talking about the “one anothers.” Thinks like bearing one anothers’ burdens, encouraging, loving, praying for, admonishing, instructing, forgiving, and comforting one another.

Large gatherings are great for lifting our voices up to God and receiving instruction.

⁶ The earliest church building was probably built in the middle of the 3rd century.

⁷ Yes, Acts speaks of thousands coming to faith in Jesus on the Day of Pentecost. But that lasted only for a very short time before the believers were scattered. Following Acts 2, the congregations we read about were likely quite small.

But when it comes to the matter of deep and transformational relating, practicing the one anothers, and being intimate in prayer, THAT stuff happens when small groups gather.

It can and does happen in Adult Bible Fellowships here at the church building. And it can and does happen in homes. It could happen in your home.

Your home could be placed alongside the home of Priscilla and Aquila or Philemon as a home hosting a church.

The Church: Your Home, Where “CHURCH” Happens

Here, I’m not so much thinking about the activities that your home might sponsor (like a small group), but the culture of your home.

When you and the people who live with you view your home as a place *set apart* for God - like a church is - there will come to be a certain atmosphere in your home. That atmosphere/culture will impact the kind of interaction that takes place there.

For instance, when you greet guests at the door, you’ll wonder how you might encourage them. In conversation you will be looking for ways to provoke them to love and good deeds. At certain points when you are together you’ll sense that the time is right to suggest that you pray together.

You’ll view your family members as people on whom you want to lavish grace and love as God has lavished it on you.

By the way, this is exactly what we want to see happen here at our “church building” at 8900 Guilbeau. But, biblically speaking, this building is no more a church than your home. In fact, THIS building has less to do with the mission of Jesus as the early believers thought of it than your home does!

So again, pray.

PRAY that God will give you the grace to see yourself for who you really are: the minister of your home (whether you are ten, mom, or dad). PRAY that the others in your home will join you in the adventure of home-as-church.

PRAY that your home will be a place - just like Northwest seeks to be a place - where everyone is “on mission” for the Great Commission.

So, homes can be places that serve people in Jesus’ Name AND they can be places that fulfill Jesus’ mission.

As we conclude this morning, I’d like for us to think about home as the place where life makes up its mind, the place of spiritual nurture.

Much of this piggy-backs on Jeff’s thoughts from last Sunday. But the idea is so critical. God can use your home as a place to nurture spiritual champions.

Lest we neglect the obvious, let’s start off by observing that the Lord Jesus Christ was raised in a home that nurtured His spiritual life.

Nurturing Faith at Home

Biblical Heavyweights

Jesus

Joseph and Mary were not only honored by God to provide a womb and a room for Jesus. They were tasked with raising Him. They did a great job of bringing Him up as only God-fearing parents would.

They took Him on annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem at Passover. (Luke 2) and they also would have taught Him from the Bible, told Him the stories of faith, and prayed with and for Him.

John the Baptist, too, was raised to be a hero for God in a wonderful home.

John the Baptist

We know the story of the remarkable birth of John to too-old Elizabeth and too-old Zacharias. John had a destiny to fulfill. He was to prepare the way for the Messiah, which he did.

But there is no doubt in my mind that his priest father and his godly mother guided him toward that destiny.

And then there was Timothy.

Timothy

We meet Timothy in the book of Acts. He is Paul's protégé. He traveled with Paul from the Second Missionary Journey on.

Early in life, Timothy had been set aside by a prophetic laying on of hands (1 Timothy 1:18) and served faithfully in a variety of settings over many long years.

Paul trusted Timothy. He sent Timothy while he was still a young man to deal with some of the problems in the church at Corinth. (THAT was no small assignment!) He traveled with Paul on his last journey to Jerusalem and was co-author of some of his letters.

Paul wrote two letters to Timothy. Their relationship was very close. We know that he was the shepherd of a congregation, probably at Ephesus.

So here is a man who was used by God to push the cause of Christ forward. And where did Timothy's faith journey begin? At home.

Timothy was the son of a Greek father (presumably an unbelieving man) and a Christian Jewish mother. His grandmother was a believer, too. These women passed on the torch of the faith to Timothy and he became one of the bright lights of the early church.

Then there is everybody's favorite champion - Rufus.

Rufus

If you've not heard of Rufus, that's OK. He's really not all that famous. But he did become a leader in the movement's early days and Paul thought the world of him.

We read about him in Romans 16 when Paul refers to him as **[13] a choice man in the Lord**. So, how did Rufus find his way to faith in Jesus?

While we don't know for sure, the best guess it was through his father.

When Mark tells the story of the crucifixion, he says that for a time, Jesus' cross was carried by a man named Simon of Cyrene - the father of Rufus.

We can only imagine the impact that cross-carrying experience had on Simon. I suspect that when he made it back to Rome he told his sons about it and led them to follow the Jesus he had come to know on Good Friday.

Or consider another young man - John Mark.

John Mark

John Mark is first mentioned in conjunction with the First Missionary Journey (Acts 13-14) as the traveling assistant to Barnabas and Saul/Paul.⁸

Sadly, things didn't work out too well. The Bible says that he deserted Paul and HIS RELATIVE (!) Barnabas.⁹

Paul was so upset by John Mark's behavior that he refused to take him on another mission, splitting with Barnabas for good and prompting Barnabas to take John Mark home with him to Cyprus.

We might wonder if that is the end of John Mark's career in serving Jesus, as he isn't mentioned again in the book of Acts.

But it's not at all the end of the story and he does surface again - surprisingly in Paul's own writings.

In Colossians 4, Paul mentions that Mark was a faithful servant. He called him his "**fellow-worker**" in the short letter of Philemon. And at the end of his life Paul said that John Mark was "**very useful for service**" (2 Timothy 4).

Evidently, Barnabas' act of taking John Mark to his home for restoration and re-equipping was essential to his future effectiveness.

⁸ Many scholars believe that John Mark refers to himself when he mentions a young man who escaped naked from the betrayal scene in the Garden of Gethsemane. This is probably true.

⁹ Barnabas may have been his cousin or uncle.

2013 Heavyweights

Note the crucial, the central role that HOME played in development of Jesus, John, Timothy, Rufus, and John Mark.

They and countless other men and women will point to their home as the place where they found Jesus.

Today, you - husbands and wives and moms and dads and brothers and sisters and extended family members and roommates - can have enormous impact for God as you press Jesus into your home.

Home is where life makes up its mind.

No, you can't force someone else to believe and follow. But you can entice. You can't lead a horse to water, but you can give him a salt tablet to make him thirsty.

So home life is no place to be *laissez faire* when it comes to faith, thinking that your friends or your family will make up their own minds about God and that it would be wrong for you to try and press Jesus into your home.

NO! God placed you in your home to plant seeds of faith and then to water those seeds and then to fertilize them as best you can.

Of course it will ultimately be up to those in your home and to the Lord as to whether that seed comes to fruit. But you are to do the work of a good gardener and tend that garden.

Your home can become a Jesus oasis that nurtures thirsty people on their faith journey.

What a vision! That your home would be:

- one that serves Jesus by serving those who serve Him.
- a “church” for all who enter - a sacred spot where people are loved, cared for, prayed for, encouraged, admonished, and built up.
- a place of spiritual nurture where we are building each other up in our faith and where we seek to use our home's resources to build up all who enter.

PRAY that God would transform your home into a Jesus oasis that is a blessing to those who live in it, blessings to all who enter, and blessings to others as you exit your home and enter a world in need.

Conclusion: