

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Faith. Family. Fusion.

Building Faith at Home

(Matthew 5-7)

Introduction: A fearsome February...

The Bible tells us that *[1 John 4:18] perfect love casts out fear*. Sadly, since most of us have not been completely perfected in love, from time to time, fear still reigns.

We may fear things that go “bump” in the night or an empty house or public speaking. I have been known to fear certain phone calls - ones that I expected to receive or that I had to make.

You may have certain things that frighten you, too. Dread phobias that only you know about, or understandable and shared fears about national and international dangers.

Throughout the month of February we’re going to be focusing on how to build faith - at home. Fusing faith and family.

It makes great sense to bring a series of messages on Sunday mornings that deal with building faith at home. After all, churches are nothing if not family friendly. Here at church we cheer families on.

So why am I scared to bring this series of messages?

Over the time that I have served as a pastor I have never brought a series of messages like the one I’m beginning today. From time to time I’ve spoken to the topic of home life, family issues and such, of course.

But I’ve never brought a series of messages about the family. I’ve been afraid to. Frankly, I’m still afraid to.

It’s not that I’m not drawn to the topic.

I grew up in a home with parents and a twin sister. It was a good home. Since leaving home I’ve analyzed my family of origins, seen some of what was pathological and much of what was good and wholesome.

Kathy and I have raised a family. We had our children in the home with us for nearly thirty years and loved every season those years brought.

Now, Ben, Zach, and Erin are on their own. If they haven’t already, they’ll soon be analyzing their family of origins, identifying what was pathological and, hopefully, finding some of what was good and wholesome.

Kathy and I enjoyed our life together before kids and we’re enjoying the empty nest, too.

I love my family and I love families. So, again, why am I scared?

- “Pat-answer-ism”

I fear giving light answers to weighty problems, simplistic solutions to complex challenges, and pat answers to thorny issues.

The challenges families face are complex. If you and the people in your home are facing challenges, you don’t need me reducing them to something simplistic. You’re smarter than that.

Of course, I desperately hope that there will be something useful in the next four weeks. But after three decades of marriage and almost that long as a pastor, I have come to detest “pat” answers. I fear giving you a “pat” answer to a family question, because if I do, I will not have served you well or biblically.

- “Formula-ism”

I fear that what you will hear in what I’m saying is that there is a formula, which, if followed, will guarantee a God-honoring home.

It is not hard to find a seminar that will tell us what a family is, complete with detailed notes on how to run a home according to the Bible. Many of these seminars and the books that accompany them do provide tremendous help.

But I do find it intriguing that there is precious little material in the Bible that is written about the family at least in the form we would have put it in had we written the Bible.

I don't want to overstate the case. There is some instruction in the Bible about how husbands and wives should be with each other and how parents and children are to be with each other.

But there are no lists. There is no section to which we can point in the Bible where we find "Six Principles of Godly Fathering" or "The Eight Steps to Being a Great Brother."

What the Bible does give us is mystery, nuance, complexity, "for instances", and a whole lot of stories.

As important as we believe family is (and I really do believe it is important!), the Bible's instruction about family comes in a format that mocks our interest in neat outlines.

- "Guarantee-ism"

I fear that you will walk away with the idea that certain behaviors on your part will guarantee certain behavioral responses on the part of others in your home.

I don't believe that the Bible gives such a guarantee - and I want you to know that up front. Of course, there are wise ways to carry on at home. Living wisely will increase the likelihood of a movement toward peace, joy, and love under God in your home.

But each person in your home and in mine is a free-will agent who will make his or her own choices about whether to submit to God or not.

If we believe that by our example or forcefulness or love or prayers we can assure godliness in the lives of the people with whom we are living, we've climbed way out on a limb without much Biblical support.

Now these are only a few of my favorite fears.¹ And given my fear and trepidation and the potential pitfalls, why bring a series of messages on the home?

Well, the decision came about because of several factors coming together at the same time.

One was the recommendation from our Pastor of Family Ministries, Guillermo Cardona, and our Children's Ministry Leader, Judy Blake, that we highlight family for a month.

Another was a profound conversation with the Elders about the crying need we Elders have seen in the homes of people who make up Northwest.

The final tipping point was my own sense that it was simply time. The age in which we live has not been kind to families.

About as many marriages will make it as will not - and that's been true for the last several decades in America.

Parents face new challenges every month with advancing technologies, social networking, texting (sexting) and the ever-present Internet.

Young adults (my word for teenagers) face the same challenges I faced as a young adult - only about five to seven years earlier than I did.

George Barna tells us that the church now has the assignment to win back an entire generation of American children because they have not been exposed to the faith.²

It's time.

¹ Another would be my fear that anyone would think that I think that I've got this family thing figured out or that I am the answer man - although people who know me well are unlikely to trend this way.

² His research around 2008 uncovered the fact that only 7% of people born since 2000 have church experience.

I'm not angry. I'm not going to go on a rant. But there is a sense of urgency about this series. There are fires burning in some of our homes that need to be put out. There is some protection that other homes could use to keep fires from starting.

So, today we launch our series. Guillermo came up with the series title: Faith. Family. Fusion. It's a good one!

All I had to do was come up with a message title for this morning. I considered "Focus on the Family" and "Family Life Today" and "A Sunday Morning to Remember", but decided against those.

I toyed with "Grace Based Home Life" and "Growing a Family God's Way" - but Guillermo advised against it.

Instead, I've landed on something more original, "Building Faith at Home", which is the title of a very good book by Mark Holmen. (And if you're wondering, "Has Dave ever had an original thought?" - the answer is "Nope.")

As much as I am capable of doing, I will present what I believe and have become convinced of from the Bible about having a home where Jesus is Lord. I'll avoid canned answers. I'll run from clichés like the plague. I'll be transparent about some of my own experiences where I think that will be helpful.

And together, over the month of February, I'm praying that you and I will find help from God in our quest for a dream come true - a home that honors Him.

On one Sunday I want to address husbands and wives and talk about what it might look like to have a marriage where Jesus is Lord. I'm aiming for this message to be helpful to everyone, married and unmarried alike. I think I'll call that message, "Love and Respect."

On another Sunday, I want to speak to young adults and their parents. I'll be speaking as much to the one group as to the other.

On the final Sunday the theme will be children and the parents who raise them.

So, on three of the four Sundays of February, I'll be speaking to particular people within families. All will be in my sights, even though some will be closer to the bull's eye than others.

This morning, I'm targeting everybody - no exceptions.

Today, I want to speak about the beauty and the importance of a home where Jesus is Lord.

Homes Where Jesus is Lord

Homes, Nuclear and Otherwise...

The HOMES in which we live

Homes come in all shapes and sizes. There are varieties of homes in which we live.

You may hang your hat in a several thousand square foot home or in an efficiency apartment. Your home may be a town home - or you may live on acreage.

What I'm talking about today applies equally to people who live in all sorts of homes.

And what I have to say today applies too, I believe, equally to people who are involved in every conceivable living arrangement.

The WE who live in homes

Those of us who gather in this place have come from a rich diversity of living arrangements.

Some of you live alone. You are your only companion at home. 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, and one or more children - with two pets in the yard. There are those of you who have kids at home without a partner - you are a single parent.

Others of you 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 have roommates. Your home is populated by friends, not family by blood or vow.

In each and every one of these homes, Jesus wants to reign. He wants to be the Lord of your home.

Jesus - Lord of Your Home

Having a home where Jesus is Lord is every Christian's dream. It is His dream, too.

He wants to have the final say in what conversations are held and what these conversations look like among the people who live in your home and among those who come over for a visit.

He wants joy to be present - and weeping when appropriate. He wants the full range of emotions to be expressed with authenticity. He said that He came to bring abundant life and He wants us to live out that abundance at home. (John 10:10).

Jesus wants His Word to be read, revered and obeyed in each of our homes. He wants to be spoken to, not ignored. He wants our homes to be havens of rest, bastions of strength and hospitals for healing. He wants our homes to be places where the "WELCOME" mat is out to all comers, and where He is thoroughly enjoyed!

Sounds good, doesn't it? It does to me and I'll bet it does to you, too. Of course, this may not be a description of your home right now. And, if it is not, there are probably reasons for that.

Challenges to Maintaining a Jesus-is-Lord Home

Swimming upstream

You may be committed to the Lordship of Jesus, while others in your home are not. It feels like every time you seek to enthrone Jesus in your home, you are running into roadblocks, swimming upstream, going against the current. It's hard to keep pushing.

Which way to go?

Or you may be new to the faith and really don't have a good idea about what it looks like to submit to the Lordship of Jesus - at home or anywhere else for that matter. You're just wondering, "*What should I do differently now that I'm a Christian? I'm picking up on how to behave at church, when to stand, when to sit - but how do I behave at home?*"

Temptations galore

It is possible that you've got challenges enthroneing Jesus at home because you've developed bad habits you're having difficulty breaking. These bad habits may involve media related time wasting, using drugs or the excessive use of alcohol, bad language, or inappropriate web-surfing. Jesus wants you to experience victory over all of this so that He can reign and you can enjoy His reign!

Battling entropy

Or it is possible that you have been living for some time as a Christian without much intentionality about enthroneing Jesus at home. You have some ideas about what you might start doing or stop doing if you wanted to enthrone Jesus, but you're battling entropy. It's comfortable where you are and it's difficult to change.

The vision is to have a home where Jesus reigns supreme - but for all of us there is some distance between that vision and reality. In your case, the distance may be great or small. You may see fulfillment just around the corner, or it may look like a Grand Canyon's worth of a leap.

And the thought may occur to you this morning, “*If only my wife would...*” or “*If my husband was a bit more...*” - well, then our home could be more Christ-centered and God-honoring.

You may be thinking about how difficult your roommate makes it to have a home where Jesus is Lord. Parents will be drawn to blame the problems on their children’s obvious failings - and vice versa, as will siblings.

And herein lies part of the challenge whenever we envision our homes being places where Jesus is Lord. It is not a decision you or I can unilaterally make. We are forced to admit to the reality that in the things that matter most in life we are least in control.

Decisions to have a home where Jesus is Lord are made one person at a time. Homes where Jesus reigns are occupied by individuals who have personally enthroned Jesus.

For that reason, at this point in our time together this morning, as we consider having homes where Jesus is Lord, I want to emphasize the importance of each of our HEARTS being places where Jesus is Lord.

Building Faith at Home, One PERSON at a Time

Life, with Jesus Enthroned

Fortunately, we have a passage in the Bible that gives us a picture of what a “Jesus is Lord” life looks like.

It’s been called The Greatest Sermon Ever Preached³ and it’s found in Matthew’s Gospel. The Sermon was directed at disciples - but we know that multitudes of others heard it.⁴

³ From the International Standard Encyclopedia of the Bible, “As an exposition of the ideal life and the program of the new society which Jesus proposed to create, [the Sermon on the Mount] is of the deepest interest and the profoundest concern.”

⁴ The beginning emphasizes that Jesus spoke when His disciples (the twelve) came to Him. The end tells us that the multitudes heard and were amazed.

About twenty years ago I attended a conference on preaching and heard Chuck Swindoll give a thirty minute message on the entire Sermon on the Mount. It was amazing.

I know what you’re thinking. “*Dave, I’ve heard Chuck Swindoll. You’re not Chuck Swindoll.*”

Relax. I’m not going to try anything so bold as to attempt to preach the entire Sermon on the Mount. All I want to do is demonstrate what a Jesus-is-Lord life might look like if we were to take the Sermon on the Mount seriously, at home.

Consider the following a sort of Reader’s Digest paraphrase of Jesus’ best known message. As you listen, envision applying what He has to say in your home.

Now, imagine some Sunday Jesus showed up at Northwest and gave a message that sounded something like this...⁵

True happiness comes through obedience (5:3-12)

“If you are looking for happiness and real fulfillment, be faithful to God. Admit that you’re spiritually bankrupt and humbly obey Him. Learn mercy and make peace - even when people do you dirty. Rejoice when you have to swim upstream to live for Me. Godly people have been doing that for thousands of years.

Be world-changers for God and for good! (5:13-20)

“Never forget that you are My representatives in the world. So be world-changers! Light up the world and be a salty influence for God and for good.

⁵ Jesus spoke to people who faced lots and lots of obstacles to a God-centered life. Life in first century Israel was tough. Poverty was the norm. Disease was rampant. The Roman government was always pressuring, controlling, taxing. It was to these people Jesus was speaking. It is to people who face great challenges that the Sermon on the Mount is directed - people like us!

Raise the bar of holiness in your own life (5:21-48)

“I’m calling you to raise the bar when it comes to leading an exemplary life. If you’ve suffered a fractured relationship - YOU take the initiative and seek to restore it. Do everything you can to eliminate any taint of sin. If you’re married, stay that way. Marriage is a sacred covenant, a promise to not be broken - and don’t ever break your promises.

“People will sometimes wrong you. Expect it - and learn the grace of forgiveness. Go above and beyond expected norms of gracious interaction. Blow people away with your forgiving spirit. In fact, don’t just forgive your friends. Do the unexpected - forgive those who have set themselves against you.”

Jesus might pause for a minute or two to catch His breath at this point. He might have allowed His audience to take a moment and let what He was saying sink in. But it would have just been a moment’s pause. He quickly would have re-loaded and re-launched.

Nurture a GENUINE relationship with God (6:1-24)

“Your life is to be all about God. Show how all about God you are by outrageous and secret generosity, by fervent and serious-minded prayer, and by non-showy fasting.

“Where your financial treasure is your heart will follow, so put your money in investments that pay eternal dividends - even if it is to the detriment of your 401(k).

“In everything you do, be wholly devoted to God!

Trust God and seek His Kingdom (6:25-34)

“Look at the flowers and watch the birds. They are beautiful and busy and cared for. You’re beautiful in your Father’s sight. Trust him to care for you. Don’t worry. Be happy.

Be more concerned with self-inspection than with judging others (7:1-6)

“Anyone with an ounce of observation skills will see shortcomings in others. The gift of seeing others’ faults is cheap and easy to cultivate. More difficult but much more valuable is the art of seeing your own faults and working on them. Look in the mirror before the window.

Trust in God’s absolute goodness (7:7-11)

“Never doubt that God is good. Really good. If you ask Him for something, He’s not going to give you something hurtful. Every gift God gives is for your good, not your harm. So ask away, confident of His love and care for you.

Treat others as you wish they would treat you (7:12)

“And whenever you are confused about how to treat others, here’s a golden thought. Treat them exactly the way you would wish to be treated in the same situation.

Enter by the narrow gate to find LIFE! (7:13-14)

“You will hear all kinds of siren voices telling you that this way or that way or this other way is the way to life. Trust Me. I know what I’m talking about. The way to enter life is to trust Me. Every other way is a detour to disaster.

Do the will of the Father (7:15-23)

“Never for one moment think that getting in good with God has to do with what you do or how good you are. It is not about calling Me, “Lord” and it’s not about doing good works. It is about doing the will of My Father who is in Heaven. And what is His will? It is that you believe in Me.”

Whew!

Imagine your life if you took Jesus’ words to heart. It would be the life you’ve always dreamed of.

Now, imagine a home filled with people who took Jesus' words to heart. Wouldn't that be the home we would all love to live in?

To live in accordance with Jesus' words in the Greatest Sermon Ever Preached is to live with Him enthroned. But the critical thing is to not only HEAR His words. It is to DO them.

And it is with a call to action that Jesus' sermon ends.

Life, Built on Jesus, the Solid Foundation

[Matthew 7:24] "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. [25] "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. [26] "Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. [27] "The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall."

(This is just too easy. Talk about shooting fish in a barrel...)

It sort of sounds like Jesus has been reading the San Antonio Express News. Recently we have become all too aware of the importance of solid foundations. Displayed in dramatic fashion we have seen the problems that can result when there are insufficient foundations in place.

Homes suffer cracked slabs and retaining walls topple when the ground shifts. None of us want that to happen to our homes - either physically or spiritually.

Jesus' sermon provides a solid foundation for a life and for a home. As we close I'll suggest two applications for His words.

Conclusion:

First, implicit in Jesus' words is a call to faith. When we read the Sermon on the Mount honestly, reflectively, we see a bar set so high that we instantly know we can't get over it.

Jesus' Sermon is INTENDED to convince us that we can never obey to the full what we are required to do if we hope to work our way to God.

Are you encouraged to work your way to God when you read, *[48] Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.?*

Me neither!

So we abandon all hope of earning a right standing before God through our works and seek another way, which is the way of faith. Eternal salvation is by God's grace, given at the moment we admit we can't be perfect and look to Him for that salvation!

But if Jesus' words are intended to convince us that we can't make it to Heaven by our own efforts and to call us to faith, they have a second purpose. They are a call to faithfulness.

Jesus is a King and those of us who have been saved by trusting Him have been placed in His Kingdom. What we have seen today is a blueprint for a life lived in obedience to King Jesus.

We don't live according to the blueprint so that we will get to Heaven. That would be to horribly miss the point! We seek to live according to the blueprint because we are going to Heaven. The Sermon on the Mount describes life under the rule of King Jesus. It describes how life works best for those of us who know Him.

We want lives that joyfully demonstrate to a watching world that Jesus is Lord. So this is how we live.

And when you and the other people in your home join hands and hearts to submit to King Jesus, together, you demonstrate to that watching world what a Jesus-is-Lord home looks like. And there are few things more powerful than a Jesus-is-Lord home!