

Creating a Culture

Our Family Values:

Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Ephesians 5:1-8

April 19, 2009

Wesley J. Gabel

Bethany Church

It has been quite a time since we have had a baby in our home. Our home, instead, is frequented by youth and young singles. Often there is blaring music, loud laughter, and even some wrestling. Grandma Gabel has to turn down her hearing aides. However, when you walk into a house with a baby, you hear: “Shhhh! The baby is sleeping. If you wake him up, you’re changing his diaper and rocking him back to sleep!” The volume and activities in a home with a baby are quite different from one with teenagers. They are purposely different.

When we had toddlers, we were taught to house-proof our children. It helped. However, we still child-proofed the house. One toddler was both strong enough and strong-willed enough that we had to place child-locks on all our cupboards. One day we found that tyke microwaving a toy. We had to alter the environment and create a certain culture.

We create cultures with what we do and what we don’t do, with what we tolerate and what we don’t tolerate. Each time we act and each time we don’t act, we influence the culture. Our families, our workplaces, our clubs and our churches all have cultures. Each is influenced by the actions of people: what they do and what they don’t do. Cultures produce results. A family focused on healthy foods, athletic activities and physical exercise will produce people who are more fit and trim. A family that sets aside time for homework, reading, and discussing history and current events produces studious individuals. Those that sing together, play

instruments and attend concerts will foster musical gifts. When I was growing up, I was often around the piano. We sang, played instruments and performed here and there. It was a given that we would sing duets, trios, quartets and solos. The musical leadership I provide grew more out of that environment than any innate ability. The choices of my parents led to many of my interests, abilities, and achievements.

In the Scriptures today, God calls his people to create a distinct culture that shapes their hearts. When St. Paul wrote the Ephesians, he was moved to help the Christians in Ephesus forge a completely different culture than that of their community. Paul wrote:

Be imitators of God... and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us... But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. (Ephesians 5:1-5, NIV)

God addressed the way these believers talked, acted and treated others. God addressed what this church in Ephesus should tolerate and what they shouldn't. The church was raising a people. They were raising children of God to reflect God's vision, passion and values.

In the Old Testament Moses painted a picture of how to create a godly culture. He wrote:

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. 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. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:6-9, NIV)

God called his people to make his commands their focus. The commands of God – not the latest music, the commands – not the most popular TV show, the commands – not your favorite romance novel, the commands – not the local sports team, the commands – not the latest news story or political dispute, are to be impressed on your children, talked about at home,

shared when you are driving, on your mirror, on your refrigerator, on your “to do” list, and on the walls of your most frequented quarters. We are to build a culture that focuses on God’s will.

Kathy Ireland was a supermodel. She recently was interviewed by Mike Huckabee on Fox News Channel. As a teen she traveled to Paris for a fashion show. Her mother packed a book for her, which she found when she opened her suitcase (Interview 1:07-2:11). Kathy grew up in a home that was estranged from God. She didn’t know the love, power or wisdom of Jesus. However, after her Mom reconciled with God and began to walk with him, the culture of Kathy’s life and home began to change. Her Mom valued the Bible and a relationship with God. It showed in what the Mom did with her daughter. From the interview, you can tell that everything God says now matters to Kathy Ireland. She wants to know God’s word and shape her life by it.

Several months ago, church leaders at Bethany began wondering, “What do we really value?” What is our top-ten-list and what should it be? We knew our mission: *Go and bring people to faith and freedom in Jesus Christ*. We knew we are to fulfill this mission, but we never established how we would pursue it, what values would guide us. What as leaders, like parents, will we give ourselves to, so that everyone here, can’t help but be touched by it? What values will help us achieve the mission that God has laid on our shoulders. It took us months of prayer and reflection to articulate and agree on what we heard from God. Some of these values are shared widely with other churches; and some are a unique and distinct calling. In your Pew Bible is a bookmark we want you to take home. It articulates what we are about and what will shape every person who associates with Bethany Church. Let’s read these values together.

Value #1: Experiencing Salvation: We value Jesus Christ alone as Savior and Lord and His works that restore us to intimacy with God and creates a new life of obedience in the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5-6).

Value #2: **Believing the Bible:** We value the Bible as God's authoritative Word, study it together, and build our lives on its truth (2Timothy 3:16-17).

Value #3: **Praying:** We value prayer as the gift through which we communicate with God and through which God supplies our needs and accomplishes His will (Matthew 7:7-11).

Value #4: **Worshipping God:** We value heartfelt worship that is God-honoring, Spirit-directed, and life-changing (John 4:23-24, Psalm 101:25).

Value #5: **Growing with One Another:** We value the fellowship and ministry of every believer, and an atmosphere of acceptance and mutual accountability, through which we develop our spiritual gifts, grow in servant leadership and unite in Christ (1 Corinthians 12:7, Ephesians 4:15-16).

Value #6: **Witnessing to the World:** We value our Holy Spirit-empowered identity as Christ's witnesses to all people (Acts 1:8).

Value #7: **Serving Compassionately:** We value serving others at their point of need, following the example of our Lord Jesus (John 13:12-17, Matthew 25:34-40).

Value #8: **Pursuing Unity:** We value the complete unity of Christ's one Church and our part in it (John 17:23, Ephesians 4:2-6).

Value #9: **Loving our Neighbor:** We value all relationships as God-given and our call to love one another (John 13:34-35, 1 John 3:18).

Value #10: **Blessing Families:** We value families (or households) as God's primary means of providing for, protecting and developing people (Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Joshua 24:14-15).

Each of these values, we believe God has given us, and we are completely committed to both live them and also impart them. We believe they are our family values. These are the defining characteristics of Bethany United Methodist Church. They go to the core of who we are, what we are and how we will behave. These values define what we do, what we pursue and what we say "no" to, what we will not tolerate.

Although in May a sermon series begins introducing each value, many sermons will be preached, many teachings will be given, and many applications will accompany each value. We

are God's family. He is raising us to open the eyes of his estranged and suffering children. He has brought us together for good purposes. He has plans for us that reveal how great God's love, power and redemption are.

Indeed, God's great plans are saving plans. Not the kind that squirrels money away in a bank. God's salvation plans and work are so great that he is lifting us to be as intimate with God as Jesus is... and he is restoring us in Jesus to be his glory.

Don't walk out of this church family today estranged or defeated by your sins. Don't walk out with a second class attitude. God is reaching out to you in the full love of his Son Jesus Christ. You are to be tight with God and the delight of God. It begins with your decision. Do you want your Father in heaven? Will you repent of your unbelief in his love, power and word?