

# Mission, an Essential Focus

## *Six Essentials for Families*

Proverbs 29:15-18; Matthew 10:24-25a

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Wesley J. Gabel

One summer we had custody of a 12 foot sailboat. Sailing on a windswept prairie lake was exhilarating. At times the winds were so strong and waves so high that we'd be drenched. There was even one moment when I was caught by shifting winds and the boat was blown backwards. Imagine my confusion trying to rudder the boat as it moves backwards! One day my son John, sailing with a much more skilled sailor than I, was surprised by a wind gust that flipped the boat and broke the rudder. Without a rudder they required rescue.

Family life is like that on occasion. Sometimes you need outside help, someone to pull you out of the water. In fact, family life is much like sailing. Sometimes the wind dies and you just meander along praying for progress. Other times the wind fills your sails and the ride is wonderful. There are turbulent winds that require great energy and skill, and sometimes you just focus on survival. In sailing and in family life, you rarely move in a straight line toward a destination. The wind always determines your heading, and often the length of a journey is longer than it looks. Frequently, you must tack or turn in directions that lead you away from the destination so that eventually with the wind in your sails you can get there.

The difference with sailing is that it is recreation. The journey and destination are optional. With families the journey is necessary and the destination is critical. Tragically, our families often lose sight of their purpose. We become rudderless and are blown here and there by whatever is trendy. Madison Avenue shapes us. Movies, music and the latest science begin to dominate our vision. The winds not only swirl about and confuse us; they also blur our vision

so that we navigate life disorientated, confused about the objectives we are to achieve. Let's consider those objectives by asking some questions.

**Why did God establish your family? What purpose did God have in mind?**

When Diane and I met, we were both believers. We were attracted to each other, but we also were committed and submitted to Jesus as our Lord. We married only after we believed that it was God's will for us. No matter the decisions or means by which your family was started, the Bible reveals that God had a hand in it. God was in charge of timing. God foreknew your disposition and personality. Jesus said of marriage, "What God joined together let no one separate." You can be certain that there is a divine purpose and mission for your marriage and family. Knowing our purpose and mission is critical especially with children.

Solomon declares in Proverbs, chapter 29:

***The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother... Discipline your son, and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul.*** (Proverbs 29:15, 17; NIV)

We are told that children must be guided. They must be corrected. They must not be left adrift where the winds will blow them into danger and disaster. A course must be plotted and corrections made. Discipline is necessary. Consequences must be mediated. We parents must have direction and give direction, but direction requires vision. We must have a vision of what the kids are to be like. Solomon continues:

***Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained; but happy is he who keeps the law.*** (Proverbs 29:18, NAS)

Vision is critical. People must have a goal, an objective. Otherwise they are blown by winds into pitfalls and traps. There are traps of fame, greed, affluence, gluttony, intoxication and a party life. Some people just live for weekends. Then they get stoned, drunk, or just focus on their hobbies and pleasures. They grow selfish and self-indulgent. They fall into traps of

promiscuity, sexual addictions and then depression when life doesn't meet their expectations. Family members get blown around and caught at different times in combinations of traps.

Solomon looked to the Covenant, the revelation or law that was given to the Hebrew people. It outlined God's objective for his people. It revealed their purpose. People were not to wander from thing to thing or be taken captive by different allurements. Instead, with a specific goal they were to progress toward an objective and experience contentment.

Some of you may remember the story of former Minnesota Viking wide receiver, Cris Carter. He most recently played part of a season with the Miami Dolphins. Whenever he plays, football broadcasters speak of him as a future "hall of famer." That is the greatest tribute one can pay to an active football player. Early in his career, Cris was cut from the Philadelphia Eagles. The Vikings paid the Eagles \$100 for the right to sign him. That moment served as a wake-up call for him. He was squandering his talent and his life. He eschewed discipline for an easy, pleasure-focused life. His focus was destroying him. The translation of Proverbs 29:18 in the old King James Version is "*Without a vision, the people perish!*" That was Cris Carter. When he saw himself as nothing better than an animal, he focused only on his pleasure. However, when he discovered his identity in Christ, Cris found his purpose and saw how football fit. He became disciplined. Curfews were no longer broken. Not because he would be fined or the coach would chew him out. Curfews were observed because he wanted to be at his best, and he wanted his team to do their best. Curfews were observed, drugs and alcohol went out the window. He was focused. The old cliché was true: "*He plays like a man on a mission.*" As a result, Cris became one of the most respected and influential players in professional sports. His aim was not merely to win, but to honor his creator and redeemer.

When a family member descends into alcohol, drugs, pornography, promiscuity, gluttony or any other addiction, he or she lacks both the vision of identity and mission. You can talk until your blue in the face about the harm of ones' ways and mediate all kinds of consequences; however, until they discover their identity and mission, progress will be meager and temporary. What is more, a family will be susceptible to all kinds of temptations and problems unless identity and mission become more than a notion. They must become a conviction.

I look at Bethany Church as a family. When I arrived three years ago, I knew this family had suffered through a tempest. I also knew that in this country, state, region and denomination, all kinds of winds would continually swirl about us. Unless we as a family focus on who we are and what we are about, we would go in many directions and accomplish very little. The winds of forceful personalities, individual taste and desire for personal comfort could blow us all over the place. The first order of business after recruiting people to pray – that was the first order of business, but after that – was the task of establishing our identity and stating our mission. Our leaders spent a great amount of time carefully discerning who we are and what we are about. They recognized that this family lives with the command: *Go and bring people to faith and freedom in Jesus Christ*. Those words are the Holy Spirit's call to us and serve as a guide in decision-making. We are not about ourselves. We are not about our growth. We are not about our denomination. We are about going and bringing. We are about helping people put faith in Jesus. We are about helping them experience freedom. We are people with a call. Everyone here will receive discipline and correction based on that mission.

Do you have such a compass for your family? Can you write in one sentence the purpose of your family and its mission? Do you have something in mind that guides all your decisions?

When you know your identity and mission, avoiding the traps is easier. Personal discipline becomes attractive because it helps you fulfill your dreams. Children don't just need the message, "Don't do drugs!" They need to hear why. They need to know who they are, who is against them, who went to the cross to redeem them, who has given them a call and what that call is. God has given them a personality, filled them with special talents and provided them special relationships to fulfill that calling. They need to know that God has a significant purpose for their lives on this earth; and in order for them to fulfill it, they must walk with Jesus and the Spirit he gives us and then avoid all kinds of things that get in the way. They need to know their mission.

Jesus told his disciples:

***A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master.*** (Matt 10:24-25, NIV)

Jesus told his followers this so that they wouldn't be surprised if they encountered opposition. However, there is an even greater truth in those words. If Jesus truly is your teacher and master, then you will be like him. His priorities will be yours because you share in His identity, vision and mission.

What then is your family's priority? Are you raising disciples of Jesus who are missionaries to lost and hurting people? How do lost people matter to your family? Do your children pray for them? Are you training them as missionaries? If this isn't a family activity then are you really walking with Christ or just faking it? The student becomes like the teacher. The servant becomes like the master. Why not pray right now about your mission and write a mission statement for yourself, your marriage and family? Worry later about perfecting it. Just get it down. Then pray about implementing it. For building a family, it is an essential focus.