
Vision

“My husband is a good man, but he has no goals nor does he want them. He plays on the computer from the time he is home till he decides to go to bed.”

Having no goals would be fairly typical even among Christian families. If we want to be good managers of our time, it begins by understanding what is important in our lives so we know where to spend our time. Otherwise we can feel like we are on a frantic time treadmill, racing for all we are worth with no relief in sight. Rather than being able to focus our attention on the real needs for our time usage, we find ourselves doing what we have always done, with new tasks regularly added in but nothing taken out.

Because knowing where we are going is so important to time management, I want to help you see what happens when we don't have goals for our own lives and our family's lives or if those goals are too general. In addition, we will evaluate how these goals affect our time.

I like to use the word *vision* when referring to personal and family goals. To me the word *vision* communicates the importance of involving the Lord in the long-range direction of my time. “Where *there is* no vision, the people perish. . .” (Proverbs 29:18).

As a youth I used to enjoy going squirrel hunting on my uncle's farm in southern Iowa. With my .22 rifle in hand, I would walk slowly through the woods attempting not to make noise as I stepped on crunchy leaves. Hunting a small animal with a .22 is not as easy as it would be with a shotgun. I first had to get close to the squirrel, and then it took a steady, careful shot to bring one home. I wasn't overly successful because the dry leaves were loud, I wasn't that great a shot, and I had little heart for the killing aspect. I mostly loved just being out in the woods. The point of my hunting story is that if you don't aim at something carefully, you aren't going to hit it. The inverse is also true: if you aim at nothing, you will hit nothing.

Do You Have a Vision?

“As far as a vision statement, I have one for my children and their education. As a family, we don't have one, unfortunately. I have been praying that my husband would become interested in our homeschooling and one day care about creating a vision statement for our family. That is my desire, and I am trusting the Lord will help us with that. My husband dislikes attending church, to say the least; however, he has a website in hopes of reaching non-believers and cult members. He spends a lot of time on the Internet and doing outreach to cult members. Unfortunately and sadly, I don't think he has things in order or priorities right at home. For a while he was trying to change things around, but I am afraid other things are more important to him right now.”

We often ask, “Would God say this is the best way to spend our time?”

Without a vision, we can be easily sidetracked—perhaps even to good activities, but missing what are the most important uses of our time. Don't sacrifice what is best for what is good. The man in this example is spending his time

in ways he believes will build God's kingdom, but in the process of that, he is neglecting his vital priority, which is his family.

One dad wrote me an e-mail, and he told how his children are all headed for hell. He felt that he had "showed them the way." He described himself as a typical "token Christian," but Jesus wasn't his Lord. He spent his time doing what he felt like doing without any concern for following the Lord Jesus. He had no goals for his life but lived to make money, have fun, and not be bothered by his children. He was content to go to work and then spend his evenings watching TV. His children are following in his footsteps.

"And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). This man didn't involve himself in his children's lives spiritually when they were growing up, but rather he let his wife be the spiritual teacher. All she ever wanted was children who loved the Lord Jesus. Sadly, the children have followed his example rather than his wife's. He managed his time in the way he wanted to manage it. He now acknowledges responsibility for leading his children on the path toward hell. He feels unable to direct them spiritually because of his own spiritual bankruptcy. Even if he knew how to help his children, they want nothing to do with him. They hate him because he lived his life selfishly and had no time for them. What heavy guilt to live with for the rest of his life! Here we can see that the repercussions of having no goals go way beyond living without time-management guidelines.

Where Are You Aiming?

I remember many years ago when I was graduating from high school, people would ask me, "What are you going to do after you graduate?" Some things never change. Our children are asked that same question.

What if you were to ask a youth at your church about his future after graduation, and his answer was simply, “I want to have fun and be happy.” After thinking about that response, you might draw a number of conclusions such as:

He has no real idea what he wants to accomplish.

He has no ambition or drive.

He has such a low expectation, he probably won't achieve even the goal of being happy.

Now ask yourself what you are aiming for in your life and with your family? Are your goals any higher than the high school graduate who wants to be happy?

During our travels, we have spoken with many families around this continent. From discussions with them, it is evident that the vast majority of families have very little, if any, direction for their lives. Consequently, they have no barometer for how to use their time.

The Bible Has the Answers

If we are going to have goals, doesn't it make sense that they would be good ones? This book is written for Christians, those bought with the blood of the Lord Jesus. We are not our own. Therefore, it shouldn't be a matter of the goals we want, but what the Lord Jesus wants for us. The servant doesn't choose how he will spend his time, but the Master specifies what he is to do. How does someone determine what the Lord wants for his life and for each family member? What would this vision entail and how would one use it in helping him manage his time?

The Lord has told us plainly what He desires for our lives. “All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly fur-

nished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Lord has given us the Bible by which to live. It is the master vision for our lives. However, there is so much information in the Bible that it can be difficult to set specific, definable goals. Therefore, it is beneficial if we narrow our vision down to several statements that reflect the direction God is calling us personally and as a family.

We begin by praying and seeking succinct direction from the Word. I have found that the amount of time I pray is an inverse indicator of my pride. If I don't spend my time praying, asking the Lord to show me how to best utilize my time and lead my family, it means that I don't really believe prayer is important, and I am making the decisions on my own. Jesus said in Matthew 26:41, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak.”

You will find that as you read the Bible each day, the Lord puts certain verses on your heart for your personal life and for your family. If you write them down, over time you will develop a road map for where the Lord wants to take your family. By basing your vision on Scripture, you don't have to be concerned about getting off track with it. The Lord will always lead you consistently with Scripture.

Let's Get Practical

I recall many times on the way home after church when my wife, Teri, would say, “What a great message, but I want to know how to apply it to my life.” No matter how good something sounds, if it can't be applied, then where is the benefit? “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not” (1 Corinthians 10:23).

Our vision statement provides direction for our time management. For the sake of example, let's now evaluate my family's current vision statement and see how it directs my use of time. I say "current" because I always have the freedom to add to it as the Lord leads.

As you read through my vision statement, notice how every item has a Scripture reference associated with it. No matter how good a goal might be, if it doesn't originate in God's Word, I don't want it as a goal. Remember we are owned by the Lord Jesus.

Maxwell Family Vision Statement

By God's grace, each member of the family would have a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and serve Him (John 3:16, Hebrews 9:14) and:

- joyfully serve others (Galatians 5:13, Colossians 3:17, Romans 12:1)
- be obedient (John 14:15)
- respect others (Romans 12:10)
- be self-disciplined (Galatians 5:23)
- love children (Matthew 19:14)
- pursue holiness (Romans 12:1, Titus 1:8, 1 Peter 1:15-16)
- court and not date (Romans 12:1)
- live as ambassadors for Christ, including speaking, writing, and dressing appropriately (Colossians 3:17)
- be lovers of God more than lovers of pleasures (2 Timothy 3:4)
- learn to edify rather than criticize (Romans 14:19, 1 Thessalonians 5:11)

- be content (Philippians 4:11)
- be “wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil” (Romans 16:19)
- love His Word, have a good understanding of the Bible and church doctrine (2 Timothy 2:15)
- give their hearts to us as long as they are living in our home (Proverbs 23:26)
- be debt free even for cars and houses (Proverbs 22:7, Romans 13:8)

Vision Directs Time Usage

The overriding point on my vision statement is that each one in my family has a saving knowledge of Jesus and a real relationship with Him. That is where it all begins, and little matters if the child has no relationship with Jesus. “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26). I look at our family time in the Word as being the number-one contributor to leading my children to salvation. That investment of time is directed and substantiated by my vision statement.

The first subpoint of my vision statement is that my children would joyfully serve others. As I have spoken with many men who profess faith in Jesus but acknowledge no power or vibrancy in their relationship with Him, it becomes obvious that they haven’t obeyed the Lord Jesus by serving others. “Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works” (James 2:18). Faith and works go hand in hand. Salvation comes through faith, and works will follow if it is real salvation. Many men go off by themselves to minister to others.

Sadly, they miss out on a bonus for their time had they included their families and given them the appetite, blessing, and reality of Jesus in their lives by serving together.

I invest time ministering with my family because that leads my children to learn to joyfully serve others. An example of serving the Lord alongside my children is that for over ten years our family held a small church service at a local nursing home every other Saturday afternoon. Also for over ten years, we went to a homeless shelter and led a chapel service the second Saturday of every month. We have had some wonderful experiences in serving Jesus this way, and I have seen firsthand the way that this use of my time has developed in my children joyful hearts of service.

Following salvation, a very critical aspect of life in Christ is obeying Him. “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him” (John 14:21). I want my children to be aware of Jesus Christ living in them and others to observe Jesus in my children as well. In John 14:21 we are told that if someone keeps Jesus’ commandments, He will manifest Himself to them. The word *manifest* means reveal. Jesus will reveal Himself in the life of the saved person who is obeying Him.

My desire is that my family not only “starts” well but also finishes well. That means the more they are aware of Jesus in their lives, the better their walk with Him will be, and the less likely that they will drift away. Therefore, it is our desire that we learn obedience, which begins by utilizing our time as the Lord directs, both individually and as a family.



I have seen
when I am
obedient so are
my children.

More Practical Examples

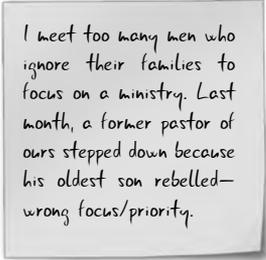
Respecting others is the next point on the vision statement. This is developed through spending time in the Word and learning to value people. Having families over for dinner provides excellent, supervised training opportunities where the children learn to show proper respect for others. We regularly have hospitality evenings because this use of my time is in accordance with my vision statement.

Learning self-discipline comes from Scripture teaching us boundaries of proper behavior. Our evening Bible time allows us to discuss the practical implementation of being self-disciplined. As you are beginning to observe, our family Bible time targets many areas on my vision statement. Bible time is a bargain in time usage because of its multiplicity of applications. In addition, I spend time every week having an individual meeting with each child. This allows me to have input into their lives concerning their self-discipline—or lack of it. Then as the children grow older, they will have greater freedom and opportunity to exercise self-control while succeeding or failing within boundaries.

Loving children involves being around them. Since our children are no longer young, we enjoy being around families with little ones. Spending time with others is then consistent with our vision statement. As we fellowship together, our children's love of children deepens. Here again, time spent fellowshiping with other families is meeting more than one of the goals on my vision statement.

Holiness is learned by spending time in the Word, engaging in discussions as a family, and exercising good choices. To be holy means to be sanctified or set apart. We desire that our children learn that we are to live in the world, but our hearts are not to be for the world, but for things above. “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth”

(Colossians 3:2). Therefore, the activities that we spend our time on must not be the world's activities. "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4). How we spend our time greatly impacts whether our families will have a desire for the world or the things of the Lord.



I meet too many men who ignore their families to focus on a ministry. Last month, a former pastor of ours stepped down because his oldest son rebelled—wrong focus/priority.

Most families want their children to find God's spouse for them in a God-glorifying fashion, and the best book on this is the Bible. As we read God's Word, we discuss all aspects of life to include how God brings two people together. We talk about this at mealtime and family discussions. I see this time as well invested in the future of my children. After arming them with a heart knowledge of the process, my time will be needed, because my children will be sharing their questions, issues, concerns, joys, excitement, and plans with me.

A Few More Examples

To teach my children to be ambassadors for Christ means having them with me whenever possible. They see firsthand my interactions with those with whom we come in contact. They see how I delight in telling others of the One Who died for us. They see how I dress and act out of respect for our Lord and those we meet. Once again, this impacts my time.

There are several more aspects of my vision statement, but I have given you enough examples that I think you can observe how that vision statement impacts my time. Therefore, to wrap up this section, I am going to move to the last point in my vision statement.



I am free from monetary debt but sometimes feel a slave to my over-commitments.

For my children to be God's ambassadors, they must be free to follow the Lord. To be free, they must not be slaves to debt or the bank. This goal takes a great deal of my time. I help my children learn to manage their finances. I discuss the vision of their freedom from debt and why it is important. In addition, I encourage them to begin entrepreneurial businesses as teens, working and saving for the future. In this process, I am their encourager and consultant, so I spend many hours talking with them about equipment, quotes, how to tackle a job, and how to be successful.

For us, God has clearly led that our children would not attend college. One of the reasons for this is because many people are slaves to their college loans. Having my children home during the usual college years, without a doubt, impacts my time as I continue to disciple them and advise them in their business ventures. Our children have owned the goal of being debt free to include even major purchases such as houses and vehicles. So far, our oldest two sons have purchased their homes debt free, and the younger three have that vision as well. (For more on this, see Resources at the back of this book for information on *Preparing Sons to Provide for a Single-Income Family*.)

Are We Asking Permission?

There is an old saying I heard for years: "It is easier to ask forgiveness than to ask permission." Is that our philosophy? Would we rather have our own way with our time and then ask forgiveness later when it doesn't work out very well? Or would we rather seek His direction early on? If time is wasted, second by second, minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, week by week, month by month, and year by year, there is no reclaiming lost ground. It becomes too late for anything but

regrets and sorrow. There are no regrets when our time is surrendered to Jesus. He will make the most of what we have to offer. We must seek Him daily in prayer for direction as we implement the vision He has given us.

As you can see by reading through my vision statement, it has had a very real and practical impact on the way I have spent my time through the years. It isn't enough just to avoid wasting time, but our time must be spent so as to edify and build up our families. The emphasis is on spending our time in a manner consistent with our vision statement. Jesus said that to avoid temptation, we must watch and pray. The world is full of enticements and temptations to pull us off course. To stay on the proper heading, we need a vision from the Lord, and we must pray and make decisions consistent with it.

My vision statement sets the course for my life and directs my time usage. It helps me redeem my time and to number my days. It gives me peace that when I choose to forgo an activity to instead spend family time in the Word, I am making a good decision about my time. It helps me make decisions on how to invest the time I have available because it is a guide to what the Lord has indicated is important in my family's lives. It is a key aspect of the stewardship and management of my time.