

THE MARRIAGE ADVENTURE



Developing a Family Mission

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“A family mission statement is a combined, unified expression from all family members of what your family is all about — what it is you really want to do and be — and the principles you choose to govern your family life.” -Stephen Covey

The Process Is Just as Important Than the End Product!

Before you start thinking about your family mission statement, decide together that you won't get hung up on whether it “sounds good” or “looks right.” In reality, the end product isn't as important as the process – this task of creating your family mission statement is where the real magic happens.

During the drafting process, you'll have a chance to have deep, meaningful conversations with your wife and kiddos about what's really important in life.

You'll have a chance to bond and connect as a family, and pray together as you empathetically listen to each other.

As you share your vision for your family with your wife and children as well as the values and principles you think should guide the family, their confidence in you as a husband and father will increase. And vice versa, your confidence in your family will increase as you hear them share their ideas.

Simply having the discussion about values and principles as a family will guide your children to start thinking about God's purpose in their daily lives, which, in my opinion is a big win itself.

So, as you work through the steps outlined below, don't get discouraged if you think it's taking too long or isn't going exactly how you wanted. In those moments when you feel like giving up and retreating back into default mode, just focus on the process. Remember, the important thing is that you're intentionally starting a conversation & seeking God on what it means for your family to live a life on mission. This is a life-long, multi-generational discussion. Don't get discouraged by a single bad family mission statement meeting.

BEFORE WE GET STARTED:

Just before Christ ascended back up to heaven, He gave all Christians a common mission. It's called The Great Commission.

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 28:19

If you're a Christian, at the core, your family's mission has something to do with this Great Commission!

A. God's common mission for all Christians involves two things: loving God and loving others. This must be a component that is in your family's mission.

“Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6

“For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. 8 For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.” Romans 14: 7-8

B. A good mission statement has three things.

1. Who are you?
2. Why does your family exist?
3. What are the principles that will guide your family?

STEP #1:

Pray, pray, pray.

Pray as a family and ask God to begin to reveal to you HIS vision for your family.

STEP #2:

Call a Special Family Meeting

While your role is to initiate and guide the process of drafting your family's mission statement, every member of the family should have a say and be part of its creation. So, the first step in creating a family mission statement is to hold a family meeting where everyone can take part in the discussion.

Covey recommends making these meetings special occasions. Maybe you can take a family vacation and set aside a day to brainstorm a family mission statement. You don't even have to go far from home. Rent a hotel room nearby, order pizza, get everyone in their PJs, and start the discussion. The key is to make the occasion different from any other "family meeting" or night of the week. Make sure everyone gets a say. As the family leader, don't let a single person monopolize the discussion. Make sure everyone has a say. Remember, where there's no involvement, there's no commitment.

Listen empathetically. Even if you think your six-year-old is just spouting off weird six-year-old-things like "Our family loves pizza!", really focus on listening to them. Kids, like any other human, want to feel like their contributions matter. You may discover that while you're on the same page on most things, you might be in completely different books on other matters.

Write things down. Make sure someone is capturing all the ideas that get spit out during your family mission statement jam session. You'll need to review the notes when you actually sit down to write out the statement. If you have older kids who can write, elect one of them to act as scribe and write down ideas on a dry erase board or easel pad so everyone can see. If those aren't available, create a special "Family Mission Statement Journal" to capture ideas.

You don't have to do this in one sitting. The last thing you want to do is to turn creating a family mission statement into a chore that your kids find unbearable. Having a marathon mission statement meeting will do that, especially if the kids are younger. Remember, the process is the most important thing, and you don't have to crank out a completed family mission statement in one sitting! It's okay to take it slow.

If you have younger kids (4-10 years old) try to keep your meetings between 15 and 30 minutes; if they're older than 10, 30-45 minute sessions are probably best. If you have toddlers (18 months to 3 years old) you may consider waiting until they're older before they take part in the family mission statement meeting. If you want to include them, don't worry if there are interruptions, and try to explain to them what's going on in terms they can understand.

STEP #3

Ask Questions, Read Scripture, Discuss What Your Family Is All About

Once you've got everyone gathered, it's time to start talking about what your family's mission is. As mentioned above, this is probably the most important part of the process. This is your chance to communicate with your children about your values and hear what they want their family to be like.

The easiest way to get ideas going for your mission statement is to ask questions that will foster a healthy discussion. Here are some suggested questions from "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families" to help you do that:

- What is the purpose of our family?
- What kind of family do we want to be?
- What kinds of things do we want to do?
- What kind of feeling do we want to have in our home?
- What kind of home would you like to invite your friends to?
- What embarrasses you about our family?
- What makes you want to come home?
- What do we want to be remembered by?
- What kind of relationships do we want to have with one another?
- How do we want to treat one another and speak to one another?
- What things are truly important to us as a family?
- What are the unique talents, gifts, and abilities of family members?
- What are our responsibilities as family members?

What are the principles and guidelines we want our family to follow?
Who are our heroes? What is it about them that we like and would like to emulate?
What families inspire us and why do we admire them?
How can we contribute to society as a family and become more service-oriented?

QUESTION:

Do the answers to the above questions, reflect in any way Great Commission Jesus gave us?

STEP #4

Identify your Family's Core Values.

Instead of imagining what you think other people would approve of, or what you're "supposed" to value as a family, focus on those values and principles that truly resonate and inspire every member of your family. But how do you know if a value is really "core" to your family?

Jim Collins, author of "Good to Great", sets this standard for core values:

"A core value is something so central you would say, 'Even if it's harmful to us, we would still hold on to this value. Even if we had to pay penalties, even if we had to punish our children for violating it, even if we had to deny them something that would bring them pleasure, we would still hold to it.'"

A. Make your list of values as big as you want - you'll pare it down later. Here are some ideas to jog your thoughts:

Adventure, Creativity, Discipline, Education, Faith, Fun, Health, Honesty, Humor
God, Integrity, Kindness, Service

B. Brainstorm and compile a list all the intrinsic, moral, family rules you have.

For example: Love God & love people, It's never wrong to do what's right, We never put each other down, Share Jesus wherever possible, If it doesn't challenge you, it doesn't change you, etc.

B. Once you have this list, find the ones that are similar or duplicates and cross them off. Then narrow it down to the 4-6 most important ones that really represent your core value system.

Step #5:

Decide on 10 (or Fewer) Big Ideas

You've now probably amassed a giant list of values/phrases/goals/ideas that could be included in your mission statement. While it's tempting to include every good value you can think of, a huge, unwieldy, and generic list that no one can remember will be meaningless and defeat the whole purpose of the exercise. So, work to whittle your master list down to 10 (or fewer) "Big Ideas" that encapsulate your family's mission.

If some of the things you listed are just two words describing the same idea, combine them.

- Put a star by the values/phrases/goals/ideas everyone feels sure about.
- Then take the concepts that you feel are important, but aren't sure if they're top 10 material, and put them in pairs.
- Think about two of those values side by side, and ask your family which of the two is more important. Then eliminate the other. Keep pitting the survivors against each other until you're down to 10 or less.

One effective and democratic way to hone your list was described in The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families:

"We put all the words on a big flip chart and gave everyone ten votes. They could use up to three votes per item if they wished, but they could not spend more than ten votes in total. After the vote, we were left with about ten items that were important to everyone."

Step 6: Write Out Your Family Mission Statement

Once you have your list of Big Ideas, it's time to synthesize them into a single mission statement. Brace yourself - this can be difficult. Don't expect to crank it out in a single sitting.

As you write out your mission statement, keep in mind the following guidelines:

- 1.Keep it short. Mission statements work best if they're kept short, because short is memorable. Give yourself a low maximum word count. Writing always turns out better when you place constraints on it because it forces you to really think about what you put down. Try to keep your mission statement under 100 words.

1. Make it collaborative. Your family might decide to delegate the writing process to you. But you can also suggest doing it collaboratively. For example, task each member of the family with writing phrases for 2-3 of your Big Ideas. Then have them present their work for family discussion and approval.

Even if you do most of the writing yourself, get plenty of feedback from the other members of your family and give them a final vote of approval.

There isn't one right way to write a family mission statement. Some families write out their mission statement essay style; others create a bullet point list of the values that they strive to live by. Both are fine, as well as any number of other creative formats.

Take as much time as you need. Write, edit, and re-write until everyone is happy with the final product. This is something you'll look to for years and years, so it's okay if it takes a few weeks to get it just right.

Examples:

“Our family mission: To love each other, To help each other, To believe in each other, To wisely use our time, talents, and resources to bless others, To worship together, Forever.”

“To encourage others to become like Christ through loving relationships, healthy lifestyles, and stimulating experiences.”

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Step 7: Hang Your Family Mission Statement in a Prominent Place in the House

Once your family is happy with the mission statement, consider printing it up on some high falootin' fabric paper, framing it, do something cool with it, and then hanging it up in a prominent place in the house. Now you have a constant visual reminder of what your family is all about and what you're striving for together.

Step 8: Refer to it Often & Allow it to Define What Your Family Does!

A family mission statement is useless if you don't use it. It needs to drive everything your family does. As you go about your day-to-day life, be intentional about finding teaching moments in which you can refer back to your family mission statement.