Creating a family mission statement

Most businesses have a mission statement of some variety, telling customers what their business does and what they stand for. Businesses with a mission statement are focused on meeting their goals! In the same way, families can benefit from a mission statement that tells everyone—in and out of the family—what they do and what their family stands for. A mission statement is a combination of the goals and the identity of a family. It's both *who we are* as a family and *what we do* as a family. Mission statements look to the long term. Our goals tell us what we want to do in a defined period of time; a mission statement identifies a family purpose and tells us what we look like on the way there.

Writing a family mission statement needs to be a family affair. You want every person in your family to take ownership of the mission, and people are more likely to take ownership of something they have contributed to.

In order to get your family more excited about creating a family mission statement, you can tie the experience to creating a family brand. Brainstorm some of the company brands and slogans that they might know. For example, *"Just do it!"* (Nike) or *"Save Money. Live Better."* (Walmart) or *"The Happiest Place on Earth."* (Disney World). You might have to make a few suggestions to get them started, but chances are your kids will be able to come up with at least a few. Challenge them to come up with a slogan for your family.

Tell your child that while a slogan helps consumers recognize products, all of those businesses also have a mission statement that helps them make decisions about the kind of business that they do. If you are feeling adventurous, look up a few examples. Most companies have their mission statement

(or an abbreviated version, some are quite long) available online.

Depending on the age of your children, there may be a lot of variation in how much help they can give you combining slogans, goals, and identity. When we wrote our family mission statement, our children were still fairly young and we did most of the actual writing ourselves. Make a decision based on your family circumstances and go from there. Depending on your kids, they may be able to help with brainstorming ideas, proposing wording, or maybe voting between several final versions.

In general, a mission statement should clearly identify a purpose of the family and what someone else should be able to observe in order to show that you are meeting your stated purpose. For example, our family mission statement is:

In this family… We honor God through faith and service. We think before we act. We work together. We show respect for others and ourselves.

A little explanation:

In this family,

The emphasis is on the word *this.* All families do things differently. We like to emphasize this in a way that makes it easy to say, "We do it this way because we are a part of this family; other families do things other ways." Works great for explanations of why other families do or have something that we do not without unintentionally sounding critical of the choices others make.

We honor God through faith and service.

We try to emphasize (with varying degrees of success, like any family), that the first and most important thing in all of our activities is that we are bringing honor to God. That includes our daily activities, school, work, relationships,

intentional acts of faith (prayer, Mass attendance, devotions, living the liturgical year), and service. We probably apply this particular line more often than any other as we make choices with our children about activities and events that our family will participate in.

We think before we act.

This refers largely to checking to see if our actions are going to bring honor to God. If the answer is no, then we need to rethink our choices. While always thinking before we act is the goal of this statement, the reality is that having this in our mission statement gives us concrete, familiar language to use when we have to talk about choices that didn't bring honor to God. I also find that this is an area of the mission statement that my husband and I work hard to model, stepping back to discuss a particular action or difficult circumstance before taking action.

We work together.

Our catch phrase for this year is, "No one is finished until everyone is finished." If you finish your bedtime chore, school work, or other task and someone else isn't quite done yet, then, as a member of this family, it is your responsibility to help the other person out. This way everyone is finished with work more quickly and can enjoy our playtime together. We have been really emphasizing the difference between "doing for" and "helping" with our older kids as they help the younger ones. The short-term result of "doing for" might mean finishing faster, but the long term result of helping is that the younger person can eventually do it for themselves and they might even finish before you do!

We show respect for others and ourselves.

If we succeed in the first sections of our mission statement, then this one might seem a bit redundant. In some ways it is; if we are thinking before we act and honoring God then we

should also be, by default, behaving in a respectful way. On the other hand, a little extra reminder doesn’t hurt. We live in a diverse world and a lot of the choices that our family makes are not the same choices that other people make. We figured a little extra reminder that we shouldn’t treat others differently as a result doesn’t hurt. We also wanted a reminder that all of these great things apply to ourselves as well. Respecting ourselves by respecting our bodies and caring for our own physical, mental, and spiritual health is a way to bring honor to God that we want to make sure not to overlook.

So what is our purpose? Honoring God. How can you observe that? When we demonstrate faith and service, when we think before we act, when we work together, and when we show respect for others and ourselves. Other families may choose to have a much longer or involved statement. Since our children were young when we wrote our mission statement, it made sense to keep it simple and it continues to apply as they grow. In fact, most of our older children have now memorized it and we can use it as a gentle reminder when we don’t observe one of the particular characteristics, especially when we notice a habit of not working together or showing disrespect in a particular avenue. The foundation has been set with them that we do these things in order to honor God and that when we don’t do them, we are not honoring God.