

A progressive state is necessary to the happiness and perfection of man. Whatever attainments are already reached, attainments still higher should be pursued . . . Let us with fervent zeal press forward, and make unceasing advances in every thing that we can support, improve, refine or embellish society. Let (us) progress.

-- James Wilson (1788)

## Principle Fifteen

### VISION AND MEANINGFUL GOALS CREATE UNITY OF PURPOSE

A babe's work is his play, and his play is the conquest over the body. He stretches arms to reach for objects, struggles to inch his body forward, and strains to lift his body to an upright position. He is ever about the business of gaining control over the physical body. No one needs to encourage, offer rewards or threaten; the baby progresses instinctively and zealously. As a toddler, he will seek adventures, experiences, knowledge. As a young child he will ask a never-ending stream of questions.

Just as growth is the career of the baby, so growth is the career of the adult who remains alive and understands the need to learn, to grow spiritually, socially, physically, intellectually, and morally. I am convinced that being true to life's urgency to grow is the very key to happiness. Nigel Calder, in his book *The Mind of Man*, said, "The human brain depends for its normal alertness, reliability and efficiency on a continuous flow of information about the world; . . . the brain craves information as the body craves food" (p. 33).

Likewise, just as the body needs nourishment and the mind needs the stimulus of new knowledge, so also does the spiritual nature of man require nourishment, and the heart require opportunities to share love and compassion.

Man, by nature, is progressive, and when true to this nature experiences a never-ending renewal of life--in body, mind and spirit! By following the innate zest to become, man maintains the zeal for life. James Wilson wrote, "A progressive state is necessary to the happiness and perfection of man. Whatever attainments are already reached, attainments still higher should be pursued."

Happiness then, for the individual and the family, is through growth.

Sometimes happiness is confused with what is sometimes called success. But success itself may need another look. Success is not just indiscriminately more and more of everything; it is not just indiscriminately going and getting. It is getting what we want--if we want the right thing. It is arriving where we want--if it's the right place. And one could scarcely be considered happy if he didn't have a wholeness and wholesomeness of life, integrity, work, service, self-respect, appreciation for other people, love, a sense of belonging, a sense of being wanted and a sense of purpose--permanent, eternal purpose, with faith to survive the sorrows and setbacks and faith to outface fear. Going, getting, arriving--even these are not so essential as is this: an awareness of being on the way, on the right road. This surely is one of the chief essentials of happiness--with an awareness also that life is purposeful, limitless and everlasting, and that the same sound principles that lead to happiness here lead to happiness hereafter. (Richard L. Evans)

The family, then, must not be a static institution that merely provides for the physical needs of its members, but rather a dynamic, growing, functioning, aspiring team unified in purpose. Solzhenitsyn,

in his address quoted earlier, reminds us, “The human soul longs for things higher, warmer, and purer than those offered by today’s mass living. . . . It has to be fulfillment of a permanent, earnest duty so that one’s life journey may become above all an experience of moral growth: to leave life a better human being than one started it.”

Family happiness--like individual happiness--is experienced through “moral growth.” We see around us families who clamor for the pleasure pursuits--the carnivals, movies, boating, skiing, etc., as if money spent on a good time will result in greater love and harmony in the home. While these pursuits can help unify the family, they are no comparison to the pursuits that expand the vision and extend the purpose of the family. When parents act as initiators--to bring about or to cause to happen experiences of moral growth--they create happy families--families with incentive, families with purpose.

I remember the tragedy that occurred to a fellow student when I was a young girl. During the night the hot water heater in her home exploded and the house caught on fire. Both parents and all five children were badly burned, though no lives were lost. Our friend Marlene was one of the children who was more seriously injured. She had to go through months of horrible skin transplants.

Someone at school came up with the idea to raise money for her expensive medical treatment. Everyone caught the fund-raising spirit! For months, one campaign after another was launched. Gum and candy were sold for a dollar. There were fines for tardies. Every Friday the school held a special bake sale. All the proceeds went to the Marlene Fund.

I was fascinated then and now by the whole event--that so many would do so much! More important, that everyone would actually be excited to pay a dollar for gum, be fined for tardies, and buy their own homemade treats. The campaign for the Marlene Fund seemed to bring out the best in everyone. There was a sense of purpose, meaning, and team effort! As hearts were opened to Marlene, they opened toward everyone.

Victor Frankl, the psychologist who discovered faith in his fellow human beings while incarcerated in a German concentration camp, wrote, “let me cite an experiment once conducted by Carolyn Wood

Sherif. She found that aggressions subsided when youngsters dedicated themselves to a collective purpose. . . .they [are then] not only challenged but also united by a meaning they had to fulfill.” (*Man’s Search For Meaning*, p. 167)

I recall my Mother and Father reminiscing on the country’s unified spirit during World War II. Mother has often said, “It was wonderful to be a part of the cause. We would all buy U.S. Bonds. Everything was rationed, but we didn’t mind because we knew that we were helping the boys who were fighting abroad. There was a spirit in our nation then that seemed to unify everyone together! It was truly amazing.”

I am sure that most of us have experienced these same feelings--when the cares of the world fade away under the bright light of a good cause. Recently our family experienced the fear and insecurity of an earthquake.

As Micah was carrying the vacuum to the van, the cement under him began to buckle. He later said, “I thought to myself, ‘This wind is sure hard; it’s knocking me over!’ Then I realized that there was no wind.”

Jennifer was in the van as it began to rock back and forth. She looked to see who was doing it, then realized it was an earthquake. One by one the children ran to me, excited to tell their stories. Together we ran to the television to see where the epicenter was; the local stations were off the air. “That’s interesting. That could mean that San Francisco has been hit the hardest,” I said.

We decided to check on our eighty-eight-year-old grandmother who lives across town. As we all piled into the van, everyone was united in fear, love, and purpose.

This principle--setting meaningful goals creates cooperation and unity--works. It can lift and liven the family spirit. It promotes goodwill, cooperation, thoughtfulness, and enthusiasm.

We are often so busy teaching children what they should not be doing that we fail to teach what they should be doing. Children misbehave more often out of boredom and frustration, than a cantankerous nature. Youth who have energy to burn need to be involved in a good cause. While we adults (or as our son, Aaron,

refers to adults--a 'dulls') contentedly settle into routine, our youth crave variety, direction, purpose and happenings! (Note that most revolutionaries are students!)

We have found that our greatest moments of family triumph--when Camelot shines--occur when we are anxiously engaged in a good cause. These causes--or projects--can be as simple as raking the leaves off the lawn, to organizing a family reunion, but all members of the family should be included and involved in the planning, organizing, and implementation.

### **A Family Constitution Can Create Vision for the Family**

Just as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States created the vision for the nation, a family constitution--a written document that explains the philosophy, goals and aspirations of the family--can do the same for the home. Whether simple or elaborate, it should inspire, motivate, and create a higher vision. It answers the question "What is our family for? What are our goals, our aspirations?"

Here is an example of a written Family Constitution:

The Smith Family does hereby promote and establish our philosophy and tenets of truth.

1. That there is a loving Father in Heaven, who loves us and will guide our lives to greater life, love, joy and freedom.
2. That we have chosen to be together as a family to love and serve one another.
3. That the family is organized by God for the welfare of the individual members, to protect and enhance rights, not to take advantage of one another, or to expect free services from one another.

4. That together we complement one another and provide an environment where all can grow; we will strive to lift one another, to encourage one another, and to assist one another.
5. That since the family is united to assist in the growth of individual members, there should never be an attitude of belittling one another's abilities.
6. That while our family is dedicated to assisting one another--spiritually, physically, intellectually, socially--we believe it is the responsibility of each member to strive to become fully self-reliant. The family should build strengths, not contribute to weaknesses. All service to one another ought to be voluntary, not mandatory.
7. That the family is united to promote freedom, independence, and the pursuit of happiness for all members, therefore, just as children are assisted by parents, so ought the parents have the assistance of the children.
8. That we come into this world indebted to all those who have gone before--grandparents, inventors, teachers, authors--and therefore we have a great obligation to contribute just as they have: "to add some measure of grace to the world," as Don Quixote said.
9. That the greatest joy in this life comes not in the acquisition of things, but in the acquisition of truth.
10. That our lives should be spent not in longing for heaven hereafter, but in creating a heaven here--through love, cooperation, unselfishness, and service.
11. That relationships are bond together forever by love, not by written contract. Respect, the seed of true love, is won by respect, and can never be expected.

A Chinese proverb reflects the path to earthly heaven:

If there is righteousness in the heart,  
There will be beauty in the character.

If there is beauty in the character,

There will be harmony in the home.

If there is harmony in the home,  
There will be order in the nation.

If there is order in the nation,  
There will be peace in the world.

This is merely an example of how a family can outline their constitution. It could be read once in a while for family members, or be posted in the home where all can see it. The family constitution prevents the home from becoming a mere bed-and-breakfast. It lifts the family's vision to the spiritual quest--above spilt milk and dirty socks. Our reach should exceed our grasp!

## **Summary**

The family can be a dynamic association of individuals moving forward in their lives, or it can become merely a group who occasionally gather around the table to eat.

It can be a think tank where great ideas are discussed, or an association bound together only in name.

It can become a complementary team engaged in contributing to the world's needs, or an emotionally contentious group groveling in the confusion of their own problems.

The idea that man is in "pursuit of happiness" suggests that the family finds its greatest glory in pursuits that lead to happiness.

## **Principle in Practice**

### **Family Work Projects**

When we moved to our present home, we found ourselves overwhelmed with repair projects. The property contained eleven

buildings--most of which were over a hundred-years-old. The three-story millhouse served well as a clubhouse and workroom for the boys, then we noticed that the foundation was rotting away. Out of selective neglect, we ignored it for as long as possible, then, facing it squarely, came to the conclusion that the building would have to come down. We concluded that it would take two Saturdays just to dismantle it, and a third to haul the debris away.

We roused everyone up early in the morning--at least early for Saturday morning--and gathered them together in the living room. My husband Norm, who delights in the impossible, gave the pep talk, "Boy are we going to have fun today! We've talked about taking the millhouse down for a long time; today's the day. We'll begin by dismantling it and piling the lumber to one side. Everyone will have something to do; and by doing it ourselves we'll save several hundred dollars. It'll probably take us three Saturdays; we'll work until about one, then Mom will make us a great lunch (winking at me), and you'll be excused to go."

The children were excited--a chance to destroy and demolish with parental blessings! While Norm and the teenage sons--Donnie, Norman, Adam, Aaron, Shiloh--took sledgehammers to the building, the younger children--Anna, Jen, Micah and Mary (who was only three) loaded the debris into the dump truck. Everyone worked zealously through the morning, joking and enjoying the team spirit! To my surprise, after lunch no one wanted to quit.

Shiloh, said, "Mom, when we work like this together, and everyone's having a good time, the work is more like play."

In the hot afternoon sun, the same team spirit prevailed. As dusk fell, we gathered together to marvel; the three story millhouse was leveled and all debris taken to the dump! In its place remained only the cement foundation, which we left for another super Saturday.

Aaron exulted, "I think it's amazing. It's totally awesome what this family can do when we set our mind to it!"

Our property has provided plenty of work projects throughout the years, each one of them furnishing our family with reason, purpose and glory!

## Family Council

Family councils can capture direction and promote cooperation. This is an opportunity for the family to discuss, plan and unify efforts. In our family the agenda goes something like this:

1. **Opening Prayer**
2. **Calendar** (planning future events),
3. **Compliments** to children who have excelled at something-- anything,
4. **Children sharing time:** "I need a tennis racket," . . . "I will be running track on Friday, I hope that everyone will come" . . . "I don't like the way I always do dishes on the big dish nights" . . . "Somebody has been going in my room during the day and. . ."
5. **Discussion of proposals:** "Who will be able to go to the track meet?" . . . "Who is going into her room?" . . . "I will take you after school on Thursday to get your tennis racket."
6. **Parent sharing time:** "We have a problem with everyone leaving their wet jackets on the floor" . . . "Gramma has asked that someone come mow her lawn every week. She will pay five dollars. Who would like this job?"
7. **Family Goals:** "Let's remember that we're trying to stamp out put downs in the home. Don't put down; build up." . . . "Our family motto, 'Let Your Light Shine,' means that we need to be aware of how we treat others" . . . "Remember, we had the goal that everyone will get a part-time job. How are you coming in your search?"
8. **Personal Goals:** "Micah, how can I help you with that state report?" . . . "Anna, do you still want to take a dance class?" . . . "Jennifer, are you able to practice shooting the basketball like you wanted to do?"
9. **Closing Prayer**

## **Family Flags**

Another excellent way to create vision, unity, and enthusiasm in the home is to create a family flag that depicts the family theme. In this world of despair and depression it is elevating to have a picture of vision and purpose. For our family motto we have chosen the scripture, "Let Your Light So Shine." This simple statement suggests to the family that we need to do more than merely exist, or seek our own pleasure. We have a mission to dispel the darkness and gloom around us by bringing light to others. Some families have made their own flags, others have had them made.

## **Neighborhood Parties**

Ten years ago Halloween fell on a Sunday, and since we enjoy our Sabbath on Sunday we decided to host a Halloween party on Saturday night. It turned out to be such fun that we have continued our annual party for over ten years; now more than five hundred friends, neighbors and school chums join us. Everyone participates; the older boys create the haunted house--build coffins, tomb stones, dummies, spiders, etc.--the girls assist with that project, plan the hayride, create a stage for magic shows and watch over the refreshment table. Mom and Dad oversee and plan for the entertainment--magicians, and a Melodrama. The preparation usually takes an entire month, but the rewards are gratifying.

Over and over we have heard, "We just love your Halloween parties! It is such fun, and we get to meet all our neighbors! We look forward to it all year."

While we enjoy hearing the comments and receiving the notes of appreciation, we realize that our family benefits most of all. Throughout the month of preparation the children are enthusiastic, creative, inventive, and happy: all the time enjoying each other's company and making memories!

## **Family reunions**

We have discovered this same team spirit in planning family reunions. One year my sister, Anita organized the family to make a quilt for our parents. Each square of the quilt represented one of the grandchildren, displaying that particular child's interests and talents. Mother says of it, "It is my most favorite gift that I have ever received!"

Family reunions are usually three days with planned activities--hikes; slide presentations, games, treasure hunts, etc. Teenagers have a night out, then a night to watch the children while the parents go out.

Last November the Family Reunion was held at my sister Anita's home. On the last day, all the children (about twenty-five) participated in a treasure hunt that eventually took them to the nearby beach. As we watched the children running up and down the beach, in search of the treasure, we caught the beauty of the moment. The last rays of sunshine were casting a golden hue and radiance over all; the children's faces seemed illuminated; their hair haloed with light. The beach was a mirror of silvered glass. The birds overhead squealed with delight. It all seemed too wonderful to be real! With the impending sadness that separation would soon bring, we relished in our last moments together.

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These are but a few examples of family events that can create vision and purpose, but they need not be so elaborate--a family trip together, a party for friends, a visit to the library, an outing to the zoo, a spring cleaning project, a remodeling project, helping a favored candidate with his or her campaign--can all increase family solidarity and harmonious cooperation.