

PARENT CONVERSATIONS

“The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing,” wrote Stephen Covey in his best-selling book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Yet that’s easier said than done, right? Especially when it comes to parenting, it’s easy to get caught up in the day-to-day and lose focus of the big picture. This month’s column can help us refocus. These authors are laser-focused on their goal as parents. Although that can be intimidating for those of us who feel like we miss the mark more often than we hit it, the intention isn’t to burden us with guilt. We know that we’re forgiven and loved children of God, just as our children are. In thankfulness, we share that message with our children. Do we do it perfectly? No. No one does. Do we sometimes lose focus and let other things take precedent over sharing God’s grace with our children? Yes, but that’s when we return to our Savior, humbly ask his forgiveness, and ask him for strength to carry out our vocation as Christian parents again. See how these parents do just that.

—Nicole Balza

WHAT IS OUR GOAL AS PARENTS?

OUR NEIGHBORS welcomed their first baby in late summer. It brought back so many memories—our first was born at the same time of year a mere 28 years ago. What a rush of emotions the start of the parenting journey brings! But as the years slip by and you move from diapers to driving, daily decisions, and duties, it is easy to lose track of the essential question: Just what is our goal as parents?

Sorry, parents, this is not when we hear that our aim is the NFL, the WNBA, a Nobel, or even a Pulitzer. Christian parents have only one goal by which every other life activity must be measured: heaven. Without faith in Jesus, our good health, good manners, well-rounded school years, and even exemplary public service are meaningless.

Listen as God commands believers and parents: “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. . . . Impress [these commands] on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. . . . Write them on the doorframes of your houses” (Deuteronomy 6:5-9).

Through God’s gracious gifts of Baptism and the Bible, we and our children are filled with faith and granted

salvation through Jesus. Then spurred on by that God-given faith, we encourage our children of all ages to share the gospel and serve in whatever way their God-given talents, treasure, and time on earth allow.

This objective is only achieved with God’s help. Our heavenly Father gives us this wonderful prayer through Paul: “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:16-19).

How does this look in our Christian household? It definitely means prayers for guidance, forgiveness, and the strength to center ourselves and our family on God’s Word and to show Jesus’ love in all we do. It also means getting up early for devotions before it’s off to the races, Bible passages posted on bathroom mirrors or in text messages, and Christian books for birthday gifts. It means reexamining priorities and paring back so weekly church attendance returns to the top

HAVE PARENTING QUESTIONS?

Visit forwardinchrist.net/parents to access years of perspectives from Christian parents on topics ranging from discipline to gender confusion to sibling rivalry. Just type a keyword or two into the search bar. In addition to articles, forwardinchrist.net/parents also provides videos and podcasts featuring interviews with Christian parents and Christian counselors.

of the list, saying no to certain music or movies, having difficult but loving conversations about sin and consequences, budgeting for Christian education opportunities, apologizing for parenting mistakes, or making vacation a mission journey.

Each Christian family is different, but the goal is the same. God wants all to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:3,4), and above all, Chris-

tian parents do too. May God give us the grace, love, wisdom, and perseverance to serve our children and their children to this end!



Ann Ponath and her husband, David, are blessed with two sons, two daughters, two daughters-in-law, and one granddaughter.

AMANDA AND I have one clear goal as parents: We want above all else for our children to know the love of God for them in Christ. We arrived at this goal through our study of the Scriptures. Experience has only strengthened our conviction on this point.

At some point in our marriage, we began looking at our one parenting goal through the lens of our mortality and also the mortality of our children. Any other goal for parenting, apart from the gospel, looks empty with this lens.

We asked ourselves these questions: “Does it matter if they can kick a soccer ball when they meet Jesus?” “Does an Ivy League degree confer any sort of eternal benefit?” “Does a wonderful, recognized career matter?”

Every Christian—and for that matter, any thinking person—can see that death is a clarifying lens to use. So is life in Jesus’ name. Can anything possibly matter more than that our children know the forgiveness of sins in Jesus’ name both now and for eternity? This is our hearts’ conviction: We want our children to know Jesus.

Honestly, this goal impacts the decisions that we make on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. As I write this article, our daughters have just started to play in a recreational

soccer league. We spent years trying to find the best fit for sports. Most sports leagues here require every single weeknight plus weekend travel. New York parents want their kids to play professional soccer one day it seems. We hold no such illusions. Our recreational league is just one night a week with games on the weekends. It does schedule games on Sunday mornings. Last year, our daughter Brooke made the championship game in her league, but the game was on a Sunday morning. We wrestled with what to do, but we kept our convictions in place. God’s Word is simply too important. Our daughters never skip church for a game. They know this and their coaches know it too.

We have one goal, and our daughters agree with it. They love going to church, hearing the gospel, and spending time with their friends. Our family won’t have it any other way.



Tim Bourman and his wife, Amanda, are raising their four children in New York City as Tim serves as a home missionary at Sure Foundation, Woodside, New York.

OFTEN MY friends laugh at me because I am a life coach by profession and I hate setting goals. Maybe it’s just me, but when I set goals, oftentimes the outcomes of the goals are beyond my control.

When I set a goal, I believe it should be something that I can control. And when it comes to my children, much to my dismay, I cannot control them. I believe the danger of setting goals as parents is that we set goals for our children instead of for ourselves as parents.

My goal as a parent is to love my children as Jesus loves them. My goal is to continuously direct and redirect them to their Father, Savior, and Counselor. My goal is to raise them to know what it’s like to have a relationship with their Creator.

The fun thing is that we get to watch our children do all sorts of things this side of heaven. I currently get to watch one child learn what it’s like to be in a relationship. I get to see another enjoy his skill set as a college cheerleader. My recent graduate is learning skills working with her handyman dad. And my youngest gets to

use his abilities as a high school athlete.

The challenge for me is not allowing the things of this world to distract me from my goals. Or even worse, to have these blessings become the ultimate goals. It’s easy to make what my children do more important than who they are: beloved sons and daughters of the King.

Getting to see my children use their God-given abilities on this earth is exciting! Intertwining who they are and what they do with their relationship with Jesus is the intent that I want to focus on. Because after all, there is truly only one thing needful: Jesus.

I can set the goals. I can work toward those goals. And yet again, I leave the outcomes to him. And that’s a great place for them to be.



Jenni Schubring and her husband, Tad, are currently parenting their two youngest children and navigating their change of roles as their three adult children are now living on their own.

Interested in more? Visit forwardinchrist.net/parents for more parenting resources, including articles, podcasts, and videos.

