
WELL-ORDERED FAMILY

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C O N O R G A L L A G H E R

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Gastonia, North Carolina

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To Ashley, Aiden, Mary, Patrick, Peter, Jude, Paul, Teresa,
Imelda, David, Annie, Luke, Thomas, Lucy, Lily Jane,
Elizabeth, and any future children if God wills it so.

Thank you for teaching me everything in this book.

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THIS BOOK IS JUST THE BEGINNING

Scan the QR code on this page to go to our website:

WellOrderedFamily.com

With the aim of best serving you and your family for the years to come, QR codes are displayed frequently throughout this book. These codes link directly to specific tools on our website. On the site, we give you more ideas and examples of how to use each tool, plus the opportunity to download your own blank version.

If you are holding the printed copy in your hands, please use it as a reference book. Highlight, fill in the blanks, and attach sticky notes where it's most helpful.



INTRODUCTION

You love your family. You want to bring more order and clarity to your family life. Families feel overwhelmed by the chaos of modern life. Chaos is not creativity. It's not freedom. Chaos makes everyone anxious, crazed, or even despondent. It is not good.

Contentment, creativity—and true freedom—depend on order. But to achieve order, you need a system.

There are three sure signs that your family doesn't have a family management system.

1. You feel too busy
2. Unnecessary conflict is a normal way of life
3. When it comes to family dynamics, you have little joy and loads of constant anxiety

Leave these conditions in place long enough and you get spouses who drift apart, teenagers who drift away, and a lingering grief that overwhelms you as you slowly realize you're failing those you love most.

It doesn't have to be this way.

Well-Ordered Family™ was founded to put an end to this.

My wife, Ashley, and I have fifteen children. Their names are Aiden, Mary, Patrick, Peter, Jude, Paul, Teresa, Imelda, David, Annie, Luke, Thomas, Lucy, Lily Jane, and Elizabeth. I love giving someone a name. In fact, many of my kids have multiple middle names, such as Luke Dominic Chesterton Gallagher, and his twin brother, Thomas Joshua Kolbe Gallagher. Giving someone a name is a tremendous honor. I take it very seriously. After all, I am a word nerd.

I'm terrible with numbers, however, so don't ask me their birthdates. I feel accomplished when I can work out the year. My wife Ashley, on the other hand, has the complete data for all fifteen at the tip of her tongue, including heights, weights, allergies, and Social Security numbers.

People often wonder about the makeup of our family. Can fifteen really be, well, *fifteen*? At the time this book goes to press, we have eight boys and seven girls. The oldest is twenty-two and the youngest is two. We have one set of twins (age six). And, in fact, we are expecting number sixteen, due shortly after the release of this book. It's a girl, which brings the total to eight and eight. Her name is Monica, named after Saint Augustine's mother, the patron saint of mothers. Ashley chose Monica as her patron before she had any kids. One must marvel at that providential choice. To date, we have been blessed with healthy children. It hasn't always been easy. My wife has experienced numerous miscarriages, and I plan on meeting these children at Heaven's Gate upon my arrival.

My wife and I know what a chaotic family life is all about. We know the joys and sorrows, the ups and downs. We know the dangers of technology, the trials and tribulations of friendships, of sports character-building that veers into sports fanaticism. We also know the chronic pressure of financial stress. We know how the same family can go from laughter to fighting in seconds. We've seen broken bones and broken hearts. We know what it's like to demand an apology from a child and what it feels like to apologize to a child. We know babies, toddlers, small children, middle schoolers, teenagers, and now, adult kids. We even have two grandchildren on the way, one of which will be older than her own Aunt Monica. No parent can experience everything, but we have experienced a lot.

We know how blessed we are to have these children. We are so proud of our children. But we also scratch our heads and wonder why we haven't

done a better job in certain ways, or why we let the stress get to us at different times. We are happy. We are also remorseful. Why didn't we do better? Every child came along and reminded us that there is always room for improvement. We hope to be better tomorrow than we are today.

In addition to being the father of fifteen, I am also the CEO of multiple businesses. This wasn't always the case. As the first five or six kids arrived, a level of complexity entered our lives that we'd never known before. At that time, I was a young lawyer with a master's degree in philosophy. My first book was titled *If Aristotle's Kid Had an iPod: Ancient Wisdom for Modern Parents*. Its theme is what Aristotle can teach us about raising kids in the digital age. I mention this because I've always had a drive to get to the essence of an issue and to connect seemingly unconnected dots. For a mind of my particular bent, joining ancient Greek philosophy with modern attitudes toward smart phones and social media seemed natural.

I did not become a professional philosopher or remain a lawyer for very long.

Despite never taking a business class in my life, I eventually entered the business world. This is a story in itself, but suffice it to say I felt very unprepared for my new calling! In a frantic attempt to figure out what I was doing, I read approximately 250 business books (yes, I tried to count them one day). Read enough books on business methods and philosophy and you notice certain underlying principles recurring again and again. I pulled those principles together and developed what I call "the natural law of business." I use it constantly in my professional life.

So, there I was: a young businessman trying to bring order and clarity to business operations at work, and my wife was trying to bring order and clarity to our home. I noticed that our labors were not all that different (though hers was more important, more exhausting, and more rewarding). When I came home at night, I was excited about what I'd done during the day. Those principles of business were slowly but surely working!

I began to apply my business knowledge to the day-to-day running of the family. Doing so seemed a natural extension of my day. There were clear similarities and analogous situations. Why not give my natural laws of business a try?

I did, and they worked.

There was no bolt from the blue. It was the slow and steady accumulation of small successes that told the tale.

Today, I oversee multiple businesses. One way to think about a business is to picture a well-oiled machine. If you don't create order in your thoughts, actions, and communications, you will go out of business. The "check engine" light flashes on. Left unattended, the machine breaks. It's the same with a business. No order, no system or means to check it, means no commerce. The money stops flowing. One thing about us humans is that we pay *very* close attention when a sack of gold is on the line.

Now, fifteen children in, I am completely convinced that the principles of managing a well-ordered business apply to managing a well-ordered family. I'm not only going to prove it to you, I'm going to show you how to do it.

There are so many resources to help create a well-ordered business. But no one I'm aware of has taken the time to apply this knowledge to family life.

Here is the first "natural law of business": In its essence, business is the act of getting a group of people to work toward a shared vision.

Guess what a family is! It's a group of people working toward a shared vision, or at least it should be.

All too often, the executive at work focuses on getting his marketing department to communicate better with his finance department . . . and then goes home exhausted and does nothing to improve communication between his spouse and teenager. So often, people choose a job because of *company* culture but do little at home to make improvements to *family* culture. Seen from a distance, such a situation is not only messed up, it's nigh-on *immoral*. But here in the everyday fray, we are flawed, sinful human beings who—totally against our wishes, and contrary to everything we hold dear—perform better at work than we do at home. It feels crazy. It is *wrong*.

It is time for this to change.

We must be our very best with our families. Most of us feel called by God and conscience to be our best at home. But how? It may sound counterintuitive, but the business tools of corporate success can help us.

In The Well-Ordered Family Management System™, I provide a six-part process to reclaim order and clarity in your family life. I begin with vision

for a few reasons. First, I believe there is great benefit to beginning with the end in mind. For this reason, vision becomes a foundation for the other five parts in the Family Management System™. Secondly, I have been asked what is lacking most in the modern American family in regards to my six-part system. My answer is vision. Families are spinning their wheels in part because they don't have a clear idea of where they want to go. And thus, I begin with vision.

It is important, however, for me to make something crystal clear: you do not have to work through these six parts in the sequence that I have set forth. I recognize that beginning with vision might be overly philosophical right now. If you want to focus right now on getting your family on the same page for this upcoming week, feel free to jump to part two on unity in which I discuss family meetings. If you feel the need to get control of screen time and cell phones immediately, consider part three on systems. If the idea of a family scorecard really piques your interest, you can begin with part four on metrics. Or perhaps you are suffering from deep conflict with a teenager or spouse. There are a few tools in part five on relationships that might give you some clarity in the next five minutes. What if you are on the verge of making a major decision such as buying a new car or taking a new job? Part six on discernment might be the perfect place for you to focus right now.

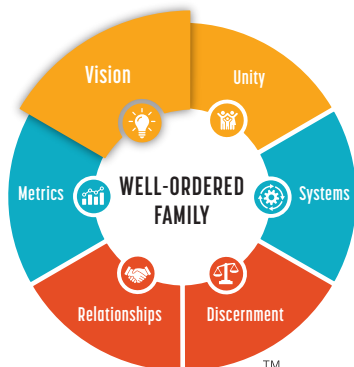
I have designed the Family Management System™ to be dynamic. Your family is different than mine. Your stressors are different than mine. Your family's strengths are different than my family's strengths. So, move at your own pace and your own sequence. And yet, I firmly believe that all six parts are steeped in the natural law that governs your family's well-being.

Most of us, however, have little time to master complex systems before seeing results. The demands of work and family come at us like water gushing from a fire hydrant. We need help! The philosophy can wait.

With this in mind, I've provided more than twenty-five tools to help you implement this family management system. A tool is a worksheet that makes the work a little easier. You might find only one or two of these tools effective for your family. No problem! My goal is to help you and your family get going in the right direction. Remember another of the natural laws of business: it's much better to do a few things well than to do many things poorly.

The goal is not order in itself, but a vibrant, meaningful family life. Businesses thrive on order, accountability, and vision. So can your family. I will show you how.

Here is a quick overview of the six parts of The Well-Ordered Family Management System™. You can use this overview to decide where you want to begin.



PART 1: VISION

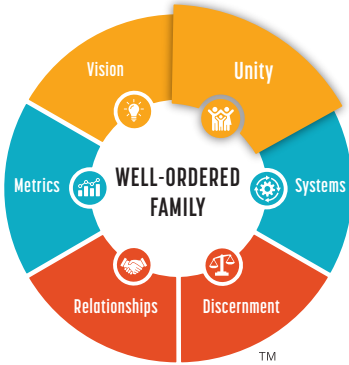
Order and clarity begin with vision. Every business, every athletic team, and every significant achievement begins with having a crystal-clear vision of where you want to go. I will help you create your very own master plan using The Family Master Plan™.

Tools included:

- ◆ The Family Master Plan™
- ◆ The Family SWOT™
- ◆ The Family Vision+ Statement Builder™

Shape your vision.

- ◆ Craft your Family Vision+ Statement
- ◆ Perform a SWOT Analysis
- ◆ Discover your Core Virtues
- ◆ Choose a Family Patron, a Family Motto, and a Family Beatitude
- ◆ Envision a Ten-Year Family Portrait
- ◆ Target Three-Year Household Goals



PART 2: UNITY

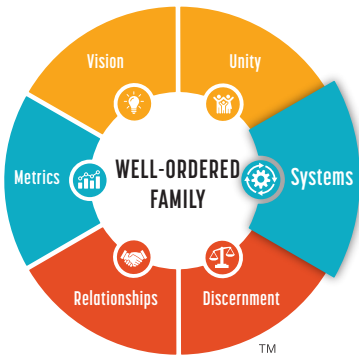
It has been said that one percent of success is due to vision, but 99 percent of success comes with alignment around that vision. We call this unity. Nothing is more powerful in this world than a united family. In this part, we'll show you how to have family meetings to stay united around your vision.

Tools included:

- ◆ The Family Meeting Cadence Master List™
- ◆ Sample agendas for each family meeting

Learn to lead.

- ◆ The Weekly Marriage Check-In™
- ◆ The Weekly Family Huddle™
- ◆ The Quarterly Family Meeting™
- ◆ The Annual Family Council™



PART 3: SYSTEMS

This is the engine that drives family dynamics. Everything in life fits into a system, even if it is a really bad system. Families run on systems. In business, we break down systems into macrosystems (environments) and microsystems (processes). Families can do this, too.

Processes are those day-to-day routines that keep things running smoothly and bring a sense of peace into your home.

Tools included:

- ◆ The KFP Finalizer™
- ◆ The Digital Policy Builder™

Customize your essential family processes for order and clarity.

- ◆ Discover your KFPs (Key Family Processes)
- ◆ Use our numerous sample processes to customize your own Family Digital Policy

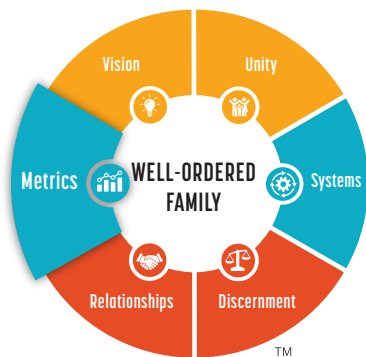
Environments include those large, external factors that shape your world.

Tool included:

- ◆ The Family STRREP Test™

Get a grip on the external forces acting on your family.

- ◆ Social factors
- ◆ Technological factors
- ◆ Religious factors
- ◆ Recreational factors
- ◆ Educational factors
- ◆ Professional factors



PART 4: METRICS

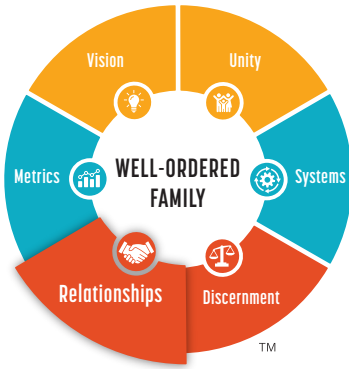
What gets measured gets managed. Great human achievements are usually accompanied with incredible attention to key data points that indicate success and failure. There are a handful of key metrics that your particular family should monitor on a weekly or monthly basis. We will help you discover these.

Tools included:

- ◆ The Family Scorecard Generator™
- ◆ The Family Habit Tracker™

People *respect* what you *inspect*. Learn how to simplify the way you track the most important numbers and activities in your family life.

- ◆ Rank the most important areas in your family life
- ◆ Craft measures of success so that everyone plays with the same scorecard
- ◆ Learn a non-threatening, non-confrontational way of “keeping score”



PART 5: RELATIONSHIPS

If your family has a clear vision, has unity around that vision, manages the macro and micro systems that govern your daily life, and tracks key metrics, your relationships are bound to improve. Nonetheless, relationships are the trickiest part of this mortal life. Each person has a God-given temperament and unique personality. In the corporate world, we

have made great headway in leading people and collaborating with them according to their natural strengths. We ought to do the same with the family.

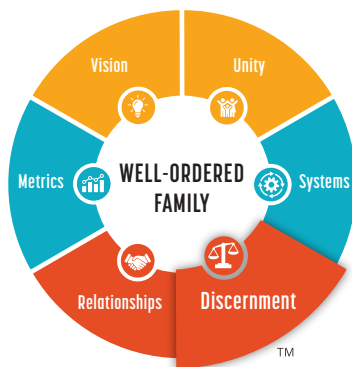
Tools included:

- ◆ The Relationship Maximizer™
- ◆ The Conflict Analyzer™

Do you ever feel like your most important relationships are in a rut? Are you ready to take them to the next level? Break free from the complexity holding you back. Our goal is to clarify your thoughts, emotions, and actions toward loved ones.

Learn your family's key personality traits.

- ◆ Determine which of the four Greek temperaments your family members possess
- ◆ Learn how to speak to and act toward each temperament
- ◆ Discover how to maximize any relationship: your relationship with God, a spouse, a child, a friend, or even an enemy
- ◆ Equip yourself to analyze a conflict immediately after it happens to understand what you and the other person were both thinking and feeling so that you are better prepared to handle the situation as your better self the next time it occurs



PART 6: DISCERNMENT

Every family has urgent and important decisions to make, whether it's what to feed the kids for dinner tonight or whether you should pick up and move to a new town. There's a difference between decision making and problem solving. Decision making has to do with choosing between multiple options, such as which family car to purchase. Problem solving is about figuring out the root cause of an issue.

Decision-making tools included:

- ◆ The Family Focus Box™
- ◆ The Family Pros and Cons List
- ◆ The Family CBA™
- ◆ The Family Decision Matrix™

Discernment is wisdom in action.

- ◆ Prioritize the urgent and important over the not-so-urgent and not-so-important
- ◆ Condition yourself to use the tried-and-true pros and cons list to get the issue out of your head and onto paper
- ◆ Weigh multiple alternatives against each other to find the best option according to your own standards

Problem-solving tools included:

- ◆ The Five Whys
- ◆ The 80/20 Family Optimizer™

To really solve a problem, you have to go beneath the surface and get to the heart of the issue.

- ◆ Get to the root cause of the problem by asking (like a little kid), “Why, why, why . . .”
- ◆ Optimize the vital few activities in your life that give you the vast majority of the benefits and eliminate the few negative things in life that cause most of the problems

There you have it. The six-part family management system. I hope the journey you are about to undertake is rewarding for you and your family. Remember, this *is* a journey. You do not create a well-ordered family in a day any more than you create a well-ordered business in a day. It takes time. It takes continuous improvement. But, my friend, you have far more power over how your family is structured and the good that your family pursues than you might realize.

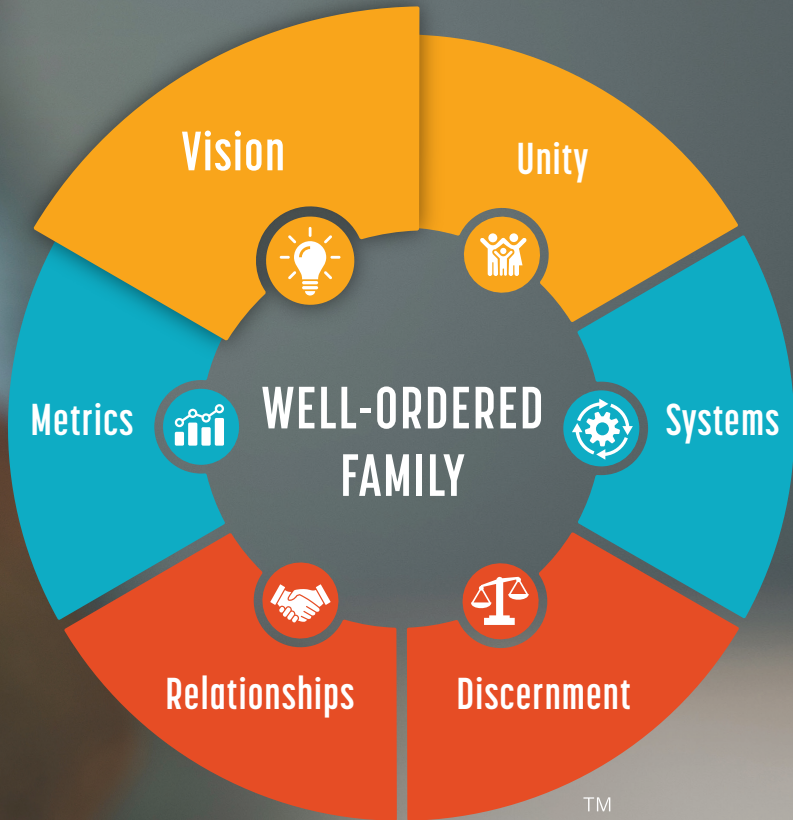
My dad always says, “God may feed the birds, but He don’t put the food in the nest.” That’s his folksy way of saying God will indeed bless you, but He expects you to do all within your power to build the foundation upon which His grace will flow.

By implementing these six principles in your family, you are creating a firm foundation. You may not find complete peace, but you will feel contentment. Most of all, your family will be far better equipped to receive the grace that God has in store for you.



PART - 1

VISION



“The best way to predict the future is to create it.”

–PETER DRUCKER

“The best way to show that a stick is crooked
is not to argue about it or to spend time denouncing it,
but to lay a straight stick alongside it.”

–SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES

C H A P T E R

1

BEING A VISIONARY

QUO VADIS?

There's an old Christian story about Simon Peter, Jesus's righthand man—also infamous as the disciple who cowardly denied his Lord three times before the cock crowed. Years later, Peter—who also happens to be the central leader of the early Christians, the first Pope, and the rock on which Jesus said he would build his Church—journeyed to Rome to minister to the young Christian community tenuously established there.

About this time, the economy and civil order began to go south for Nero, the current Roman emperor. Instead of righting his own ship, Nero cast about for someone to blame and lighted on that odd new religion that denied the Roman gods and ministered even to outcasts and slaves, that is, the early Christians. Thus began a terrible persecution that resulted in many deaths, and great suffering. Christian martyrdom was everywhere. In AD 65, at the height of this jackbooted attack on his flock, Peter decided to flee Rome and the troubles there. Was Peter experiencing a similar cowardice as he did thirty years before

when he denied knowing Jesus three times? Was he being strategic by escaping death in order to continue his evangelization? We will never know. But what happened next seems to imply Peter was straying from his true mission.

Peter was hurrying along the Appian Way, the ancient Roman main road, heading south away from Rome when he suddenly saw the resurrected Jesus heading north toward Rome. Shocked, Peter asked, “*Domine, Quo vadis?*” (Lord, where are you going?) And Jesus answered, “I am going to Rome to be crucified again.”

Well, that stopped Peter in his tracks. If Peter was not willing to face the persecution, then Jesus must do it Himself again? It was like a repeating nightmare! Was Peter to deny his Lord *again*?

The proper question was not “where are You going, Lord?”

The question, as Jesus demonstrated to his errant disciple, was “where are you going, *Peter?*”

Quo vadis?

And Peter knew in his heart there was only one answer. Head back to Rome, and to the persecution and possible death that awaited him there.

Why? Because there are some things more important than life and death. Some things have eternal consequences.

Peter was right about the persecution. Shortly after this scene on the Appian Way, he was crucified. According to the ancient story, he was nailed upon the cross upside down at his own request, for he felt unworthy to die in the same way as his Lord.

Peter turned back and faced the chaos, the evil, the dysfunction because he knew he had the one answer to it all.

Did his answer result in fields of sugar plums and daisies for Peter?

No. The opposite, in fact.

But it did result in fulfillment. Purpose. Eternal reward for Peter. Beyond that, Peter’s decision resulted in the foundation of a church that would one day convert the Roman Empire to Christianity and bring God’s truth to a broken world. Although he didn’t live to see it and possibly never expected it, Peter’s vision would one day become Rome’s vision. Rome would become a Christian Empire. And the rest is history.

This Latin phrase, *Quo vadis*, is a way to ask: What are you doing with

your life? What is your life purpose? What is your vocation? It's a beautifully simple way to create a vision for yourself and your family.

Remember those diagrams of a prism in your old science books from high school? The white light passes through a focal point and from there is split into beautiful, precise bands of color. Think of *Quo vadis* as your focal point, the place where the scatter of your family life can become coherent and, eventually, result in a rainbow.

It all starts with one simple question.

Ask yourself: Where is your family going? Are you just following the crowd? Are you blindly fleeing down the Appian Way of life with no objective in mind? Or will you define your destination with precision?

Every successful business spends hours upon hours honing, refining, and clarifying its vision: what it wants to be, where it wants to go, and why it's worth the effort.

If you were running a business, would you take the time to crystallize a vision? Would you do this to satisfy your customers, motivate your employees, and keep yourself from veering off track? Of course you would.

Why, then, would you not do this with your family? Why would you not do this with the eternal souls within your care?

Quo vadis?

VISION: MORE THAN JUST SEEING

Vision can be a tricky word. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the first definition of vision is *the state of being able to see*. But it's the second definition where vision starts to get interesting: *the ability to think about the future with imagination or wisdom*.

Vision is the *why*. Why are you doing what you are doing? Why do you have faith? Why did you marry your spouse, take that job, have those kids? It is the *why* for the small things as well. Why do your kids play soccer or have cell phones? Why did you buy that car or make that charitable contribution? Why, why, why . . .

The more refined your vision is, the better you can make those important decisions *and* the small but urgent ones as well. With a proper vision, things fall into place.

THE VISIONARY

A third definition for vision is the most interesting: *an experience of seeing someone or something in a dream or trance, or as a supernatural apparition.* There is a mystical quality about it because you are looking to the future. You are envisioning qualities of your family they don't yet have. A business must envision skills and attributes that it doesn't yet possess. Long-term visions might even foresee technology that doesn't seem possible at the moment.

Every vision, however, must come from a visionary. That is you. It is your job and no one else's. You can't outsource the vision for your family. If you don't come up with a vision for your family, no one will. Don't see yourself in this role? Too bad. You've got it. Fortunately, you are not alone. I'm going to give you the tools and backup to handle it. We can start by realizing that you don't have to fit into a specific mold. All visionaries are not alike.

They come in many varieties. Moses was a visionary when he foresaw the Promised Land for the Chosen People. Great missionaries have envisioned the conversion of multitudes of people. Great explorers have envisioned distant lands and overcome great obstacles to reach their destinations. The Founding Fathers of the United States envisioned a unique form of government protected by inalienable rights. And most recently, great business visionaries have radically altered our world with technological advancement.

The greatest visionaries often see something that the average mind thinks is completely out of reach. Henry Ford envisioned every American being able to afford a car. Thomas Edison had the seemingly impossible idea of electricity in every household. Ray Kroc thought it was possible to get a burger, fries, and milkshake within seconds of ordering it. And Elon Musk is trying to figure out how to colonize Mars long before the technology exists to accomplish this. It is often the vision that gives birth to ingenuity.

Business is a wonderful place to see vision coming to fruition. But there is no reason why it can't be the same for family. In fact, it's a shame that many of these great corporate visionaries have no vision for their home life. It's an open secret that many famous visionaries had fractured and painful personal lives, with their ex-spouses and children becoming collateral damage in their headlong pursuit of greatness. Too bad they didn't see, or take the time, to apply that native genius to their most important relationships.

It is the job of mothers and fathers to devise clear visions for their families. Behavior that might seem impossible may be exactly what you are called to pursue. There's no rule that says you can't have a family of saints. There's no reason your family can't defy the odds. There's nothing that says your home can't be a place of joy, charity, and prayer. There is no reason that your children can't carry on your vision into future generations. Very often, the biggest hurdle keeping this from happening is a shallow vision that aims far too low, expects far too little, and accepts mediocrity. Imagine if Edison had settled for "good enough" in his laboratory. You'd be reading this book by candlelight.

I remember the first time I thought of myself as the visionary for my family. It was after I had fully embraced the title of "Visionary" at work. I had begun to appreciate it more than CEO because it was a title that gave me direction. CEO makes me an executive, but it doesn't tell me what duties I'm supposed to execute. Visionary does, and yet it gives me wiggle room to craft "vision work" to fit the needs of the different companies I oversee. And while others on my team contribute to the vision every day, I know that a carefully considered and clearly articulated vision for each company is ultimately my responsibility.

In my family life, my wife runs virtually every aspect of the day-to-day activities. For us (with fifteen kids), this includes homeschooling, managing the education that we outsource, paying the bills and keeping up with insurance companies, taking care of all medical issues and doctor appointments (every doctor and nurse thinks my wife has medical training when they speak to her), social activities for the kids, and feeding a ton of people multiple times a day! The list can go on and on. I would be a fool to come home from work and try to take over these areas. And yet, I am not a mere "special helper" for my wife. I am the husband and father. And to be very frank, I struggled mightily for quite some time to figure out the practical implications of this in my own home.

When I realized that I could and should be the Visionary for my family, I felt at peace. In our particular family it is my task to keep the big picture in mind, to ensure that our daily life is working toward our ultimate goals, to lead effective and peaceful discussion when things get off course, to

incorporate our faith into our daily lives, and to inspire my wife and children toward the good, true, and beautiful.

Whether the Visionary role is embraced by one spouse or it's a shared responsibility, the main point is this: you must be intentional about crafting and protecting your family vision. Embrace this role. Take time to consider what it means. I know it can seem overwhelming at first. But imagine the places you can take your family! I guarantee you that the initial temporary discomfort will seem miniscule compared to the payoff on the follow through of your vision. And Well-Ordered Family™ has plenty of helpful tools to get you there.

WORKING ON AND *IN* THE FAMILY

You've probably heard how business leaders must work *on* their business rather than just *in* their business. What does this mean? As a CEO, I can tell you that this is harder than it sounds.

At work, it's common for someone to poke their head in my office and say, "Hey Conor, you got a minute?" It's the most misleading sentence in my professional life.

To be clear, the person isn't intentionally being deceptive. Probably. But you can bet your bottom dollar that whatever it is will certainly not take one minute. It might start an entire hour of discussion, trigger a whole day of work, or create a week's worth of mental effort.

Maybe it's a "little" accounting issue that prevents accurate reports, a technology issue that makes you look silly to customers, or a fragile personnel issue that has to be handled sensitively. "Hey Conor, you got a minute?" signals that I'm about to be pulled into working *in* the business when I would prefer to work *on* the business.

This is precisely why I have a home office. It's very hard to work *on* the business in the middle of all the daily operations. Most visionaries have a secret getaway place: the local library, Starbucks, or the old shed in the backyard repurposed into a home office. The psychologist Carl Jung had an unheated stone mini-castle perched on the edge of a mountain lake.¹

¹ Jung, C. G. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. New York: Vintage books, 1989. P. 223-227.

No matter where it is, you must get away to see the business from a holistic perspective, to see the most important issues, and to make the most important decisions. Working on the business is very much like Robin Williams in *Dead Poets Society* standing on his desk and looking at the classroom from a different angle. He convinces his students to do the same.

I'm not suggesting you get the kids to climb up on the furniture and refer to you only as "O Captain! My Captain!" but you do need to look at your family from a different perspective.

You spend most of your time working *in* the family: paying bills, cooking and cleaning, driving from one event to another, changing diapers, doing dishes and laundry, teaching grammar, teaching math, dealing with teachers, confiscating phones . . . the list never ends.

My house is no different. One of my greatest frustrations is that most conversations with my wife are interrupted by the kids. Usually, we attempt these conversations in the morning before I go to work. And inevitably, as you might imagine with fifteen kids, one kid after another cuts in: the babies pitch a fit, the middle kids need help with school, the teenagers want to discuss which car they are driving, even the adult kids are texting or calling asking for help or advice. And all I want is to have ten minutes to talk with my wife!

Ashley rolls with these interruptions like a pro, partly because she deals with it all day long. But part of me expects (unfairly so) that I should be free from interruptions at home because I am bombarded at the office with, "Hey Conor, got a minute?"

I know I must get away and think about the business. It is no different for family life. Ashley and I must get away and work *on* the family. And if we aren't intentional about this, it will never happen.

But what does working on the family mean? First, it doesn't mean going to dinner and just discussing the most recent logistics of family life. It isn't just talking about the kids when the kids aren't around. And it's not just making soft complaints about the list of things to do around the house.

Working *on* your family means discussing your long-term vision, checking how the core virtues are holding up, exploring ways to deepen your faith, monitoring the environments (macrosystems) through which your kids are

maneuvering and coming up with ways to improve the daily processes (microsystems), updating the metrics by which you judge your success and hold each other accountable, examining the important relationship dynamics in the family, and discerning urgent and important issues.

I know this can seem like a lot at first, but with practice, you will learn to recognize when you are working *in* your family versus working *on* your family. The good news is that you don't have to necessarily work harder, just differently. The length or intensity of the conversation isn't the point. What matters most is the mindset you bring. Are you trying to stay one step ahead in the chaos of the day, or are you looking for systematic ways to improve your family life? Staying ahead of the chaos is working *in* the family; looking for a better system is working *on* it.

Well-Ordered Family™ is here to help you work *on* your family as simply as possible.