**Preface**

January 16, 1994 was a damp and blustery day in Houston Texas as crowds gather for the 24th running of the Chevron Houston Marathon. Julie Cardell had been dedicated to training for months with a couple of friends to run her first marathon. Her parents, Sara and Kent Cardell, had traveled from San Antonio to cheer her on. I was planning to meet her parents for breakfast and navigate around the closed streets to join other friends and family at a house along the marathon course to cheer Julie on. I had met Julie while attending Baylor University and we reunited a few years later at Houston’s Second Baptist Church. We had been dating two years and I looked forward to seeing her parents again. While visiting over breakfast Julie’s mother showed me small paddle shaped signs that she made saying, “Go Julie!” I smiled and told them I had also made a sign. I said, “It is four feet tall and about twenty feet long.” After a brief pause, her father said “Well, what does it say?” I replied, “Well that is what I wanted to talk to you about today. It says, ‘Marry Me Julie!?!’” And that is where our adventure begins.

 Julie’s dad grew up in Detroit, Michigan and her mom grew up in Falls Church, Virginia. They began dating during college while attending Michigan State University. They were married after graduation and Kent went to work for Carter’s selling baby clothes. His job brought them to San Antonio, Texas where Kent travelled to sell Carter’s and Sara managed the house with Julie and her sister Debbie and brother David.

My parents, Steve and Carla grew up in Winnetka, Illinois and met at dance class in the 7th grade. After drawing my mother’s dance card, my dad filled out all the remaining slots which began their romance that continued through New Trier High School and onto Miami University of Ohio. They married after graduation and my father began his career selling steel cable for Armco Steel. Armco moved our family many times before we settled in Houston, Texas. My mother managed the household and my sister, Allison, and I were blessed to have parents that loved each other.

You might be thinking this is a fairy tale. Sadly, in most families today, married parents raising their children together is, for the first time, less than the majority. Julie and I were indeed blessed by parents and grandparents that modeled love for each other, committed to lead our families in the church, and provide the stability and education to put us in a position to prosper. A strong family unit is the foundation for every civilization. As we looked toward raising a family of our own in the 90’s and even more so now over two decades later, the world has changed. According to the Pew Research Center, only 46% of children are living with two parents in their first marriage. 26% of children are living with a single parent and 40% of births are to unmarried women. Where are all the dads?

Today men and the family are in a crisis. Men represent 75% of the suicides in our nation and substance abuse is predominantly a male problem. The #MeToo movement has exposed widespread harassment and abuse by men. Women are out earning men and getting 60% of the higher education degrees required for success in today’s economy. TV and commercials make dads out to be incompetent and out of touch buffoons. Think *Al Bundy and Homer Simpson.* Is there any wonder why men have abandoned fatherhood? Is there any wonder why men struggle to commit to marriage?

Julie and I have now raised and graduated three children from our home. I began writing this book in 2004 when our sons Drew and Ben were 7 and 5, and our daughter Summer was 3 as a plan for how I wanted to raise my family. Upon encouragement by friends, I published the first version of this book in 2012 while in mid-stream of raising our family to share with other families. Many of the concepts and ideas that I planned had not been executed. Many parenting experiences were yet to be lived. After completing the journey of birthing, growing and launching our children I can now fill in some of the blanks. I stayed true to my plan and have left most of the chapters as originally written except to add further illustrations and include some discussion questions to help you in thinking and planning for your family.

This book was never intended to be a “one size fits all” plan for all families. It is a simple plan that I put together based on my training and experience in planning for business that I think many moms and dads working in the secular workplace can relate. The plan was grounded in scripture and used in my own family but is written to serve as an encouragement and catalyst for you to develop your own “vision” and “mission statement” for your family. It is written to stimulate ideas and discussion of “core values” or core beliefs that you wish to train your children. It is my prayer that our experiences may encourage, bless and inspire you to lead your family to be the next generation that will carry the Christian faith, build strong families, and change our nation and the world for His glory.

**Planning for Success**

*“These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children.”* Deuteronomy 6:6

On a Thanksgiving break in 2004 we were visiting my in-laws in San Antonio, Texas. At 38 years old, father of three, active in the church and community, and president of a regional manufacturing company, I rarely got a chance to catch my breath. I actually found myself in a comfortable chair beside the pool with time to daydream. Visiting my in-laws is always peaceful. I was away from work and an endless list of errands and tasks that itch at our family when we have down time at home. On this day my wife Julie, her sister and her mother were occupied in the kitchen, cooking and talking. The kids played outside in the yard, offering a rare moment to reflect. I thought about my business - how the year was coming together and what the prospects looked like for the coming year. In 2003 I had accepted the responsibility to lead a 70-year-old struggling manufacturing business that needed direction, leadership and energy to rebuild after the loss of their largest customer of 30 years. The owner and principal executive was in his upper 70s when I took over the business. Earlier in my career I worked for a Nasdaq public company where I led the rebuilding efforts of a small division that manufactured specialty graphic products, labels and nameplates for large computer and telecommunication companies. Following that position I led the turnaround for a privately held service company providing contract labor to a variety of industries. In these jobs I was fortunate to have some great mentors and coaches who helped me learn the process for planning and leading the rebuilding of businesses. In my role at the manufacturing company, I had been running very hard to get the business moving again. I began thinking about the vision, mission and core values that we had put in place to provide a picture of where we wanted to go, a plan to get there and boundaries and beliefs that would guide our daily decisions. As I thought about my business and considered priorities, I began to think, “Why do I not apply the same discipline, energy and proven tactics of leading a successful business organization to my highest priority, my family?”

It was a question I knew I needed to give more time to consider. What immediately came to mind is that many of us invest the better part of our days and capacity of our minds reaching the hopes and dreams we envision for our business. But we have a higher calling and should have greater dreams for our families.

I have always had a picture in my mind of what a successful family would look like. Julie and I have discussed long and short-term goals for our family. We have set priorities and have planned various activities. We have sent our kids to a private Christian school where professional educators plan outstanding curriculums and train our children. These educators provide measurements on the progress of our children in the forms of progress reports, report cards and standardized testing. Was all of this enough to realize the vision of successfully raising our children? Julie and I saw the difference between the small steps we had taken to set goals and implement what mattered most to our family. But we also saw the huge influence that educators could have on our children in setting the stage for what they believed and how they carried themselves into their friendships and other non-classroom moments at school. It is said that if we fail to plan then we are planning to fail. None of us want to fail at parenthood, our highest calling. We invest our time and income in buying clothes, decorating rooms, paying for lessons and activities, investing in education, toys and hobbies for our children. We devote ourselves and our energy into our children. Why would we not invest the time it takes to put our hopes, dreams, goals and aspirations for our families into a written plan? Why would we not use a similar strategy that successful businesses have used to create a successful family model where each member of the family knows what he believes and how that guides their decision-making and actions? Have we established guiding principles, goals and measurements to monitor our family’s progress? We practice these principals in our jobs and see the results of good planning and goal setting. Why would we not put in writing and commit to live from the values that we hold dear and want our children to follow? Quite simply, why don’t we put as much planning to build our families as we do our businesses?

This is not a new idea. But you rarely hear about it – if ever – in Christian circles. Why is that? Scripture tells us in Deuteronomy 6:9 to write God’s truths on our door posts and to speak of them to our children in all our daily activities. This is our great responsibility. Most of us spend so much time on our professional lives trying to make money, please our bosses and gain recognition. These efforts certainly are rewarding but are secondary to the responsibility of raising godly children. As Christians, we have been given the greatest gift to raise children and teach them to respect their Creator and us, their God-given parents. We have accepted a great responsibility to train our children to know God’s love and to reflect His love and His glory to each other, our family, their friends and anyone they come in contact with.

We know that each day we are given multiple opportunities to choose well and make a difference in the ups and downs of life. Life is an adventure. We can certainly meander along, hoping that the river of life will carry us somewhere safe and successful. Or we can grab a paddle, plot our course, live to higher standards and accomplish greater goals that God is preparing us for and calling us to.

I believe that this course starts with being intentional with your children. We have had success through our church in getting our kids involved in a ministry that they can relate to and are interested in, which I understand from others is key to introducing your children to live out the mission of serving. We have two sons, Drew and Ben that are 21 months apart and a daughter, Summer, who is 2 years younger. At the time our oldest son Drew was 13 and was involved in a puppet ministry in our church with several of his friends. Every Sunday they participate in the GIGL (Growing In God’s Love) ministry to grade school kids. They performed skits each Sunday as part of the children’s worship and teaching. They also to participated with the adults for a very well-done Christmas puppet musical program where they perform 20 or more shows between Thanksgiving and Christmas to thousands of kids, parents and grandparents. Our middle son, Ben is great with little kids. He also served in the GIGL program and helped the 4-year-old kids with crafts in their Sunday School class.

Our friends John and Shirley Meredith have two sons and have engaged them with an “at risk” school in Houston that has a mentoring program. For many years their family has mentored a young boy who was the same age as their two sons. He would spend many weekends with the family. Their sons understood that he is as a brother and is a welcome part of the family. He went on family vacations and shared in nearly every aspect of their family. This experience and particularly the extended time together, taught their kids to share their stuff and gave them a broader perspective of life and the blessings they share. There are so many simple and convenient ways to be intentional in teaching our kids’ service to others. Our church has a ministry to the local food banks where our bible study class goes to a grocery store and politely provides lists of needs for the local food bank to people entering the stores. The patrons do their normal shopping and can pick one or many items off the list of needs and drop them off in our collection bins on the way out. It has provided an easy and convenient way for our family to provide a great service to the food bank and is a simple project to involve the kids. We typically break the schedule into shifts so our entire family can do the service project in a one-hour shift. I bet that your church in your area or a community outreach ministry provides many opportunities for your family to serve where kids are interested and can relate and experience the fulfillment of serving others. I encourage you to get involved in something like this so that your children begin to see the importance and value of offering their time, energy, and heart to others. As they see you serve, they will begin to develop a heart to serve. After all, we know that what kids see modeled before them is what they tend to do and who they become.

**Planning for success**

So how do we “grab a paddle,” lead our families in the stream where God is working and accomplish great things for Him (rather than for just ourselves or our family)? There are many successful businesses that plan from year to year and quarter to quarter and have not written down their vision, mission and core values. Likewise, there are many successful families that live year to year and have not put into writing their visions and guiding principles for their families. I am not trying to discredit these successful companies and successful families but to challenge you to make the investment in a disciplined approach - to put in writing the hopes and dreams you have for your family and the core beliefs that you hold sacred and want to pass on to your children.

Statistics, whether you place much stock in them or not, show that businesses are much more likely to be top performers when they establish a written vision. I believe that we will be better leaders in our families and be more likely to reach the goals we establish and stay within the boundaries we set if we follow this course.

There is competition for our hearts and minds and for the hearts and minds of our kids. We are all challenged with so many activities and daily chores that take our attention. Our children are bombarded with messages from their peers, teachers, television, games, and a host of other forms of attention-grabbing means in their lives. The core beliefs of our families are under severe attack. The culture and media represented by select decision makers and influencers are always imparting their beliefs and value systems on our families. By investing a small amount of time putting into writing the things you hope your family will become as well as the core beliefs you hope to impart to your children, you will make these concepts an accessible and important part of your daily decision making – and your kids as well.

When this concept first propelled me to take action during that Thanksgiving break in 2004, I put together a one-page letter that stated what I believed to be our family’s vision, mission and core values. I began to use them as a reference when instructing our kids and periodically looking at our choices and activities to make sure they were in line with our core values.

As friends noticed these statements on our refrigerator and asked for a copy, I was encouraged to expand the statements into a book about how to incorporate your core values into daily family life. I never considered myself a writer but found it easy to write what was on my heart for my own family and also create a tool for others to be able to embrace the same concepts. I’ve been attracted to discipline and structure for as long as I can remember and during the process of starting this book, I learned about an education and training project targeted to Christians put on by Focus on the Family. The *Truth Project* teaches and helps Christians understand what the Bible says about every area of human existence and is a starting point for looking at life from a biblical perspective. I realized that what attracted me to the *Truth Project* was the systematic and disciplined study to understand and articulate what we, as Christians, believe. And once we contemplate, understand and believe the truths of the bible, we will be changed forever. They offer a statement to consider “If we really believe that what we believe is really real, it should have a profound impact on our faith, perspective on the world, and impact the choices we make in every area of our life. I found myself attracted to this program because of the similarity to my efforts to create and teach a simplified version of that for my family in the form of Core Values. To some, this disciplined and structured approach to leading your family may be of absolutely no interest. However, if you are wired like me, this is the stuff that energizes me. The goal of the training was to train leaders to lead 13-week programs in their homes. When I heard about the program, I felt strongly that I had to attend and prayed that I would be receptive to hear and act on the message God may be trying to communicate to me. The material was fantastic, and I was receptive to this goal, but really felt God leading me to another action.

On the second day of the training, I felt that I was being led to finish this book to help moms and dads develop their own vision, mission and core values for their families. May I mention that I was a C student in English and the thought of really writing a book was never on my radar. However, I left the training committed to being obedient to finish this book to give parents a tool to help them lead their families to know what they believe and hold as uncompromising principles for guiding life decisions and activities.

In this book I will share tools of how to develop your personal vision, mission and core values for your family. I have provided formats and examples of the plan that we have put to use in our family so that you can consider and use them as you seek to organize and lead your family. It is my hope that you will be inspired to consider your family’s deepest values, to establish guidelines, boundaries to live within, and that this will provide a way for you to measure your progress and to be a family that is recognizably different in your community.