

A 10 MINUTE GUIDE TO INAUGURATE A VISION DAY YOUR FAMILY WILL WANT TO REPEAT YEAR AFTER YEAR

By [Gary Morland](#), dad to [The Nester](#) and [Emily Freeman](#)



Above is an example of the fun you can have on a family vision day.

Okay, he's not one of us, but we did snap this at a mall on one of our vision days. We think he lost a bet. See what your family has to look forward to?

What is a family vision day?

“A happy family is but an earlier heaven.” – George Bernard Shaw

I think the first time was ten years ago.

The Nester, Chad, Emily, John, Brenda, and I spent a day together (was it two days?) eating, laughing, and talking about our goals for the next year. A mom and dad, two grown daughters and their husbands.

Probably one of those Costco chocolate mousse-filled slab cakes was invited, too. Kids were with other relatives. We were at one of our homes.

I don't remember much, but I do remember this: a magical solemn silence filled the living room for each of our turns sharing goals. The silence was from the attention we gave each other. When it's your turn to share, that silence is intimidating. You feel each person's investment in hearing you. What a gift. It's like that every year.

A family vision day is like a Super Bowl Party without the football

You invest time together as a family to better know and encourage each other and to think about the future. Your family is the football game.

The party is the stuff you do that's fun and enjoyable to your family. It can be big or little.

The party and the game are both important. But the game is the reason for the party.

Your day won't be like ours. Yours will be like yours.

Last year we got together in the youth room at church for three hours. Usually it's at a home. A few times we've done entire weekends, going out to eat, shopping, to a movie. Every year is different.

However, one thing stays the same. We invest a few hours listening to each person share how they feel about the last year, and we share our goals, hopes, and dreams for the coming year.

We try to hear each other's heart.

We take our time.

Usually each of us brings written goals for the year, but not always.

We try to encourage and appreciate each other, have fun, and be purposeful.

You can do it

Find a way, some time, to get together.

Picture life as a journey. Picture you and your family on that journey.

It's helpful to think purposefully about learning where your family and each person is on this journey.

ENJOY YOUR TIME TOGETHER.

If you do not enjoy your time together, you have failed. No one will want to do it anymore.

That's the basics.

The rest of this shares how WE approach the idea of a vision day, although we've never said any of this out loud to each other. And at the end is a brief outline to help you start your own. But first, here's six ways it's made a difference to us:

Six ways family vision days have shaped our family's destiny and legacy:

ONE - We know each other better. Because of that, we care more about each other.

TWO – We have grown to see that God has created us each uniquely and for a purpose. We're now more sensitive to him and to that purpose so that we might cooperate with him.

THREE - We root for each other. We want to help each other with God's unique design and purpose for each of us.

FOUR - Thinking about the future has become normal for us.

FIVE - We're closer as a family. We can't help it since we know each other better.

SIX - As the kids grow up they'll think it's normal to think about who they are, who their family is, what God is doing, and about the future.

Picture you and your family on a life journey

"You can kiss your family and friends good-bye and put miles between you, but at the same time you carry them with you in your heart, your mind, your stomach, because you do not just live in a world but a world lives in you." – Frederick Buechner

You don't have to do this part, but over time it can lead to good things:

Think of your family as far back as you know.

Think of your great grandparents. Your grandparents. Your parents. Think of their story.

This happened. Then that. They did this. They thought this. And then, and then, and then. That's story. Ups and downs.

Brokenness. Healing (or not). Wealth. Poverty. Addiction. Abandonment. Fame. Generosity. Humility. Violence. Shame. Godliness. Grace. Tragedy. All part of the story.

Now picture the same for you – your story.

Now picture the story for any brothers or sisters or spouses and kids. And the rest of whoever your family is.

Maybe you make this picturing a low-key, enjoyable family reminiscence time before you decide on a vision day.

Your family and each person is unique. The uniqueness is your family story.

Every person and family is on a journey. You get a hint of that journey from who you all are and what's happened so far.

Just thinking about your journey and reflecting can foster appreciation. This is good.

Think purposefully about your family and each person

“The great gift of family life is to be intimately acquainted with people you might never even introduce yourself to, had life not done it for you” – Kendall Hailey

The past and present are hints of the future.

You might picture each person as you think of these words:

“We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” – Ephesians 2.10

I'll bet you want to see that fulfilled for yourself and each family member.

But you don't get a personal certified letter from God defining the works prepared beforehand that you are to walk in.

You only get your experiences, and your wiring, and the past, and God's word and his Spirit.

You get opportunities and you get the future. You and each family member.

You can be sensitive to that if you want to be.

I don't know for sure what God has in mind for our family, but each of us has grown to enjoy cooperating with him and then watching what he does.

It's always good. Often mysterious.

It's easy to get flustered with all the ground-level family drama.

You must go high up sometimes to see the journey and the hints of the works prepared beforehand.

In our family we don't want to steer each other to what one of us thinks they should be or do.

We want to help each one discover what God is doing, and help each other be and do that.

We pay attention.

We ask questions. One of our favorites right now:

“What do you really want?”

Want to be? Want to have? Want to do? Whatever you want.

The first time I asked myself that question, I felt God was waiting for an answer. As if he wanted to see if I was paying attention to what he’d put inside me.

Get in the habit of asking that question for a few years, and you and your family will get in the habit of discovering the answer.

Like [THIS](#) which becomes [THIS](#). And [THIS](#). Just an example.

Find a way to get together

If you already get together regularly, great. Now add a bit of purpose.

Do it anywhere. Dinner table. Family room. Patio. Someone’s whole house. [Bob Goff’s glacier-powered lodge in Canada](#). Ha ha just kidding (as far as you know).

It doesn’t matter where.

It doesn’t matter how long.

Make it fit your family.

If making a big deal out of it – “It’s our vision weekend!” – works for your family, go for it.

Or combine it with some gathering you do anyway.

Or start small and invite family just for this for a couple of hours.

Who is family? Whoever you say.

For us it has been our grown daughters, their spouses, and Brenda and I. For you it might be whatever combination of parents, siblings, kids, grandparents, in-laws, cousins, and kin means family to you.

One way to know what your family is: the ones who would be hurt or mad if they were left out.

If everyone doesn't or can't come, decide with your family what's best to do.

Some may never come. Some may say no, yet feel left out even though *they* said no. Some may want to come but can't.

What would one teeny, encouraging step look like? Can you do that, and then maybe another one later?

No one should feel like this is a make-or-break kind of thing.

Be positive. Patient. Calm.

If you Nazi together a 'meeting' you have failed.

If you argue over this you have failed.

Getting together at all and feeling good about it = success.

Enjoy your time together

"Govern a family as you would cook a small fish – very gently." – Chinese Proverb

Eat food your family loves.

Meet where your family is comfortable.

Do what your family enjoys.

Keep it simple. Reduce opportunity for drama.

Selflessness and generosity are contagious.

One person giving up what they want for someone else creates a little wave.

Several waves can become a rhythm.

A wave might be infrequent but over time become a rhythm.

We think about our goals for several weeks before we get together. Some might write them down weeks ahead. Others write them the night before. Or not at all.

No one says, “You’re not taking this serious enough!” Lord forbid.

Whoever the grownups are (in attitude, not age) should lead in demonstrating selflessness and serving.

The more enjoyable the time, the more people want to do it again. The value of vision days is in the ongoing effect on your family.

Meeting one time and no one has fun or feels encouraged = not success.

You can do it

Adjust your expectations of a family vision day to fit your family. No one knows your family like you.

A family vision *hour* could be a cool start. Or a conversation after dinner.

We’ve done three days. We’ve done three hours.

Be patient. Start small. Relax. Have fun.

Take responsibility for the process, not the results.

The process is not a schedule. The process is how it FEELS to each person.

It should feel good. Each person should feel like the others love and care for them. Lead in loving and caring (NOT in making anyone else love and care).

Encouragement = success.

Here's an outline you could follow for your first family vision day

(As you read through this, somewhere you'll go, "Well, that's stupid, I've got a lot better ideas." That's what's supposed to happen.)

Chat it up

Talk to whoever in your family is most likely to appreciate a vision day or time.

Then those who 'get it' and most want to do it, should share the idea with the ones they are closest with.

Decide as a family to do it and choose a date. Goals can be talked about any time of year. You don't have to wait until January or February.

Divide up the roles

Someone, or a team, is in charge of arranging the location.

Someone is in charge of what to do about food. We've done men-do-a-meal, and women-do-a-meal.

Others could be in charge of a game/recreation time, and choosing a theme song (yes, we've done that). Whatever needs to be done, have a person or team in charge.

Just deciding something like what to eat, who makes it and who buys it, can be bonding.

Agree on a purpose

Make sure everyone knows the purpose: "We're going to get together and hang out and _____ and _____ and talk about making goals for the year. It'll be fun! It's like a Super Bowl Party and we're the game!"

Keep the goals idea simple

"Just pick a few things that you'd like to change, or accomplish, or learn, or become in the next year, and write them down. It will be neat to share and hear what's important to each of us." Do that in advance.

We don't make little kids part of it. Before the kids were an issue we would do a whole weekend or overnight. These days we do a half-day or a few hours.

Sharing goals is the heart of it. No TV, or texting, or distractions. Don't do the Super Bowl Party stuff during the time you share goals.

You can sit around a table, but we've always flopped in a living room. Pillows, blankets, curled up on sofas.

You might figure fifteen minutes to maybe an hour for each person. Depends on your family and each person.

Don't be a Nazi

Don't make anyone do anything. Sharing is voluntary. Presence trumps participation. You're just glad they're there.

Before each person's turn, maybe you find ways to make that person feel special.

Recently we took turns doing impressions of the 'special' person (done in love! this could be dangerous!). Funny. Easy.

Then we transitioned to describing things we appreciated about that person. Affirming. Encouraging. Easy.

You might have a few family members share and then take a break for some of your 'Super Bowl Party' and then come back again for more of the 'game.'

Keep the real goal in mind: to hear each other's heart

The goal is not the goals. The goal is to get in the habit of sensitivity to how God has made you and your family, and what he has put in your heart.

Hear their hopes and dreams for the future.

You'll learn something you didn't know about someone you love.

Your hearts will begin to go out to each other.

You'll find yourself rooting for each other.

You'll begin to think about your own life more purposefully. "Why *AM* I here?"

Don't force or avoid prayer – make it whatever natural part of your family it already is.

Finish well

Do your best to end your time together positively.

The feeling people go home with might be the biggest influence on whether you do it again.

Desire to do it again = success.

Questions, comments, ideas, advice? I'd love to hear from you:

garysmorlandATgmailDOTcom

Thanks for reading. It gives me great joy to think you've read this far.

Gary