

Foreword

Karen (my wife) and I are in a wonderful season of life. We have four grown children and as of this writing we have seven grandchildren. Three of our children are in vocational ministry and in a few months our youngest daughter will be a physician. They love Jesus and they love serving Him by serving others.

Recently our oldest son, Bryan, and I were sharing a speaking engagement at a conference in the northeast. Bryan is the Lead Pastor of a church in Memphis, TN. Those who were responsible for the program wanted us to talk about how to influence “the next generation” with a passion for Christ and a Christian worldview and they wanted us to do so against the backdrop of our relationship as father and son. So we did.

When Bryan was speaking I had a flashback. My mind journeyed back to when he and his brother and two sisters were very young and because of the nature of my ministry I had to travel a great deal. I remembered the many nights I would wake up in a motel or hotel and slip to my knees in prayer, crying out to God, pleading that my children would not grow-up despising the ministry and resentful of Karen and me because of the sacrifices they made. But I also thought about Karen and because of her deep commitment to Christ and mutual calling to ministry she shared with me, she had a powerful and positive influence on our children’s view and perspective of ministry.

Again, while Bryan was speaking it hit me that the sense of mission that he has is not borrowed but it is his. He owns it himself. I remembered the times he traveled with me and not just sat and listened to me speak but saw people’s lives changed by the power and the hope of the gospel. We encouraged him, as well as his brother and sisters, to take short-term missions trips and to love and serve others. And they did. I thought about how we as a family would pray for the needs of people we knew and also how we would reach out and serve them. Somewhere in the middle of all of this a transfer was taking place. Exposure became experience which in turn became a compelling sense of mission.

Mission and purpose in life is not theoretical. There is something to that old line that the most meaningful lessons in life tend to be “caught rather than taught”. Karen and I have made many mistakes as parents. I am so glad that God is gracious and merciful. But early on in our child-rearing years we were both sobered by and became committed to the realization that, by God’s grace, we needed to be the visible portrait of the destination at which we wanted our children to arrive. That meant cutting back on the “lectures” about purpose and mission and pouring ourselves into living a life of mission. It also meant giving them experiences that would whet their appetites to pursue lives that would matter and count for eternity.

This is the reason why I am thrilled with *Mission as Life*. Randy Wallace has given us an invaluable gift. I love the way in which he positions mission as core to our responsibility as Christian parents. It is a practical guide to not only knowing what mission is but also how to create a compelling environment to keep in front of us what matters most. What a wonderful resource and framework to help influence and shape future generations! My only regret is that Karen and I did not have something like this thirty-five years ago.

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Introduction

Of all the things my wife and I have done in life, of all the things we have accomplished, the most important of all those has been to be godly mates and parents. Our greatest accomplishment and contribution to society has been to raise our children to love and follow Jesus. We took this so seriously that we refused to relinquish our responsibility to the church or any other institution. We saw it as our holy calling.

We understood that our job was not to reproduce American citizens, or to train our children to conform to suburban or upper class ideas of what is proper and good. Our job was to instill in our children a deep love for God and to demonstrate that love by loving their neighbor as they love themselves. We knew this would create conflict with the values of the greater society. We also knew that aligning our life with the eternal purposes of God would bring the very power of God Himself into our family. Our emphasis on loving Christ and following Him completely took our lives in many interesting directions and we endured many challenges. Our life was a spiritual adventure. When I talk to our children now, they look back with warmth and affection at those times. Our authentic living, our launching out in faith, our desire to serve the marginalized in society and the sacrifice we made to do so placed God on display to our sons. They prayed through trials with us and saw answers to prayer. They prayed for people we were ministering to and saw answers to prayer. They took upon themselves the burden of reaching friends for Christ and saw prayers answered and lives changed. Their identities were forged in a loving, serving environment. As men, they now do the same with their families.

This book explores one aspect of how to make your Christian life authentic and attractive. It helps you discover that God has a plan for your family. By placing service and mission at the center of family life, you enter into a relationship with God that shapes values and ambitions for each person in the family. What makes this so different from what you experience at church or in personal study is that it requires a greater level of obedience and sacrifice. It involves refocusing your attention from yourself and your family, to God's love for the world. It emphasizes your responsibility to be His hands and feet, loving people in the world and introducing them to the Father. You and your family learn to actively obey God and allow Him to work through you to accomplish His will in the world.

This book focuses on your affections. It will force you to make choices between your thoughts, plans and ambitions for your life and God's thoughts, plans and ambitions for your life. Consequently it involves allegiances. Do you love Him? Are the things which move the heart of God a focal point in your life? Are you working with God in advancing His Kingdom or are you pursuing your own ambitions? For too long we have been content with a mere academic approach to our life with God, a superficial understanding of what it means to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith in the scriptures involves obedience. Mere mental ascent is an insufficient response to God and His call.

In another way, **this book is about parenting.** It looks at parenting from a macro-view, skipping over the important minutia (which is best covered in other books by other authors). It zeroes in on the responsibility we as parents have to instill in our children a deep obedience to God that governs our every action and aspiration. It places parents center stage as role models and mentors for what it means to follow God with your whole heart.

This book is also about youth. It's about how we tend to underestimate their abilities and overlook their giftedness. It's about how involvement in the real world, the world larger than the artificial one created in age graded education, or in the plastic realm of how youth are

presented in mass media, provides youth with a means to forge their identity through meaningful service. Encountering the pain of others and being able to make a real difference changes you. Confronting injustice and seeing how God can use you and your abilities to break its chains, and observing firsthand the unintended consequences of sin in other's lives accelerates maturation. Amusement gives way to meaningful involvement in the world. Spiritual apathy burns up in spiritual fervor.

This book is about new life direction. Sadly, too many people and families who profess to follow God reflect the values of our society rather than those of the Kingdom of God. It has been shown that those who regularly attend church show no significant difference from those who don't when it comes to how they spend their time, their treasure and their talents. Too often minor ascent is given to the concerns of God and He is seen as more of a heavenly "step and fetch it", someone who exists to make my life comfortable and prosperous, rather than someone who must be obeyed and served. With all the preaching, worship services, special programs, and retreats, somehow the powerful message of the Kingdom of God is co-opted by the American Dream. Truth is parsed into mere factoids; commitment is counterfeited or confused with emotion. Service and servanthood are shackled to the box where "worship" services take place. Too often people react to God's Grand Story as ...*nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice.* *Ezek 33:32 NAS*

Since you are reading this book, you must be one who wants to avoid this parody of Christianity and really begin to live out the teachings of God. It is time to embrace a sense of mission in this world. After Jesus died, just before He ascended into heaven, He sent His followers for all time on a mission. For those who decide to follow Him, there is no option of whether or not to accept the mission. It is part of the call of Jesus to Himself. (Matt. 28:18-20)

He has given us the mission of not only spreading His message, but living out every detail of what He taught and helping others to do the same. We are to advance the Kingdom God and embody its teaching so that we are models to the world. We are to do this until He returns.

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come." Matt. 24:14 NAS

Because the family is the building block of society, I have chosen to look at how families can create an environment where authentic Christianity can flourish. People grow best in a supportive community and families should provide the earliest expression of the community God intended for humankind.

How do you create that nurturing environment where faith thrives? Chapter 1 explores the rationale for having a *Mission as Life* lifestyle. It explores how placing mission at the center, rather than the periphery of life, creates an authentic lifestyle. This lifestyle is not only attractive but fulfilling. Chapter 2 begins to explore how to embed Kingdom values within the daily practices of family life so that faith is nurtured in various ways. It considers how to use the arts in promoting mission vision, transforming holidays into Kingdom celebrations. It examines how to create new family traditions, and the importance of living in a manner which makes you alert to life's numerous teaching moments to deepen you and your family's relationship with God.

Chapter 3 begins a journey, spanning four chapters, into an activist view of the Kingdom of God. An overview of God's original intention for humankind is explored as well as how Satan succeeded in leading humans astray, effectively usurping the Kingdom. It also looks at the plan God puts in motion to not only redeem humankind, but to destroy all the work of the devil in the process. Chapter 4 takes you through the next logical step. If God has a plan and is working it

out, what does it mean to you and your family? What does God expect of you? Chapter 5 examines what God seems to identify as priorities in His Kingdom. What do these priorities of God imply for how we are to live in the world? Chapter 6 emphasizes the role of faith in those who seek to live according to God's Kingdom principles. Faith is viewed as a verb, something each follower of God must exercise in how they make decisions concerning their life and how they will implement their obedience to God's commands. Chapter 7 helps you prepare your family for service, providing guidance in spiritual and cross-cultural preparation. Basic issues such as what to look for in potential service agencies are covered. It also helps provide perspective on what is realistic to expect from your trips.

Chapter 8 provides a summary of some guiding principles gleaned from service. These principles do much to help you and your family maintain proper perspective and navigate the emotional, moral and logistical pitfalls which can arise once you get involved in serving God.

A resource section is provided which lists key books you may want to purchase covering topics like the kingdom of God, poverty, cross-cultural issues, and unreached people groups. There is also a section listing websites which focus on teaching missions to kids.

The goal of this book is to ignite a desire within you to place missions at the center of your life. It's to make it a heartbeat, not a fever followed by a chill. It's to have you and your family make advancing the Kingdom of God a priority in how you use your time, your treasure and your talents. **The longest journey begins with a single step...walk with me.**

About the Author

Randy Wallace received his Biblical education at Trinity College and in addition has a Ph.D. in Organizational Leadership from Regent University. For the past 18 years he has lived and worked in Appalachia doing Christian community development. Part of that involves recruiting some 300+ volunteers annually who serve the needy, elderly and disabled.

He is married to Jacqueline and has two sons who are raising their families in Southern California.