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TARGET PRACTICE

"Until I get there, FOCUS on reading the Scriptures to the church, encouraging the believers, and teaching them."

1 Timothy 4:15 (NLT, emphasis mine)



He squinted as the seconds ticked by, every muscle taut. All went quiet as he steadied the rifle, and his nerves. He aimed, ignoring the beads of sweat forming on his brow... When all was ready, he took his shot! Direct hit!

SQUAWK!!!! The plastic ducky target let out its obnoxious sound.

The scene above actually happened recently in a shooting arcade at the Bass Pro Shop, although it was not nearly this intense, and I think it was a stuffed skunk or raccoon, but that's not the point. My husband was the sharp-shooter, and although we don't own a real gun, it's always a good thing to hit the target, right?

I know what you're thinking: How in Heaven's name does this have anything to do with Children's Ministry? Well, here it is: Every church, every ministry needs a focus, a target if you will. Without a statement of purpose and clear vision, ministries can get bogged down and disorganized... a frustrating mess!

The early church was a well-oiled machine. People who were in need had their needs met, and there was peace and harmony. Their purpose was simple and clear: *To know Christ and make Him known to the world.* They had their target smack-dab in the middle of the CROSS-hairs (pun intended). All this without email, Facebook, or Twitter. Who knew?

These days, most churches have some little catch phrase, such as "Rooted in the Word, reaching for the world," or "Life transformation through following Christ." In my youth I thought these phrases were merely advertising; some kind of pithy slogan to attract people to the church. But these so-called "slogans" can have a much deeper meaning and impact. Often, along with the catchy slogan, there are words with a more purposeful, targeted meaning: "A worshipping congregation, a healing community, an equipping center, and a mission fellowship." From these phrases, programs are developed that target the church's purpose.

I've recently come to understand the need for a clearly outlined Purpose, Mission, Vision, and Goal within ministry. Never having been much of a goal-setter, I used to just work my hardest, do my best and hope the result was good. But at my first evaluation meeting for my job at church, they asked questions about my goals, challenges and achievements through the year. After I sat with the deer-in-the-headlights look for a moment, I realized the need to look at my ministry in measurable terms, and set goals for the future year. Without a focused purpose, I had been flailing in the dark without any way of knowing if I had succeeded at anything. I needed a Purpose, a Mission, a Vision and a Goal: Purpose being a reason for existing, Mission being the game plan for what to do, Vision being what the ministry would look like when it was established, and Goal, the target, a measuring tool to see how well the ministry worked. It all suddenly became tangible... and more manageable.

Recently, I had a vision for a Community Christian Children's Choir, combining the voices of kids from three churches in our town. When I approached our Children's pastor with my vision, he did a very wise thing: he asked me how this idea fit into our church's vision of "worship, community and ministry." After talking through it, we concluded that such a program would accomplish all three goals, and we are going forward with a plan and a purpose. I don't know that I would have fared as well introducing the idea of a Community Christian Bagpipe Band, as that probably would not fit the church's vision, let alone that I don't play the bagpipe.

Sure it's a goofy example, but if all ministry programs are measured against the yardstick of an established purpose, time and resources are better spent. As you pray through the ministries you have in place, some may need to be discontinued to make way for ones which have a better aim at your "target." It may be a little difficult at first, and you may come up against some resistance, but when the smoke clears, your children's ministry will be better focused and more effective. And the bottom line is always training up our kids to know and love Christ, and to lead others to Him. Bull's-eye.

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