



Writing a Life Mission Statement

by Patrick Morley

Adapted from Second Wind for the Second Half (Zondervan Publishers, 1999)

How many of us can say, "I've been a fool. I've been living out a role that others have scripted for me, a role that doesn't celebrate or showcase my talents and gifts. This is not the real me."

Virtually every man reaches a point at which he realizes he has spent 10, 15, 20, or more years "playing a role" that he thought would make other people happy or get him where he wanted to go.

In this exercise I want to walk you through a "method" or "process" for making things more clear for the rest of the journey. The goal is to equip you to write or rewrite a "Life Mission Statement." It's a process by which you can clarify the new dream, cause, or task you've been thinking about. Generally, the areas to cover in a "Life Mission Statement" can include, but need not be limited to the following . . .

- An Audit of "Your Life So Far"
- A Life Purpose - Why You Exist
- A Calling - What You Do
- A Vision - A Mental Picture of What You Want To Happen
- A Mission - How You Will Go About It

AN AUDIT OF "YOUR LIFE SO FAR"

In the space provided below I'm going to ask you to reflect on "your life so far." It's a sort of first half audit. Since writing makes a more precise person, it is doubly good to write this understanding on paper. You can write anything you want - as detailed or general as you wish. However, here are the types of things I would like you to reflect upon as you paint with words the portrait of your life so far . . .

- Your overall satisfaction
- Milestones
- Major goals and dreams, met and unmet
- Significant achievements and satisfying results
- Priorities, right and wrong
- Failures, sins, regrets and lessons learned
- Fears, doubts, and pressures for the past, present, and future
- Be balanced. Don't beat yourself up. Be humble, but don't sell yourself short.

Use the 80-20 rule - 80% of the space for positive reflections and 20% for improvement areas. Use as much imagination as you want, or you can follow the flow of the guideline above. Okay, it's time to go to work. In the space provided below, assess the current situation of your life (use extra paper if you need more space).

First Half Audit

A LIFE PURPOSE - WHY YOU EXIST

A Life Purpose can cover any time horizon, but it's generally long term - ten years or more. It reflects your understanding of what God wants for your life to at both the highest and the most basic levels. It is both the very reason and the ultimate reason you draw breath. It may focus on "being" or "doing" or both. From my perspective, though, I don't think we can do what God wants us to "do" until we become what God wants us to "be." For that reason I would say your Life Purpose should first reflect the kind of person you want to become and then, if you like, what you want to do.

The idea of a Life Purpose answers life's larger questions - not what do I do today, but "Why do I exist? What are my functions in life?" and "What is the purpose of my life?" Our Life Purpose is what God wants us to do long-term, it's why he put us here. As an example, my own life purpose is "To live the rest of my earthly life for the will of God."

A Life Purpose is a constant reminder of why you exist. Like a compass it points the way to meaning and significance. Like a gyroscope, whenever you are knocked off balance it will help you stand upright.

Steps to help:

Ask God in prayer to reveal your personal earthly purpose to you.

Search the Scriptures for verses and phrases that capture your sense of God's purpose for your earthly life.

Once you find the verses and phrases that you believe express God's earthly purpose for you, create a concise summary statement.

Do you know yet what God's Life Purpose is for your second half? Write down what you know so far as a draft here:

Draft - My Life Purpose

Additional Reading: Chapter Five, "Purpose: Why Do I Exist?", The Man in the Mirror, Zondervan.

A CALLING -WHAT YOU GIVE YOURSELF TO

In addition to settling the issue of Life Purpose - "why you exist," you must also settle the important question of Calling - "what you will do.

"What is a "calling?" Here's a good working definition: A calling is that vocation you can give yourself to unreservedly which arouses a passionate desire for excellence, to be your best. It is the thing you are "able" to do because of interest, gifting, and capability. It may be for a wage but not necessarily. It may be in the ministry, but not usually. It can be as formal as a job or as informal as "what you do during the day."



It is probably not as tightly defined as a specific "job description" you do, but the "type" of work you can give yourself to with enthusiasm.

Examples of calling could include software design, management, engineering, the practice of law, or plumbing. Or, your calling may be at the level of your "life's work" and remain general, like "solving problems" rather than management or "designing things" instead of engineering.

Picture two people working at the same job, say as ticket agents for an airline. To one his work is merely a job - something he does for eight hours daily to get money so he can do the things he really wants to do. He finds no particular joy in his work. He rarely feels a squirt of adrenaline or finds satisfaction in helping someone with a special problem.

The second agent performs the exact same tasks as the first. However, this agent believes his calling is "to serve travelers." He senses his "life's work" is to serve others.

He sees his work as a cause - part of a worldwide network of transportation which connects people to their distant families, enables families to vacation together for renewal, and keeps the wheels of commerce greased. He knows this is noble, wholesome, and worthwhile.

As you can see, a calling includes what you do but it is more. It is something you can give yourself to for the betterment of mankind that at the same time brings you joy and fulfillment. It is the vocation that kindles fresh fire each new morning. A calling is not merely a means to other ends (though it will be); a calling is also an end in itself.

Michael Novak in his book *Business as a Calling* says a true calling reveals its presence by the enjoyment and sense of renewed energies we gain when we do it. It's not that we don't dread difficult tasks (we do) but, knowing it is part of our duty, we soldier on. In fact, there is an odd satisfaction in the ability to bear certain kinds of pain.

Callings are particularly difficult to revamp or rejuvenate at midlife. Why is that? You've probably gotten pretty good at what you do. Your calling has been good to you. Perhaps you still love it, or maybe you've lost interest. In either case, now you wonder, "Is this what I really want to give myself to for the rest of my career or life?" It's an appropriate question.

Maybe you've exceeded your expectations and want a new challenge. Can you find it where you are? Or maybe you haven't lived up to your own expectations and can't figure out why. Is it your attitude? Is it your technical skills? Is it your ability to get along with people? Is it a matter of talent or getting the right break? All these questions loom larger at midlife because you feel like time is running out (it isn't).

No task of the midlife experience is more all-consuming than discovering a new, or reaffirming an old, calling. Recently a 39 year old man looking for a new calling told me that his life's work is "organizing things" and that he is motivated by "a cause." This understanding of himself gives him two exceptional clues to find his new calling. Here are some questions that may give you information about your calling.

What are your natural abilities?

What are your unique gifts?

What are you trained to do?

Do you consider your training valuable for your interests?

What types of "tasks" interest you? (e.g., innovating, designing, developing, organizing, planning, controlling, directing, persuading)

What types of "jobs" or "work" interest you? (e.g., accounting, sales)

Do you know yet what God's Calling is for your second half? Go ahead and write it down to the best of your understanding.

Draft - My Calling

Additional Reading:

- Chapter 22, "Discover Your Calling," The Seven Seasons of a Man's Life (Zondervan).
- 12 Suggestions To Help Discover Calling, pps. 172-174, Second Wind for the Second Half (Zondervan).

A VISION - WHAT YOU WANT TO ACCOMPLISH

If you find yourself in a "funk," it may be that what you need is not a new calling but a new vision.



One man found himself in such a funk in his late 40s. He questioned if he was where God wanted him to be. He had earned a Ph. D., held a prestigious position as a university professor, and led a satisfying life. He was truly grateful for his blessings but he wanted "more." He was considering whether or not to leave his secure position as a professor.

Actually, what this man needed was not a new calling, but a new challenge (or dream or vision). He was well suited to be a university professor. The problem was he had already achieved all of his goals. He had nothing left to accomplish. Of course, there are always other dreams to dream, and this is the task he must now give himself to - finding a new vision.

A new vision must spring up from a foundation of gratitude for what God has already done to use us and make us useful. The motivation cannot merely be wanderlust; not more for the sake of more. Rather, one chapter has closed and another beckons to be opened.

If Life Purpose describes in a "general" way why you exist, and if Calling is the vocation you give yourself to that arouses passion, then a Vision describes in a "specific" way what you dream of accomplishing. Think of it this way: calling is what you do, purpose is why you do it, and vision is what will happen as a result. Obviously, there is a lot of overlap.

A Vision is a "goal," but a big one. Visions are not the work of today or tomorrow or even next month. Rather, a vision has a longer term.

Often, God delays the fulfilling of a vision until He prepares us to be people who can handle it with grace and humility. God doesn't give us greater visions and accomplishments if they will work our destruction. Instead, God allows us to be hammered into the shape of a vessel that can gracefully contain the vision. Enter the funk. Much of our pain comes from absorbing the blows that shape our future - a future that is good.

What was your Vision for the first part of your life? Do you know yet what God's Vision is for your second half? Consider these questions and jot any thoughts you have in the space provided,

Have you heard a sermon or speech recently that challenged you?

Is there a specific goal that ignites your imagination?

Is there something you would love to tackle, but are afraid you'll fail?

What would you like to accomplish if there were no obstacles?

Do you see a need that you would love to pour yourself into?

Is there one thing you could focus your energy on that would yield a bigger return than spreading yourself in several areas? _____

What would you like to be remembered for? (This can be as broad or narrow as you wish).

How would you describe the picture of the perfect finish to your life?

Do you know yet what God's Vision is for your second half? Go ahead and write it down to the best of your understanding.

Draft - My Vision

A MISSION - HOW YOU WILL GO ABOUT IT

After you have thought through and settled your Life Purpose, Calling, and have a Vision, you have the final step of describing the "particulars" of how you will go about it - your Mission. Your Mission is a plan for how you will get where you want to go, what you will do, and (if you like detail) the specific steps and activities you will undertake.

Jim's vision - what he wants to accomplish - is to be a faithful husband, father, churchman, and businessman as a steward of what God has entrusted to him. His mission - how he plans to accomplish it - is to live by biblical priorities, be home for dinner every night, not miss any of his kids ballgames and events except for emergencies, spend 20 minutes in meaningful conversation with his wife most days, take her out on a weekly date, view his vocation as a calling from God, and contribute 5 hours a week to minister to others through his church. He actively shares his faith through an evangelism program in his church. He and his wife desire to take early retirement when he reaches 55 to work with underprivileged children.

How about you? What are the strategies, goals, and plans suggested by your vision? Can you describe your Mission yet? Go ahead and write it down what you know so far.

Draft - My Mission

CONCLUSION

In this article we have looked at . . .

An Audit of "Your Life So Far"

Life Purpose - why you exist, generally, why you do what you do

Calling - what you do, specifically, the thing you do that arouses passion

Vision - what you want to achieve, what enflames your imagination

Mission - how you do it, the strategies, the goals and plans

Obviously, there are no hard and fast boundaries between these ideas. All together they weave together into a single cloth of our Life Mission.

I trust preparing the "drafts" above was useful. Now it's time to go final if you're ready. If you want to take more time to think it over and come back to it, no problem. When you finish you will be able to say, "It's the authentic me I've always wanted to be. This is a cause that will make me whoop again. I feel good about entering the rest

of the journey."

FINAL - LIFE MISSION STATEMENT

My Life Purpose _____

My Calling _____

My Vision _____

My Mission _____

Business leader, author, and speaker, Patrick Morley helps men to think more deeply about their lives, to be reconciled with Christ, and to be equipped for a larger impact on the world.

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