

Family Mission/Purpose Statement

WHY?

We're all given a finite amount of time, resources and talent, which makes it rather impossible to achieve everything we want to do. No one in history has been able to accomplish it all. "When you don't know what to do next, just do the thing in front of you" (Elisabeth Elliot) This statement is much more helpful if you have an idea of what is the most important thing to do next.

The greatest danger is letting the urgent things crowd out the important. We spend so much of our energy and time putting out fires, answering phone calls and e-mails, and in the meantime, we let the most important things in our life pass us by. In the 21st century, many of us respond to the **tyranny of the urgent**. We let the things we value most take a backseat to whatever is begging for attention at the moment.

One of the characteristics of a responsible adult is to recognize the difference between the important and the urgent, and then refuse to be tyrannized by the urgent – to shun management by crisis. Of course, this is easier said than done. In managing your home, you must know the difference. You cannot operate solely in response to the urgent for long – you'll go mad. It is essential to know what's the most important stuff in life and what's urgency disguised as importance.

How do you decide what to do? Your soul needs some constant, a rock that helps you determine what you can do and what you just can't, or at least what can wait till later. This "rock" needs to be something that makes sense, that's clearly defined, and that is consistent with your priorities. Think of a GPS system that can alert you if you and your family start to veer off course.

WHAT?

There is no right or wrong way to word a purpose statement, but the statement should cover the overall picture of your life's purpose. How do you discover your purpose? One way is to answer questions (see attached), discuss their answers, write down thoughts, and scratch out other ideas. You need to identify your priorities, which will point to your purpose. It won't be perfect because you're not perfect.

The goal is to have a clear, concise, workable purpose statement that accurately reflects your priorities, your personality, and your vision for your family. **You want it to be timeless, easy-to-read, holistic statement that applies to everyone in the family.** It will help you make decisions, feel confident about saying "no," and be a bit better at focusing on the important instead of the urgent.

A purpose statement can be detailed, complete with bullet points, or it can be one word. Usually, something in the middle of those two extremes works best for most families. There are 3 keys to crafting a statement that's useful enough to put into practice:

1) It Should Be Simple

A purpose statement with an end goal to simplify your life should be simple in itself. It shouldn't have fancy words, so many specifics that it's not pliable, or so many complexities that your kids can't understand it. This is a tool for your family, not a doctoral thesis. Make it work for you and your family.

2) It Should Be Timeless

A family purpose statement is not the place to outline goals for the year, nor to elaborate on career hopes you have for your preschoolers. Ideally, your statement should be just as workable when your kids are 5 as when they're 15. It doesn't need to be perfect, of course, and it's perfectly fine to tweak and remold the statement through the years as your family organically evolves. However, as you approach this, **keep timelessness a priority.**

3) It Should Be General (*but not too general*)

You want to keep your statement rather general – but not too general that it doesn't accurately reflect who you are. For example, if you're passionate about environmentalism, you might be tempted to include, "Pioneer a movement of recycling in my neighborhood." This might be too specific – that's more of a goal than a purpose statement. But don't veer to the other spectrum and write only, "Love the earth." That doesn't really speak about your specific niche within the big vision of loving the earth, nor does it spark any creativity and inspiration for your future decision making. Find the balance between the specific and general. In this case, something like, "Steward the earth locally while mobilizing environmental change globally" might be better. If it's too vague, it won't really help in your day to day decision making. If it's too specific, it may needlessly paint you into a corner you never intended.

Your mission statement will not be who are moment by moment, day by day. This is your mission, what are you are **seeking** to be as a family. Through your mission statement, you will be able to check on a regular basis whether your family is on the right track.

PREPARATION

Set some time on your calendar with your spouse where you may need a couple hours together or even several shorter sessions. Take your time in devising this purpose statement.

This is meant to last for years to come, so please put some thought into it and definitely don't rush through it.

Look through the example family mission statements (*attached*) to get an idea of what some can look like. Also review the questions (*attached*) and take some time to jot down some thoughts separately. Don't worry about right and wrong answers. Write the first answer that comes to your mind, or simply write down some words that percolate as you mull over the topic.

Look at your responses and see if there's a theme. If you repeatedly talk about making a difference in your community, perhaps you have that innate passion within you. Or if your priorities seem to point to being good stewards of the environment, maybe a priority for you to leave the earth better than you found it. **Notice trends in your answers.**

Chat about your answers together. Do you differ on any of the answers? That could be a big deal, or it could be nothing. Either way, it should spark some discussion between the two of you.

Once you've settled on a few basic repeated themes, nail down a few descriptive words to encompass them. For example, if your answers repeatedly deal with being frugal, with not living among clutter, and having plenty of free time as a family, perhaps one of your descriptive words is *simplicity*.

Tweak some of your descriptors to be more timeless, For example, if your answer to question 12, about one principle from which your family operates, is "patience as we live through baby and toddler years," you could discuss whether patience is a theme that is significant enough to both of you long-term. Perhaps one of your guiding principles is *forbearance*, which means patient endurance and self-control.

CREATE YOUR STATEMENT

Start crafting a draft of your family purpose statement by way of your answers to the questions attached. There's no right or wrong way to write this, but remember to keep it simple and timeless, and to **create a fine balance between vague and specific**. And keep it on the shorter side; if it's too long, it'll be difficult to remember.

If you're stuck on where to begin, you could try a skeleton like this:

We, the [family name], believe that our purpose as a family is to [general mission statement]. We will accomplish this by:

- **Valuing [principle] and [principle] as our main guiding principles**

- Making our home a place of *[adjective]*, *[adjective]* and *[adjective]*
- Prioritizing *[value or action]* above lesser values
- Interacting with each other in a spirit of *[adjective]*

These questions, the outline, and everything in between are ideas to get you started. Be creative and original! Make this an adventure with your family, and see where it leads you. Let your statement reflect who you are as a family. Most important, let your statement be one that will help guide you as you make future decisions – let it serve you as a family. It’s a tool, not an altar where you worship.

FOLLOW UP

You are not finished once you complete your family mission/purpose statement. Use your mission statement to create goals for your family. Now that you know where you want to go, you have to make a plan on how you would like to get there. It will also help you to prioritize the activities within your life and to identify things that are either contradictory to what you want to accomplish as a family or that don’t add any value.

In the Steven Covey’s book, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, it talks about how you can put the different things you do into 4 quadrants. These quadrants are divided into Urgent/Not Urgent and Important/Not Important. Now that you know where you want to go and what you want to achieve, you can more easily place your activities into each of these quadrants and figure out if you are indeed being tyrannized by the urgent.

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	1 Crying baby Kitchen fire Some calls	2 Exercise Vocation Planning
Not Important	3 Interruptions Distractions Other calls	4 Trivia Busy work Time wasters

You will have to remember to **stop and review** periodically to make sure you are on the right track. At least once a year, sit down as a family and read through your mission statement again. During that time, spend some time reflecting over the past year to see how you did. Identify ways you got better, but more importantly, identify areas where you need to improve. Next put together a simple strategy for how you will work on those issues over the next year.

Questions

- 1) What are a few strengths of each member of your family?
- 2) Collectively, we are at our best when we are...
- 3) Collectively, we are at our worst when we are...
- 4) If we had a completely free day together as a family, how would we spend it?
- 5) What are practical ways we can serve each other?
- 6) What are practical ways we can serve others outside our family?
- 7) Name three things we think we could do better as a family?
- 8) What would people say today about our family as a whole?
- 9) What would we like people to say about our family as a whole in thirty years?
- 10) If our home could be filled with one emotion, what would that emotion be?
- 11) Name three adjectives we would like people to use to describe our home environment?
- 12) If we could name one principle from which we want our family to operate, what would it be?
- 13) What are the top four priorities we want our family to value?
- 14) What is the main purpose of our home?
- 15) What is the secondary purpose of our home?
- 16) What is the individual purpose in life for each member of our family?
- 17) What is one way our family is unique?
- 18) Describe the status of our family in ten year...
 - a. Financially:
 - b. Intellectually:
 - c. Emotionally:
 - d. Relationally with each other:
 - e. Communally in our environment:
 - f. Physically:
 - g. Spiritually:
- 19) Where are you as a family in ten years? What does your home look like?
- 20) What is the purpose of life?

Resources

- 1) Organize Simplicity, the clutter-free approach to intentional living by Tsh Oxenreider
- 2) Impress Faith on Your Kids by Mark Holmen
- 3) 7 Habits of Highly Effective People by Steven Covey
- 4) 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families by Steven Covey
- 5) <http://www.franklincovey.com/msb/>
- 6) <http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/articles/writing-a-family-mission-statement.aspx>
- 7) <http://www.passionatehomemaking.com/2010/07/developing-a-family-mission-statement.html>
- 8) <http://www.crosswalk.com/family/parenting/developing-your-family-mission-1162343.html>

Examples

Mark Holmen

The Holmen family is a Christian family who:

- Unconditionally loves, supports, nurtures and forgives each other.
- Demonstrates fiscal responsibility, including giving our time, talents, and treasure to the Lord.
- Models faith and Christ-like living through what we think, say, and do.

Tsh Oxenreider

As a family, we want to glorify God in all we say, do and are.

We will...

- Put each other first
- Cultivate deep relationships with one another
- Extend love to those around us
- Live simply
- Be true to who God made us
- Take care of our health
- Be good stewards of creation
- Be lifelong learners

MaryJo Wieland

- Kindness: Generosity of Spirit. We show people that we care. We are sympathetic and understanding, and we act with a warm heart.
- Responsibility: We have a responsibility to ourselves, to our communities, and to the world.
- Faith: We believe in God and in each other. We are loyal to each other, trusting that each person has something special to offer the world.
- Fun: We remember to approach life with a light-hearted playfulness, to laugh a lot, and to make memories together

Lisa Delzer

We believe that our purpose as a family is to love, celebrate, and nourish the creative spirit. We will accomplish this by:

- Living simply, loving unconditionally, and exploring
- Making our home a place of creativity, laughter, and love
- Valuing the creative process above all else, and
- Being in harmony with Spirit, each other, and Mother Nature

Kara Fleck

To be focused on *peace*

Trisha and Joel Barone

The Barone Family

- Puts God & Family first
- Lives with humility
- Offers grace
- Gives our best
- Is not afraid to fail
- Assumes the best
- Wants to be together
- Chooses joy & laughs often
- Lives intentionally
- Does the right thing

