

Living In *Front* Of The 8-Ball

Can you distill the meaning of your entire life into one sentence -- your “life sentence?” Some have tried:

William Shakespeare: *“Mine honour is my life.”*

Flip Wilson: *“My life is my own.”*

George Bernard Shaw: *“Life has no object: it is an end in itself.”*

Golfer Payne Stewart died in a 1999 plane crash: *“I’m going to a special place when I die, but I want to make sure my life is special while I’m here.”*

Give Me The Simple Life

Seattle’s John Maeda, one of *Esquire*’s “21 most important people in the 21st century,” is a globally-known designer. In his book, *The Laws of Simplicity: Design, Technology, Business, Life*, he states that:

- *Knowledge makes everything simpler.*
- *Simplicity and complexity need each other.*
- *More emotions are better than less.*

John’s right - great art stirs emotions and elicits **AWE**; great design reveals **CLARITY**; great communication marries both to unveil **MEANING**. Hey, isn’t that the learning sequence: **AWE** (“Wow!”)... **CLARITY** (“Uh huh.”) ... **MEANING** (“Aha!”). This captures three stages of life, the fourth being **COMMITMENT** (“Yes!”).

Eight Is Enough A’ready

Business coach Piper Abodeely writes, *“From the time of our birth we develop beliefs based on what others tell us. We learn to live our lives trying to satisfy others ... Everyone wants to tell us who and what we are.”* Good diagnosis. Now her prescription: *“...we must choose to either **own** our lives, or **be owned** by outside forces.”*

To test Piper’s hypothesis, let’s assume “ownership” of our lives for the next few moments. If you were to file every single aspect of your life, they’d all fit neatly into one of perhaps only eight folders. Take the next three minutes to: (a) write, in one sentence or less, what you believe is why you’re here on earth, i.e., your “life sentence;” then (b) write, in each of those eight folders, one thing you can do -- by the end of this year -- to help fulfill that purpose.

MY LIFE PURPOSE:

FAMILY:

FINANCIAL:

PHYSICAL:

PROFESSIONAL:

PERSONAL:

MENTAL:

SOCIAL:

SPIRITUAL:

First Things First

“Own or be owned!” “My life is my own!” Is this Flipsonian-Abodeelian philosophy compatible with our legacy systems, i.e., with how we’re built, with the absolute highest and best use of our lives, with the Master Plan of the One who created us and spoke each neuron and proton of the borderless universe into being?

Eugene Peterson, who paraphrased God’s Word in *The Message*, splashes these thoughts on our mental canvas:

“Genesis (the first book of the Bible) pulls us into a sense of reality that is God-shaped and God-filled. It gives us a vocabulary for speaking accurately and comprehensively about our lives, where we come from and where we are going, what we think and what we do, the people we live with and how to get along with them, the troubles we find ourselves in and the blessings that keep arriving. God uses words to make a foundation that is solid and true. Everything we think and do and feel is material in a building operation in which we are engaged all our life long. But we don’t *build* the foundation. The foundation is *given*. The foundation is firmly in place” (1 Corinthians 3:9-23, p. 358, MSG).

Let's read Genesis 1:1-2:3 from *THE MESSAGE* as follows:

First this: God created the Heavens and Earth - all you see, all you don't see. Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God's Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss. God spoke: "Light!" and light appeared. God saw that light was good and separated light from dark. God named the light Day, he named the dark Night. It was evening, it was morning - Day One.

God spoke: "Sky! In the middle of the waters; separate water from water!" God made sky. He separated the water under sky from the water above sky. And there it was: he named sky the Heavens. It was evening, it was morning - Day Two.

God spoke: "Separate! Water-beneath-Heaven, gather into one place; Land, appear!" And there it was. God named the land Earth. He named the pooled water Ocean. God saw that it was good. God spoke: "Earth, green up! Grow all varieties of seed-bearing plants, every sort of fruit-bearing tree." And there it was. Earth produced green seed-bearing plants, all varieties, and fruit-bearing trees of all sorts. God saw that it was good. It was evening, it was morning - Day Three.

God spoke: "Lights! Come out! Shine in Heaven's sky! Separate Day from Night. Mark seasons and days and years, Lights in Heaven's sky to give light to Earth." And there it was. God made two big lights, the larger to take charge of Day, the smaller to be in charge of Night; and he made the stars. God placed them in the heavenly sky to light up Earth and oversee Day and Night, to separate light and dark. God saw that it was good. It was evening, it was morning - Day Four.

God spoke: "Swarm, Ocean, with fish and all sea life! Birds, fly through the sky over Earth!" God created the huge whales, all the swarm of life in the waters, and every kind and species of flying birds. God saw that it was good. God blessed them: "Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Ocean! Birds, reproduce on Earth!" It was evening, it was morning - Day Five.

God spoke: "Earth, generate life! Every sort and kind: cattle and reptiles and wild animals - all kinds." And there it was: wild animals of every kind, cattle of all kinds, every sort of reptile and bug. God saw that it was good.

God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature so they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, And, yes, Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of Earth." God created human beings; he created them godlike, reflecting God's nature. He created them male and female. God blessed them: "Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge! Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air, for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth."

Then God said, "I've given you every sort of seed-bearing plant on Earth and every kind of fruit-bearing tree, given them to you for food. To all animals and all birds, everything that moves and breathes, I give whatever grows out of the ground for food." And there it was. God looked over everything he had made; it was so good, so very good! It was evening, it was morning - Day Six.

Heaven and Earth were finished, down to the last detail. By the seventh day God had finished his work. On the seventh day he rested from all his work. God blessed the seventh day. He made it a Holy Day because on that day he rested from his work, all the creating God had done.

DISCUSS: Pushing this soaring prose through our Awe-Clarity-Meaning-Commitment grid, what strikes you?

DISCUSS: Jesus said there are two ways to build your life: on sand or on rock. Coach Abodeely insists, "...we must choose to either own our lives, or be owned by outside forces." How does this sync with the Bible's account of the foundational truths of our existence, of "ownership?" (Matthew 7:13-29, p. 23, MSG; Luke 6:43-49, p. 138, MSG)

Like Saul of Tarsus, we can be doing what we think is right, good, productive, altruistic. But what's our measuring stick for evaluating our motives and actions? Saul was born into an upstanding family, well-educated, at the top of his profession, leading a vast, national movement....when taking a business trip to Damascus, Syria, he sees the light – **AWE** ... hears Jesus speaking to him – **CLARITY** ... is personally taught by the resurrected Christ – **MEANING** ... and he becomes Paul, author of much of the Bible and principal earthly spokesman (and martyr) for God – **COMMITMENT**.

For Paul's take on ownership, let's read I Corinthians 6:14-20 (p. 362, MSG), then some bites from Proverbs 16 (MSG):

Mortals make elaborate plans, but God has the last word. Humans are satisfied with whatever looks good; God probes for what is good. Put God in charge of your work, then what you've planned will take place. God made everything with a place and purpose ...

When God approves of your life, even your enemies will end up shaking your hand. Far better to be right and poor than to be wrong and rich. We plan the way we want to live, but only God makes us able to live it.

Good leaders abhor wrongdoing of all kinds; sound leadership has a moral foundation. Good leaders cultivate honest speech; they love advisors who tell them the truth.

Get wisdom - it's worth more than money; choose insight over income every time. The road of right living bypasses evil; watch your step and save your life.

First pride, then the crash - the bigger the ego, the harder the fall. It pays to take life seriously; things work out when you trust in God. There's a way that looks harmless enough; look again - it leads straight to hell.

Make your motions and cast your votes, but God has the final say.

DISCUSS: What CLARITY and MEANING do you find here?

Oversimplify?

Scientist Chris Lehmann notes, "Life is complex; simplify everything so that you can devote yourself to the things most complex." Although appearing to be complex, the overarching theme of the Bible is the simple story of how our loving God **formed** us ... and is seeking to **transform** our broken lives and broken world into one of perfect peace as found only by not *owning* our lives, or by *pleasing* others, but by *surrendering* them to His Son Jesus Christ.

As we marinate in God's Word, we begin soaking in His wisdom, about how to live life to the fullest, as He intended it, like:

MY LIFE PURPOSE: Mark 12:28-31 (p. 106, MSG)

FAMILY: Ephesians 5:25 (p. 429, MSG); Proverbs 22:6 (p. 489, NIV)

FINANCIAL: John 3:22-30 (p. 791, NIV)

PHYSICAL: 2 Corinthians 5:1-5 (p. 392, MSG)

PROFESSIONAL: Colossians 3:15-17 and 4:1 (p. 447, MSG)

PERSONAL: Psalm 139:1-10 and 23-24 (p. 467, NIV)

MENTAL: Romans 12:12 (p. 343, MSG); Philippians 2:5-8 (p. 435, MSG)

SOCIAL: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (p. 376, MSG)

SPIRITUAL: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 (p. 394, MSG)

Reflecting on what God has shown us in the Bible, would you now edit your Life Purpose or any of your eight action steps?

DISCUSS: What, if anything, is clearer to you now than it was an hour ago?

If you've moved from AWE's "Wow!" past CLARITY's "Uh huh" through MEANING's "Aha!"... are you ready for COMMITMENT's "Yes?" If you have questions or want to kick this can around further, let's do it. My contact info is below.

HOW TO ACCEPT GOD'S INCOMPARABLE FORGIVENESS GIFT:

- "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).
- "We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. ... God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he declares sinners to be right in his sight when they believe in Jesus" (Romans 3:22-26).
- "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord" (Ephesians 2:8-9).
- "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved" (Romans 10:9-10).
- "If we take human testimony at face value, how much more should we be reassured when God gives testimony as he does here, testifying concerning his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God inwardly confirms God's testimony. Whoever refuses to believe in effect calls God a liar, refusing to believe God's own testimony regarding his Son. This is the testimony in essence: God gave us eternal life; the life is in his Son. So, whoever has the Son, has life; whoever rejects the Son, rejects life. My purpose in writing is simply this: that you who

believe in God's Son will know beyond the shadow of a doubt that you have eternal life, the reality and not the illusion" (1 John 5:9-13).

His Deal
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The Laws of Simplicity: Design, Technology, Business, Life **by John Mayeda**

Law 1: REDUCE

The easiest way to simplify a system is to remove functionality.

It's hard to be easy-to-use (simple), yet versatile (complex). Simplicity results from reduction. Be careful what you remove.

Law 2: ORGANIZE

Organization makes many appear to be fewer.

Stuff expands. To uncomplicate, ask: "What to hide?" "Where to put it?" "What goes with what?"

Law 3: TIME

Saving time feels like simplicity.

We seek to avoid waiting, an uninvited life-complicator.

Law 4: LEARN

Knowledge makes everything simpler.

Mastering a new task can be a time-killer. But ignoring the manufacturer's manual can be a *serial* time-killer.

Law 5: DIFFERENCES

Simplicity and complexity need each other.

In a sea of complexity, simplicity pops out-like the iPod.

Law 6: CONTEXT

What lies in the periphery of simplicity is definitely not peripheral.

We love to fill in white space, but it's there to showcase the key idea.

Law 7: EMOTION

More emotions are better than less.

Great art elicits awe. Great design clarifies. Great communication marries awe and clarity to birth the "aha!" of meaning.

Law 8: TRUST

In simplicity we trust.

Learning to swim, you realize we trust when we relax and commit.

Law 9: FAILURE

Some things can never be made simple.

But, if we're humbly alert, we can learn from our mistakes.

Law 10: THE ONE

Simplicity is about subtracting the obvious and adding the meaningful.

Author Maeda gives us three keys to finding "The One:"

1. More appears like less by simply moving it far, far away.

Google's instant answers come from servers scattered worldwide.

2. Openness simplifies complexity.

If someone's been open with you, you know what to expect.

3. Use less power, gain more.

A nagging parent appears to wield power, but has little or none.