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The Path

3. Three Elements of a Good Mission Statement

This chapter lays out what makes a mission statement work. A good one is short, clear, and unforgettable. The author argues that losing sight of a simple mission is what drags people and organizations off course.

Key takeaways

- A good mission statement has three marks: one sentence long, understandable by a twelve-year-old, and recitable from memory under pressure.
- Great leaders had one-sentence missions: Lincoln (preserve the Union), Mandela (end apartheid), Mother Teresa (show mercy to the dying), Nehemiah (rebuild Jerusalem's walls).
- The greater the mission, the more simply it can be stated. Jargon-filled statements no one can recite are a sign the mission is lost.
- When you forget your mission you drift into details that pull you off your path — like the medical association that bought real estate and a Rolls-Royce while its patients went underserved.

- Too many people are still 'looking for the curriculum' when they should already be fulfilling it.

Passages worth keeping

“The truth is that time is holding a gun to our heads—pulling back the trigger and reminding us that our days on earth are numbered.”

Ties the 'recite it at gunpoint' test to real urgency: know your mission because time is short.

How it connects

Nehemiah's single-sentence mission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem is the biblical model here: a clear, God-given task pursued with urgency.