



Chapter 1: What Is the Purpose of Life?

What if you were born to live for something big? Something more fulfilling than what pulls most people out of bed each morning. Something far more fascinating than the daily discipline imposed by your alarm clock. Something more satisfying than your income, however substantial that may be. Something worth *all* of your life, not just the eight-plus hours of the day you devote to your career. Something more compelling than the products marketed by the commercials during Monday night football.

What if you were born to live for something so central it works its way into every answer to every important question you'll ever ask?

So, what wakes you up every morning and motivates you to press on? Could you define your purpose for being here? Right now? Right here? And, if you could, what size and shape is that purpose? Is it so small it fits only the boundaries of your own life, or is it so large you're still discovering its dimensions?

That's What They Say?

"The tragedy of modern man is not that he knows less and less about the meaning of his own life, but that it bothers him less and less."

*Václav Havel,
writer and former
President of Czech Republic*

"He who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how."

*Friedrich Nietzsche,
German philosopher
(1844 - 1900)*

"Everything—a horse, a vine—is created for some duty... For what task, then, were you yourself created? A man's true delight is to do the things he was made for."

*Marcus Aurelius,
Roman Emperor
(161 - 180 AD)*

“How strange is the lot of us mortals! Each of us is here for a brief sojourn; for what purpose he knows not, though he senses it. But without deeper reflections one knows from daily life that one exists for other people.”

Albert Einstein, physicist

“One never really lives unless he has something to die for.”

*Soren Kierkegaard,
Danish philosopher
(1813 - 1855)*

“ [Life] is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

William Shakespeare, Macbeth

BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE PURPOSE OF YOUR LIFE



Having It All

In the history of our country, we've seen men who were legendary for their ability to make money through the financial markets of the world. Some of them have become heroes and trendsetters.



Jesse Livermore (1877 - 1940) was a legend on Wall Street. As a teenager, he gambled on stock prices and made over \$1,000, which was a small fortune in the 1890s. When he took up legitimate stock trading, he lost everything in six months, but he kept going. After the market crashed in 1929, Livermore was still worth \$100 million. He said, "It took me five years to learn to play the game intelligently enough to make big money when I was right." His trading techniques are still used in the market today.

Jesse Livermore deteriorated into depression over the years following the stock market crash. He was bankrupt by 1934 and killed himself in 1940. In his suicide note, he told his wife he was a failure, unworthy of her love.

Arthur W. Cutten (1870 - 1936) was one of the wealthiest Americans in the 1920s. He foresaw a grain shortage coming in 1924 and by buying up grain futures, made several million dollars in eight months. He was called "the wheat king."



Arthur Cutten's speculations along with a few others may have led to the market crash. The U.S. government prosecuted him on fraud and tax evasion, selling his properties and taking most of his actual wealth. He died of a heart attack.

Ivar Krueger (1880 - 1932) was called "the match king" for his European monopoly on the match industry. For 25 years, he was a Swedish hero for the money and business he brought to his country.



Not long after the news came out of instability and deception in his many business holdings, Ivar Kreuger killed himself. Kreuger's companies owed more than the Swedish national debt.

These men were among the best in the marketplace, willing to sacrifice everything to achieve worldly success. Did they find success, purpose, and significance in life? Like many others who never make the headlines, these men could make a living, but they never learned how to live.

HOW DOES EARNING A LIVING IMPACT A PERSON'S *QUALITY OF LIFE*?



HOW DOES IT IMPACT A PERSON'S *PURPOSE IN LIFE*?



SHOULD NET WORTH BE CONSIDERED A FACTOR IN DEFINING A PERSON'S SIGNIFICANCE IN LIFE? WHY OR WHY NOT?



We Are All Wondering

All people, in all cultures, in all eras, have attempted to answer the same basic questions about life. These include:

- > Who Am I?
- > Why Am I Here?
- > Where Did I Come From?
- > Where Am I Going?

By answering these questions, we can begin to reveal our purpose in life.



Why Am I Here?

From Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* (ranked one of the top 100 movies of all time):

It is Christmas Eve, 1946. George Bailey is on the verge of suicide. With his business collapsing, he faces the scandal of bankruptcy. To top it off, he is wanted by the police for misappropriation of funds. In a desperate outburst, he declares that he wishes he'd never been born. In the midst of it all, the prayers of his family alert heaven to George's state of mind. Soon, arrangements are made to send angel Clarence Oddbody to earth to transform George's hopeless perspective.

In a strange prophetic twist, Clarence shows George what the world would have looked like if he had never been born. At first, George is unaware of the change, but as he wanders through Bedford Falls, he begins to notice subtle differences. Once a picturesque village, his hometown is now run down. The fingerprints of his life are missing from the lives of his neighbors, friends, and family. The blessings he has brought others are noticeably absent.



When he encounters old friends on the street, they no longer recognize him. Even his wife reacts as if he is a stranger.

Startled by the experience, George suddenly realizes the value of his former life, even with all its flaws. He calls upon Clarence to save him. Immediately, he is transported back to normalcy. It is Christmas Day. His friends and family have organized and collected money to save George and his company from ruin. Upon seeing the lives he touched and the difference he made to the town, George Bailey concludes that he has a wonderful life after all.

"I find it astounding that the bulk of people on our planet seem to journey through years and even decades without seriously wrestling with the fundamental question of why they are here and what they want their lives to add up to in the end. Many business and professional people get on a fast track in pursuit of an elusive vision of success without questioning whether they are selling themselves too cheaply by investing their precious years of life in something that, even if they attained, will never satisfy.

It is much wiser to follow Kierkegaard's advice to define life backwards and live it forwards - start from the destiny and define the journey in light of it."

Ken Boa, *Conformed to His Image*

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE EXPLORES THE IMPORTANCE OF ADDING VALUE TO OTHERS. WHAT ROLE DOES THIS CONCEPT PLAY IN SHAPING YOUR PURPOSE IN LIFE? ☆

A Study in Purpose

The 1995 movie, *Mr. Holland's Opus*, is also a study in purpose.

Glenn Holland thought his life was compromised when he reluctantly shelved his dream of composing an Opus and accepted a job as a teacher instead. His goal in life was to write one memorable piece of music to leave his mark on the world. But instead, he found himself on a most unlikely path, pouring his life into high school students while learning to channel his love of music in new ways. Although the job was a total compromise of his calling, his passion for music never faded.

Thirty years pass, and Mr. Holland learns the band and music program at his school will be cancelled because of budget cuts. His life is all but spent, his Opus never written, and his school is eliminating his position. Attempts to convince the school board to reconsider are without effect. Mr. Holland decides to retire from teaching. His dreams are packed metaphorically, along with the personal items from his office.



A surprise farewell party is attended by hundreds of his former students. Now young men and women with productive lives and careers, they have gathered to acknowledge his impact on their lives. Topping the list is the governor of the state—also a former pupil—who addresses the gathering. Though Mr. Holland has never completed his planned masterpiece, she declares that his life work is a symphony of lives, "and we are your Opus." According to *this* definition of success, Mr. Holland's legacy is greater than he ever dreamed it could be.

WHICH OF YOUR ACTIVITIES MAKE THE GREATEST CONTRIBUTION TO YOUR LEGACY?



Consider: What Will Your Life Add Up To?

Every person possesses gifts, talents and opportunities in this life to use as they wish. Some simply spend their lives; while others invest it in things that reflect purpose.

"Those who are wise must finally die, just like the foolish and senseless, leaving all their wealth behind. The grave is their eternal home, where they will stay forever. They may name their estates after themselves, but they leave their wealth to others." *Psalms 49:10-11*

"Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover."

Mark Twain, Author

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE THINGS THAT WOULD CAUSE YOU REGRET IF LEFT UNDONE?



The Take It Further section is to help you go a little deeper through challenging questions, audio recommendations, and reflective exercises. This section is optional for use in your study. You may do all, one, or none of the suggestions.

Take It Further



“I have concluded that the accumulation of wealth, even if I could achieve it, is an insufficient reason for living. When I reach the end of my days a moment or two from now, I must look backward on something more meaningful than the pursuit of houses, land, machines, stocks and bonds. Nor is fame any lasting benefit. I will consider my earthly existence to have been wasted unless I can recall a loving family, a consistent investment in the lives of people, and an earnest attempt to serve the God who made me. Nothing else makes much sense.”

Psychologist James Dobson
Founder, Focus on the Family

Add new comment

THINK: IF MONEY WERE NO OBJECT, WHAT LIFE DREAMS WOULD YOU PURSUE? WHY?



LISTEN: *THE REASON FOR LIVING* BY TIM KELLER



OBSERVE: WATCH THE MOVIE *AMAZING GRACE*, WHICH IS ABOUT WILLIAM WILBERFORCE'S DEDICATION TO ABOLISH THE SLAVE TRADE IN ENGLAND DURING THE 1800s. REFLECT ON THE IMPACT ONE PERSON CAN HAVE.



CONSIDER: IN A TYPICAL WEEK, WHAT ARE THE TOP FIVE WAYS YOU SPEND YOUR TIME?



WHAT MEANING AND FULFILLMENT DO YOUR TOP FIVE BRING?

