



The Incredible
Journey

Finding
MEANING
and **PURPOSE** in
Your *Life*



GARY KENT

FINDING MEANING AND PURPOSE IN YOUR LIFE

*"For I know the plans I have for you,"
declares the LORD, "plans to prosper
you and not to harm you, plans to give
you hope and a future."*

Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

Albert Einstein, the great physicist, was honoured by *Time* magazine as the 'Man of the Century' in December 1999 for both his intellectual genius and his humanitarian roles.

The story goes that Einstein was travelling on a train, when the train conductor came down the aisle checking everyone's tickets. Eventually the conductor stood beside Einstein. He reached into his vest pocket, but the ticket wasn't there. Einstein searched in his trouser pocket, in his briefcase and on the seat beside him. But he could not find that ticket.

The conductor reassured Einstein by saying, "We all know who you are Dr Einstein and I'm sure you bought a ticket to ride on this train". Einstein thanked him and the conductor continued down the aisle of the carriage. As he was about to move to the next carriage, the conductor looked back at Einstein. He saw Einstein down on his knees still looking for the lost ticket.

The conductor hurried back and again told Einstein that he did not need to find the ticket.

Einstein looked up at him and said, "Young man, I know who I am, but what I don't know is where I am going."

We might smile at this short anecdote, but we are all on the journey of life. Sometimes the road is smooth and sometimes the terrain is rocky and difficult. But what we all need is a reason for being, to find meaning in our lives, to find a purpose that provides fulfilment in our lives, and gives us some idea of where we're headed.

Have you ever woken up and thought "I don't know what to do today" Have you ever thought "I don't have any reason to get out of bed" Have you ever thought, "What's my purpose in life?" Have you ever thought: "Why am I here? What is my future? Does my life have a purpose?"

I would like to suggest that until we find the purpose that God has intended for our lives, we will be floundering as we search for meaning and purpose.

A US Navy pilot, Howard Rutledge, completed 200 bombing missions over North Korea and Vietnam before he was shot down over North Vietnam. He was captured and spent the next seven years in a prison in Hanoi. As a prisoner of war, locked in his cell, his life became a struggle for survival, not just physically, but also mentally.

Howard wrote the memoirs of his survival in a book, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies*. Most of us will not have to face the horrors of a POW camp, but we all must face our own struggles in life. When asked what sustained him through those long years, Howard replied that it was his faith in God that sustained him. It was his belief that God was in control.

But what about us? Have you ever asked the questions, "Why am I here? What is my purpose in life? Does my life have any meaning? Does my life really matter? Is there a God? Does God care

about me?" These are the big questions in life that we all face. And it's when we have time to reflect, that we search for the answers to these questions.

We are all striving for something in life that gives us a reason for being, a sense of meaning and a purpose. Sometimes we may get distracted by the daily demands of life without ever wondering about its meaning. But most of us, however, when we have time to stop and consider our lives, continuously wonder, "Am I doing something that really matters?" Finding an answer to these questions may not always be easy, but it is possible.

THE TEN STEPS TO FINDING MEANING AND PURPOSE

Here are ten steps, or strategies, that can help us to find purpose and live a meaningful life. These steps are ways to find purpose in your life, ways to

motivate you to start living the life you have always wanted, a life full of meaning, happiness, and fulfilment.

1. MAKE GOD FIRST IN YOUR LIFE

The first and most important step in discovering what is most important in your life is to include God in your life every day. When we give God a place in our lives, we will find direction, hope and peace.

When you start the day praying to God, asking for His guidance, and reading from His Word, the Bible, you will make better decisions, and find direction and meaning in life. Everything we read impacts us, and reading the Bible on a regular basis helps us to find the answers to life's big questions, and so find meaning in life. If you would like a guide to help you read the Bible, why not try The Incredible Journey Bible Reading Plan.

Welcome to a life-changing experience

AN INCREDIBLE JOURNEY THROUGH THE Bible

Daily Bible Reading Plan: 365 days

In its pages you will find the answers to life's big questions:

- Where did we come from?
- What is the meaning of life?
- What happens when we die?

INCREDIBLE BIBLE FACT:
There are 66 books or smaller sections in the Bible.

EACH DAY WHEN WE READ...

- Pray.** Ask God to help you to understand and better what you are reading.
- Read the Passage.** Check the box beside the reading you have completed.
- Think.** How does this passage fit into the Big Story of the Bible? What does it teach about God and His plan? Is there a promise to you? An example to follow? Or an action to be done?

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AN INCREDIBLE JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

GENESIS: The Creation of the World, the Origin of Sin and the Promise.

The Bible starts by beginning with the Book of Genesis. It sets the stage for the rest of the Bible. It tells us how God created the world and how He created man and woman. It tells us how man and woman sinned and how they were punished. It tells us how God promised to bless the world through the line of Abraham.

We will begin with a brief survey of history that covers the Creation of this world, the origin of evil, the fall into sin, the plan of salvation and the hope of redemption. Then we will look at the historical and prophetic books of the Bible, the Gospels, the epistles and finally the book of Revelation. The overarching theme of the Bible is God's love for us, and His plan to save us from evil and sin.

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Praying is making a direct connection to God. When we pray and ask God to guide us, we attain peace and a sense of direction. In Ephesians 2:10 the apostle Paul says, *"We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."* (NIV) God calls you to a purpose and He gives you all you need to accomplish that purpose.

If we trust God, then He will guide us. He will show us the right path. Having God guide us is a great blessing, but it doesn't mean we won't face trials and difficulties in life. When they come, the greatest comfort is that we know He is with us during the trials, He will sustain us when we falter and will give us the strength to cross every hurdle. These times of trial can bring us closer to God, where we will find a place that will soothe our anxious hearts.

God has better plans for us than we can ever imagine. He opens doors of

opportunity and directs us in the best way, even when we are not able to understand. If we trust God, He will give us the right plan – a purpose-filled plan for our lives.

"Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails." Proverbs 19:21 (NIV)

Some leading Bible characters made poor decisions and yet decided to follow God's plans and found forgiveness and their purpose in life. In God's eyes we have no past, only a great future with Him.

- Noah got drunk – He built the ark.
- Jacob lied – He was the father of the Israelites.
- Moses murdered – He led the Children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt.
- Rahab was a prostitute – She helped the two spies in Jericho.

- David had an affair – He was Israel's greatest king.
- Peter denied Jesus – He became a faithful disciple.

Finally, to have God first in our lives means we choose attitudes and values that reflect His character. In every action, decision, and interaction with others, we will choose to have the attitudes and values that God has outlined. When we use our time and energy to follow His directions, then we will find meaning in our lives.

2. DECIDE WHAT IS IMPORTANT IN YOUR LIFE

Many of us sometimes wander through life without knowing what really is important to us in this life. Our time is taken up by an infinite variety of activities, opportunities, distractions and challenges. But if we took a close look at our daily and weekly schedules, a look at how we spent our time,

we would soon find what activities consumed the most time and have become most important in our lives. Then we would have to decide if these activities motivated us or were they mindless time-wasting distractions. Which of these activities gave us a sense of purpose and provided meaning?

We need to ask ourselves, "Is this how I want to spend my life?" What am I achieving? If I continue doing these activities, are they relevant and will they bring happiness, purpose and meaning to my life."

Your family and trusted friends are probably the people who could tell you what they see as your strengths and best qualities. You could then make a list of these qualities and natural talents and decide how to use your unique skills to follow and achieve your dream. Then once you have a goal, you can make plans to see it through. It is always easier to start a new project than to

see it through. Whether it is studying at school or university, a fitness goal, starting a new job, making a career change, or going in a new direction in your life, after the initial impetus there often arise challenges or setbacks, and we feel discouraged. It is helpful to see these feelings of discouragement as a time to refocus and reorganise your plans to keep on track with the end goal and God's plans for your life.

God's plan for us is, that we should be blessed and happy, and this only comes when we seek God first and above all else. So, dream big, set goals, pray, and then seek to do God's will. Then you will truly find purpose and meaning that will make a difference.

3. FIND YOUR PASSION, WHAT YOU ARE NATURALLY GOOD AT?

Most people wish to be known for their achievements, especially if they are particularly passionate about them. To be recognised for an achievement is very important to our self-worth. Even children want to be known to be good at some activity, whether it's kicking or catching a ball or running fast, knowing their times tables, writing stories, their artwork or singing talents. We all seek and need that acknowledgment of our efforts and achievements.

Being passionate about an activity, brings drive and direction. If we follow that passion with our natural talent, then we accomplish more and achieve better results. These achievements then have the positive effect of making you feel fulfilled and wanting to do more.

Sometimes the hardest part is finding what you really enjoy doing. But when

you find what you are naturally good at, then it becomes enjoyable to you. You look forward to doing the activity, and you will notice that your brain even finds the work easier. Researchers into brain function tell us that our brains have their own unique way of processing specific types of information and managing data. If it is information or an activity that you enjoy, then it gets the brain's attention quickly and it uses your brain's innate energy advantage.

When you find what your brain enjoys doing and follow your passion into a job or career, then it makes life worth living, because it brings happiness and a sense of fulfillment to your life. This is when you achieve success, when you find your purpose, which and that will make a positive impact on your life.

4. BE ENTHUSIASTIC

Enthusiasm is contagious, and one of the most amazing feelings we can

experience. Enthusiasm is also a disciplined skill. Having enthusiasm in your life is like learning to walk, it is a discipline of intention and effort. The more you work at it, the better you become.

Enthusiasm also lifts you up. It can be seen in the twinkling of your eyes and the determination in your step. When you feel enthusiastic, nothing can stop you!

King Solomon, who is considered the wisest man who ever lived, wrote this, *"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might."* Ecclesiastes 9:10 (NIV)

So, when you include God in your plans, as you are working towards your goal with enthusiasm, nothing can hold you back. It's both contagious and magnetic. This energy is what attracts other people. You can work long hours, accomplish large amounts of work that

others may even consider humanly impossible, and still have the energy to spend time with family and friends.

So, show up to life with enthusiasm. This is where finding your motivation, purpose and meaning in life begins.

5. HELP AND SERVE OTHERS

It's no secret that helping others makes you feel good. Not only is it an amazing feeling to know that you have helped someone to live a better life, but it also adds meaning and purpose to yours. Seeing that you can make someone's life a little bit easier is one of the most fulfilling things you can experience in life.

Social researcher, Mark McCrindle, has found that many people say that if they had their life over again, they would prioritise family, stick with their relationships, and do more for others. Whatever you do, you will quickly

see that giving to others can have a powerful impact on your own life. Being of service to others is one of the best ways to provide a sense of purpose in your life.

6. FOCUS ON ONE THING AT A TIME

Focus is a mental state when we pay attention to a single task and ignore outside distractions. In today's fast-paced technological environment, we are often required to respond quickly to a huge complexity of data that bombards us.

Focus has become the essential ability to tackle many tasks, think creatively, and work efficiently. That means true focus is often a difficult act of prioritization—because in order to concentrate on one thing, you have to ignore many other things.

Today, life comes with a great number of difficulties for the human brain. Most

of us have been forced to become fond of multitasking, but it has been shown to increase your error rate and decrease your productivity, time and again. The overload caused by the sustained bombardment of pieces of information has changed the attention span of a great number of people.

Gloria Mark, who studies Digital Distraction at the University of California, found that employees spent an average of 11 minutes on a project before being distracted. Then after an interruption it takes them 25 minutes to return to the original task. Instead of trying to switch back and forth from one task to another, try to focus on one task at a time and accomplish the best work possible.

Distractions have a big affect on our daily productivity. From checking social media to an unexpected chat with a colleague, we often don't realise the time we spend being distracted every

day. This loss of focus interrupts workflow, creativity and productivity and, in turn, creates frustration, stress and pressure when we don't achieve our aims.

However, being focused can help us get things done better and faster, and end each day feeling like we've actually accomplished something, and that feeling of achievement boosts our spirits and reinforces our purpose. Successful purpose-driven people seize the moment and focus on the completion of one task.

7. STOP NEGATIVE THOUGHTS AND HABITS

Sometimes your inner voice or thoughts can stand between you and a purpose-driven life. But when it comes to living a purpose-driven life, the critical inner voice could prevent you from doing things that give your life a purpose. Your inner voice can sometimes reinforce

stability by persuading you to keep a defensive approach to life and stay in your comfort zone.

Instead of encouraging you to explore new and potentially meaningful ideas, the negative inner voice will keep you from taking risks and keep you on the old and familiar path. Even if that means to live a life without meaning and purpose.

Too many individuals fear failure. Yes, we sometimes will fail, but failure is merely a hurdle on the road to success. Successful people with a purpose don't let themselves become overwhelmed or discouraged by mistakes. They aren't crippled by limiting beliefs about what they can achieve. Instead, they use mistakes as an opportunity to reflect and learn. Perhaps you have heard of Dyson vacuum cleaners? James Dyson first began work on a bagless vacuum cleaner in 1978, and would spend the next 15 years perfecting his design,

a process that resulted in creating an amazing 5,127 different prototypes before he produced the winning model. The path to success is putting in your best effort in an active way, despite the setbacks and failures.

So, whenever these critical inner thoughts start to arise, do not allow them to proceed any further. Interrupt these negative thought patterns immediately. Think rather, "What do I have to lose if I don't do the new activity or job?" Use your determination and positive thinking to maintain the pursuit of your dreams and goals with purpose, and believe it is possible.

8. HAVE COURAGE

Most people that are leading a purposeful and meaningful life have had the courage to continuously put themselves out there and to seek new opportunities. They took calculated risks and were willing to try out new things and challenged their old ways.

Instead of confining themselves to the boundaries of their comfort zones, they had the courage to overcome these limitations and try new and fresh experiences.

If we follow a life of purpose, it is also important to be self-aware. This gives you a clear perspective of your personality, strengths, weaknesses, likes, dislikes, values, beliefs, and motivations. This awareness helps decisive people when they are making choices.

What could create a barrier to pursuing a life with meaning? Often, it's our tendency to only be outcome-oriented. Instead of spending our time with something that adds meaning and purpose to our life, we opt for the alternative, the safe option that is financially the most promising. Even if this means that we do work that prevents us from living a purpose-driven life.

The second barrier is being afraid of rejection or being criticized by family or others. Instead of trying the new idea or reaching for that goal, we try to adapt to what others want us to do with our life. Rather, go after your own dreams and goals.

Successful people all have a vision of who they want to be and what they want to do. This purpose isn't just a known thought, it drives them to the career path that will provide meaning for their lives.

9. PRIORITIZE FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Our families and friends are our greatest assets. Close friends and family relationships are an important source of finding the meaning to life. Scientific research shows that, when you are close to your family and friends, you learn the benefits of love and the process of overcoming conflict and challenges. It's also a great place

to learn how to interact with others, read body language and practise the art of active listening, which may save you from making some mistakes in life.

Even if your relationships with your family and friends aren't perfect, family and friends are there to support you during the tough times when isolation, anxiety and fear of failure may be overwhelming. These relationships can add a deeper sense of purpose to your life by maintaining and cherishing these bonds. So, invest time in your family and friends. It's one of the best investments you will ever make.

10. SET GOALS

Successful individuals have a clear vision about what to focus on and how to accomplish their goals. Once they say they will do something, they do it! They don't ask for permission, and they don't search for acceptance. Instead, research has found that successful,

purpose-driven people have some intangibles in common. They focus on one task at a time, they are present in the moment when interacting with others, they ask insightful questions, they actively listen, and they make sure they understand what they are hearing. Then, after consideration, they follow their goals with passion.

Here is a list of nine tips on setting goals and achieving them:

1. Choose a worthwhile goal
2. Choose goals that are achievable
3. Make your goals specific
4. Commit to your goals
5. Make your goal known
6. Prioritise your goals
7. Visualise your goal to stay motivated
8. Set deadlines to accomplish your goals
9. Evaluate your goals

CONCLUSION

We are all gifted with the same amount of time each day and it's our choice how we spend that time. Deep down we all want to live a meaningful life and leave a legacy for good. But how can we find a purpose that's bigger than ourselves and truly make an impact for good on other people's lives?

Well, the best way to start is to integrate God into your life, your family and your goals. Then you will find the meaning, purpose and satisfaction in your life that we all seek.

There are many promises in the Bible to encourage us. God has promised that He will always be with us. He is with us when we are afraid, suffering from despair or doubt; but He has greater plans for us. He wants us to live the dream – a meaningful life with purpose.

"In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose... which is to be conformed to the image of his Son."

Romans 8:28-29 (NIV)

"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."

James 1:17 (NIV)

"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

Matthew 6:33 (NIV)

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This booklet looks at ten steps or strategies, that can help us to find purpose and live a meaningful life.



The Incredible Journey



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