



Find Your Purpose

Using Science

Free Version

Dr. Gleb Tsipursky

My Offer to You

Thank you for reading my book! I am convinced that the science-based strategies described here will help the vast majority of readers like you strengthen their personal sense of meaning and purpose in life. In fact, I will put my money where my mouth is, and make you a money-back offer. If you can prove to me that you bought and read this book, and did all the exercises, but you still feel that you did not enrich your personal sense of meaning and purpose, I will happily give you any profit I made on the sale of the book to you. Just send your receipt and your written answers to all the exercises in the book to info@intentionalinsights.org. I hope that demonstrates my confidence that this book will help you find your purpose using science!

Endorsements

Dr. Tsipursky has done a terrific job approaching this important topic from a scientific perspective. He not only demonstrates that we don't need to imagine the supernatural to find a purpose in life, but he shows how modern research in fields such as cognitive psychology and neuroscience provide demonstrable strategies that allow us to create a purpose—our own purpose.

- **Dr. Bo Bennett** holds a Doctorate in Psychology, hosts “The Dr. Bo Show,” and wrote *Logically Fallacious* and *Year to Success*

A unique and intriguing project, well-researched, and well worth your testing out in practice. No one has done anything like this before. And it's a field much in need of work like this.

- **Dr. Richard Carrier** holds a Doctorate in History and wrote *Sense and Goodness without God* and *On the Historicity of Jesus: Why We Might Have Reason for Doubt*

Dr. Tsipursky has done a great job bringing the power of meaning and purpose to the rational and scientific among us. This topic is so frequently treated as a purely religious or spiritual inquiry that it can be a very difficult process for the skeptically-minded. The need for meaning is a fundamentally human one, and no belief system can claim ownership of it. As a math major from MIT and a former software developer, it would have been a blessing to me to have this book when I began my search for purpose! Well done, Dr. Tsipursky.

- **Tim Kelley** is Founder of the True Purpose® Institute and wrote *True Purpose: Twelve Strategies for Discovering the Difference You Are Meant to Make*

*Perhaps you have wondered to yourself, “What is my meaning and purpose in life?” If so, you have plenty of company in the wondering department but may struggle to come up with answers to that question. Well, if you are ready to explore, then Gleb Tsipursky's workbook, *Find Your Purpose Using Science*, may be just what you are looking for to get the exploration going. Tsipursky, a college professor and scholar of scientific and research-based approaches to answering big questions has put together a step by step guide to help you reflect on what you really and truly care about, match that with what you are actually doing with your life, and set up a plan to move toward more meaningful and purposeful living. Along the way, Tsipursky highlights the personal stories of people who, as he does himself, discover unexpected and positive energy for living life in a meaningful and fulfilling way.*

- **Bart Worden** is the Executive Director of the American Ethical Union

Find Your Purpose Using Science clearly is one of the centerpieces of humanist education, and it should be. In my position as an American Humanist Association Education Consultant and former Director of the Kochhar Humanist Education Center, I am in the most fortunate position of recommending it to the AHA's chapters and affiliates. It should serve as one of the centerpieces of our educational program since it provides clear and practical research-based strategies for figuring out a personal sense of life's meaning and purpose.

- **Dr. Bob Bhaerman** holds a Doctorate of Education with a specialty in curricular development and is an American Humanist Association Educational Consultant and former Director of the Kochhar Humanist Education Center

Professor Tsipursky shows us that, while there is no obvious purpose to life, meaning is ours for the making. Science shows us how meaning-making is important for our happiness, and especially how community helps us discover what truly fulfills us, then helps us act on it.

- **Maria Greene** is the Executive Director of the Unitarian Universalist Humanist Association

Dr. Gleb Tsipursky departs from the affirmation of the late Dr. Stephen Jay Gould, which suggests that the scientific method and religious approaches are differing magisteria, that is, they are asking distinct sets of questions, which, even when they overlap a bit, remain focused on different values. In Tsipursky's view, justice issues, meaning, value and even purpose issues, which are central to many religious people, can be generated very clearly from evidence based studies that use the scientific method. For conservative evangelicals like Rick Warren, there can be no purpose without a biblical warrant. Dr. Tsipursky, without rancor, demonstrates successfully to my mind that this is simply not true, and that one can live not only an ethical and moral life without religion, but a responsible, compassionate and justice-seeking life. I found it insightful throughout.

- **Rev. Dr. Mark Belletini** holds a Doctorate of Divinity Degree, is a senior minister at the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Columbus, and wrote *Nothing Gold Can Stay: The Colors of Grief*

Find Your Purpose Using Science is an effective reason-based path to deepen meaning and connect with your life's purpose. Using techniques supported by his own research and that of dozens of other scholars, Dr. Tsipursky guides readers through proven purpose discovery exercises. With his warm, engaging, and vulnerable style he shares his own personal struggle, and that of many others, to reconcile the world of science and reason with the more elusive and subtle pings of the human heart – to create a life that is larger than oneself. He guides readers through a number of activities to create their own narrative from within, to reveal their life's purpose, align their entire life with it, guide them in times of uncertainty,

chaos and despair, and empower them to achieve the impossible. Dr. Tsipurky's voice is unique, speaking to the hope, idealism, angst and empowerment of the current global population, the largest population in human history, who are uniquely suited to remake our world with their life's purpose, and use science to approach life's big question, "Why am I here?"

- **Brandon Peele**, Global Purpose Advocate, PlanetPurpose.org, Founder & Purpose Coach, The EVR1 Institute

Dr. Gleb Tsipursky's book Find Your Purpose Using Science provides a great overview of the subject. It is a must read for those who are charting their trajectory in life and are seeking to create their own meaning and purpose.

- **Mark W. Gura** is a TV/radio Host, the Executive Director of the Association of Mindfulness Meditation and Secular Buddhism, and wrote *Exploring Your Life: Mindfulness Meditation and Secular Spirituality* and *Atheist Meditation Atheist Spirituality*.

Filled with thought provoking exercises as well information on what research has shown works to provide meaning and purpose to people's lives. While Dr. Tsipursky doesn't answer the question of what your purpose in life is, he does guide you so that you can discover for yourself what your highest order goals really are. Knowing what you really want to accomplish in life provides a foundation for you to live your life, fully and with purpose.

- **Jennifer Hancock** is the Director of Humanist Learning Systems and wrote *The Humanist Approach to Happiness: Practical Wisdom* and *The Humanist Approach to Grief and Grieving*

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my partner in life, Agnes Vishnevkin, the source of so much meaning and purpose for me in my life, as well as the editor of this book. Thank you so much for being you!

The majority of the profits from this book are pledged to Intentional Insights and other philanthropic work committed to helping people find meaning and purpose in life, and refine and reach their goals through improving their thinking, feeling, and behavior patterns.

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Find Your Purpose Using Science

Dr. Gleb Tsipursky

President and Co-Founder, Intentional Insights

Tenure-Track Professor, The Ohio State University

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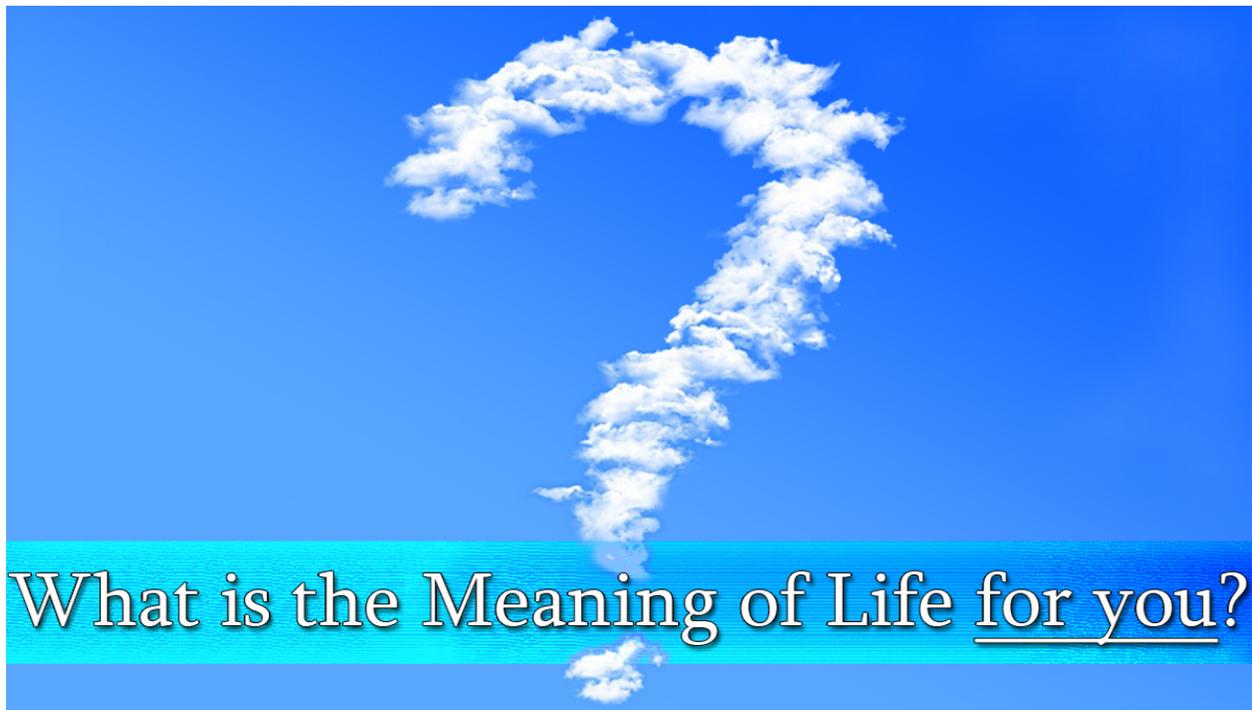
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Introduction

What is the meaning and purpose of life for you? Please take a moment to reflect on this question. Whether you have asked yourself this question before or not, it is very helpful to check in from time to time, and ask yourself, with an open heart and open mind, once again. After all, your answer may shift over time, including by reading this book, which lays out a science-based path to help you find a deep sense of meaning and purpose in life.

Using science to address life's meaning and purpose may seem surprising to many. After all, the traditional mainstream approach believes that science can't answer big life questions – that's the job of religion.



Courtesy of Cerina Gillilan

Well, actually there's been a wave of recent research in psychology, cognitive neuroscience, and other disciplines on how we can find a rich sense of meaning and purpose in life. The workbook combines an engaging narrative, academic research, and stories from people's everyday lives, and provides a set of exercises to help you figure out your personal sense of meaning and purpose. In writing this, I drew on my own scholarship on meaning and purpose, and my experience in giving workshops, teaching classes, creating videos, and writing blog posts that translate such research into practical strategies for finding life meaning and purpose.

Now, many people who come to my workshops and classes are looking for a simple, clear,

and straightforward answer to what life is all about. They want certainty about life's meaning and purpose. Well, I'd love to address life's meaning and purpose for all people and for all time, but I can't give the absolute right answer to the big question of "what is the meaning of life." I don't deal in sound bites and dogmas.

What I can do in this book is provide you some clear and practical research-based strategies for figuring out a personal sense of life's meaning and purpose. In other words, I offer the answer to the question "what is the meaning of life for you?"

Those who attended [my workshops and classes on this topic](#) found these techniques very helpful.

One participant stated in an anonymous feedback form that s/he gained "a better understanding of what it means to search for meaning, with the research basis especially greatly contributing to my comprehension." A second noted that after attending the workshop, "I have a much better sense of how to consider questions of meaning and purpose." A third wrote that "from attending this workshop, I have gained the basic knowledge for greater self-exploration." Several chose to give videotaped interviews about their experience in a workshop on meaning and purpose. They kindly permitted me to include their names and links to their videotaped feedback, for example [Ryan Mulholand](#); [Brenda Penn](#); [Karen Thimmes](#), and [Jake Calaway](#). Their descriptions of their experience testifies to how much they benefitted from engaging with the research-based strategies to finding a deeper sense of meaning and purpose in life.

I got in touch with some of these workshop participants a few weeks after the workshop, to see whether it influenced them in the long term. It did. The most illustrative statement came from Ryan, whose story I will share throughout this book. Ryan, who is a 21-year-old college student, stated that when he first came to the workshop, "my original highest order goals revolved largely around living a comfortable life." Yet in the course of the workshop, he realized that "the issue with this mindset was that it was too shallow and self-centered for me to be content with for long." As a result of the workshop, he stated that "I reached several conclusions in what I desired most out of life. I figured out that I wanted to build a life that was centered around bettering myself and other people. I wanted to be someone who constantly was learning and growing, while at the same time, being a teacher of sorts to help those around me... With these thoughts in mind, I promptly changed my major and have since then, begun to work toward making these wants into realities." His full statement describing his experience is available [here](#).

You can gain similar benefits by engaging with the content and exercises in this workbook, which offers:

- Stories from people's everyday experience finding life's meaning and purpose
- Some diverse approaches to this question informed by recent research and contemporary thinkers

- Pragmatic and straightforward strategies for working out the meaning and purpose of life for yourself

Let me give a real-life example of how the workbook helps people, by once again turning to Ryan. He read through a draft of the workbook, and described his thoughts as follows. “The majority of the book’s content focuses on exercises to help you establish the initial ideas of what hold the greatest amount of meaning and purpose... The total sum of initial work is no more than two hours, but what is that compared to the time that will be spent living life as you see fit? It is in this investment of time, both initially and continually, that you will come closer and closer to your objective. The reason for the need to revisit your plans and goals is because your answers may change. In short, life happens, and with it comes new experiences. If you do take the time to evaluate your purpose and meaning in life, then, with time, you will achieve the goals you set forth.” For his full evaluation of his experience with the book, click on [this link](#).

John, currently 27 and studying to become a teacher, also read a draft version of the workbook. Unlike Ryan, he did not go to any previous workshops or engaged with any other Intentional Insights content beforehand. This is what he wrote about his experience: “I was able to gain a new perspective on my own life and priorities. Its research-based strategies for evaluating one’s purpose and meaning have helped me develop a clearer vision for my future. I am currently pursuing a new set of goals—both personally and professionally—that align with my values. In short, I have clearer understanding of who I am and of my place in the community.” I hope the workbook will help you like it helped Ryan and John.

The first section of this workbook describes the relevance of meaning and purpose to people’s lives; the second section deals with studies and thinking on finding life’s meaning and purpose; and the third section relates the strategies and tools for figuring out your own sense of life’s meaning and purpose. Some of you may wish to skip straight to the third section, and you are welcome to do so, after taking the questionnaire described below.

This workbook comes out of my engagement with a nonprofit organization, [Intentional Insights](#). The nonprofit’s [mission](#) is to empower people to refine and reach their goals by providing research-based content to help improve thinking, feeling, and behavior patterns. One of the areas we focus on is helping people reach their life goals, such as finding meaning and purpose in life. Intentional Insights delivers such content through in-person presentations, through online channels such as [free online classes](#), [videos](#), and [blogs](#) devoted to this topic, and workbooks such as this one. Our work has been covered in mainstream media such as [The Columbus Dispatch](#), [The Examiner](#), and [elsewhere](#).

As part of that organization, I led the creation of a comprehensive program offering participants practical and pragmatic strategies for figuring out their personal answers to life's big questions. This program draws from my research on how people found purpose and meaning in diverse historical contexts (Tsipursky, [“Having](#)

[Fun](#),” [“Citizenship”](#); [“Conformism”](#); [“Living ‘America’”](#)), and research by many others as well, from a variety of disciplines. As a historian of science, I research the intersection of history, psychology, and cognitive neuroscience, specifically focusing on meaning and purpose, emotions, decision making, and agency in historical contexts. Thus, I am in the fortunate position of having scholarly expertise in combining research from many different fields into a cohesive whole, and translation of this information for a broad audience. I am especially grateful to have collaboration and feedback from experts in a variety of disciplines, which includes psychology, social work, and therapy, ([Dr. Joe Guada](#) and [Dr. Bo Bennett](#)), education ([Dr. Bob Bhaerman](#)), cognitive neuroscience ([Dr. Carlos Cabrera](#)), philosophy ([Dr. Richard Carrier](#) and [Dr. Amy White](#)), religion ([Unitarian Universalist Rev. Dr. Mark Belletini](#) and [United Methodist Rev. Caleb Pitkin](#)) and many others. All the good things in this book are the combined result of all of these efforts, while I take full and sole responsibility for any mistakes and oversights.

Before proceeding, let’s clarify some terms. Scholars on meaning and purpose define these words differently than they are used in common language. Researchers use “purpose” to refer to a broad aspiration in life that motivates one’s everyday activities. They use “meaning” as a more overarching term to refer both to one’s life purpose, but also one’s broad comprehension of one’s life, self, and the world. However, since life meaning and purpose are used interchangeably in everyday speech, I will use them interchangeably in this workbook (Steger et al. [“Acceptance”](#)).

Now, you may say that well, research and strategies based on it are all well and good, and they may work for the majority. And it’s helpful to learn about people’s personal stories, such as the one Ryan chose to share. Yet how do I know the strategies in this workbook will help me to get a deeper sense of meaning and purpose in my life?

Excellent question! I know the feeling. I often read studies and advice based on them, and am not sure whether the conclusions of studies would be relevant to my life. And while personal stories are gripping and powerful, they don’t necessarily apply to me. Moreover, as this book will describe, there are many ways one can try to gain a deeper sense of meaning and purpose. How would you know what are the best ones to pursue for you?

This is why it’s so important to evaluate and quantify your personal sense of meaning and purpose, and to tie the quantification to the different types of meaning-making activities that you may choose to do. To help you accomplish that quantification, I developed a tool, the “Meaning and Purpose Questionnaire (MPQ),” based on research on meaning and purpose, my own and that of others as well (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, Kaler, [“The Meaning in Life Questionnaire”](#); [McDonald, Wong, Gingras](#)). The MPQ will provide a baseline for you to evaluate your own progress in finding meaning and purpose. You can get a copy of the MPQ if you email us at info@intentionalinsights.org, and it is also available [here](#). We are also working on a web and mobile app where you can take the MPQ at regular intervals and graph your

sense of meaning and purpose over time. Doing so will help you understand:

- whether you are making progress in gaining a deeper sense of meaning and purpose
- what specific activities are most impactful for you in having meaning and purpose in life
- finally, how to customize the science-based strategies to gain the most benefit for yourself.

Sign up to the Intentional Insights [newsletter](#) to learn more about the app and our other offerings that help people refine and reach their goals. Also check out the Intentional Insights [Facebook Page](#), [Twitter](#), and [Pinterest](#) to engage with our content, ask us any clarifying questions, and improve your ability to gain a richer sense of life purpose.

Meaning and Purpose Questionnaire (MPQ)

Directions: Please think for 5 minutes about your sense of meaning and purpose in life. Then rank the following statements on a scale of 1 to 10, from 1 being “ABSOLUTELY NOT TRUE” to 10 being “ABSOLUTELY TRUE.” Below each, write an explanation of why you answered the way you did.

1. I have a strong sense of meaning and purpose in life
2. I have a clear understanding of what gives my life meaning and purpose
3. I actively search for a sense of meaning and purpose in life
4. I actively reflect on my sense of meaning and purpose in life
5. I engage in activities that help me experience meaning and purpose in life
6. I engage in social service that helps others have better lives
7. I have meaningful social and community bonds
8. I have social connections that help me experience meaning and purpose in life
9. I help others find meaning and purpose in life
10. I am satisfied with my sense of meaning and purpose in life

Meaning and Purpose: Relevance to Daily Life

After you've taken the MPQ, read onward!

Imagine the following scenario: you have been raised in a deeply evangelical household. From an early age, your parents taught you to pray daily and told you that the purpose and meaning of life were found in God. Attending Sunday school reinforced this message. So did the television shows that your family watched, the books that they gave you to read, and the music to which they encouraged you to listen. You grew up in this environment throughout your early teenage years, attending religious elementary and junior high schools. Then, you went off to a public high school, because your parents could not afford a religious high school. There, you met an environment that challenged your beliefs that the purpose and meaning in life were to be found only in God. You started to question and doubt, maybe even attended meetings of the local [Secular Student Alliance](#) affiliate to find out what it was all about. You wanted to explore more broadly, but were afraid of losing your sense of purpose and meaning in life.



Courtesy of Cerina Gillilan

This is the story of many young people I have come to know. They were deeply confused about meaning and purpose in life, questioning what it was all about. This questioning correlates with the [growing number of “nones.”](#) people without any religious affiliation in American society, especially among younger adults. Many nones, and [especially college aged](#)

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