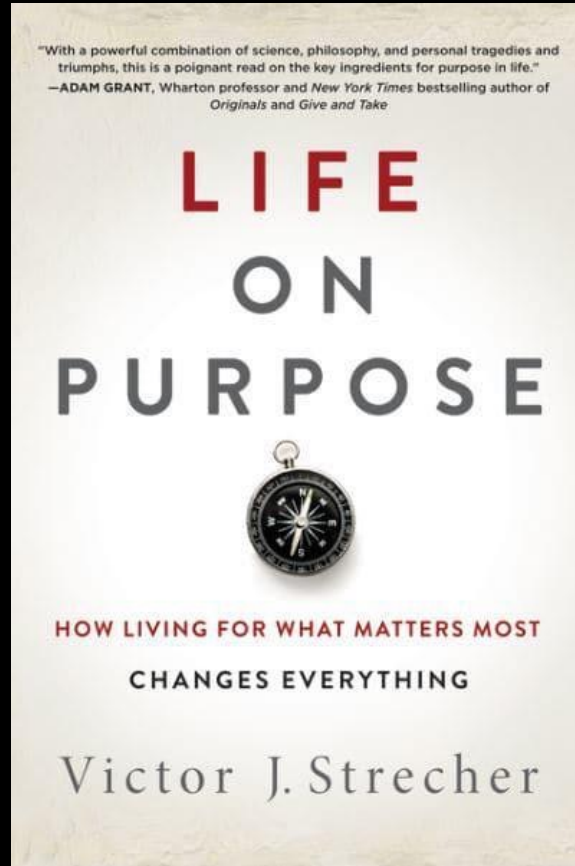


# Unness book summaries and balanced review - Victor Strecher *Life on Purpose*

Who is this book for? Our view:



1. People who want to understand the science of how purpose gives a longer healthier life
2. People who want to **sustain** the purpose they've found through life
3. People who want inspiration through difficult times – loss or battling illness

Who is this book not for?

1. People who believe that God is the only way to find purpose
2. People who are only focussed on what actions to take to find purpose.

## What does the book say? A quick summary (If you want a fuller summary please e-mail [info@uuness.com](mailto:info@uuness.com))

1. The author experienced extreme personal loss, the loss of a daughter which led to him asking himself about purpose. He could be described as “ Dr Purpose” (that’s us saying this not him) and he’s interested in the science of purpose precipitated by his personal loss.
2. Since 2008 the number of Google searches about finding purpose have doubled
3. Yet comparing American students between 1966 and 2005 we find that in ‘66 students felt meaning in life was important (85%) by ‘05 75% felt it was about being financially well off (meaning just 35%)
4. Yet USA data shows that US economic growth isn’t making people happier
5. The science shows clear evidence that a clearer purpose provides a longer, happier and more healthy life.
6. The science also shows that a clear purpose defends against bad health, major trauma and personal loss
7. Clear purpose reduces the chance of dying by 12% among one of many statistics
8. Clear purpose reduces the chance of stroke, heart disease, Alzheimer’s, reduces the production of cells leading to cancer, it helps produce healthy cholesterol, better sex, being more relaxed, less depressed and increases telomerase production which increases your life expectancy
9. On the flipside – clearer purpose is associated with better outcomes against cancer, coping with extreme traumatic events, obesity, spinal chord injury, tuberculosis and MS
10. Many well known people have a stated purpose and that’s all it takes to get these health benefits
11. For example Dexter Gordon’s purpose was to be “**the** tenor saxophonist” .
12. A less selfish, more typical purpose is that of the author - “To help others find purpose in their lives, to teach every student as it’s my own daughter. To be an engaged husband and father and to enjoy love, life and beauty”
13. How do you find purpose? The author’s recipe is as follows:
  - Find your top values e.g. education
  - Emulate someone who had those values e.g. a teacher of yours you admired/admire
  - Do the funeral test e.g. what teaching do you want to be remembered for?
  - Turn your top values into a goal e.g. to teach 1000 students to do X
  - Find a goal bigger than yourself e.g. to teach people to live kinder lives
  - Wear the suit i.e. Look at your purpose every day and live it, allow it to guide your choices in life

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14. Affirming your values stimulates the ventro medial prefrontal cortex – which is about the self and affirming positive values allows you greater love, connectedness, empathy, transcended feelings and reduced defensiveness
15. How do you sustain this purpose? Victor Strecher suggests “SHAPE” supported by science, experience, looking at the lives of people on purpose and even the impact of earthquakes on victims:
  - Sleep well
  - Maintain presence – i.e. live in the now not the past or future, use your purpose to interpret the good and the bad in your own personal life story
  - Activity – integrate exercise you like into your life and amplify it e.g. walk more, take the stairs etc and take exercise that you like/suits you
  - Creativity – this isn’t about you being an artist necessarily it’s about creating things you care about/that absorb you in the moment which increase energy
  - Eating well – essentially adopt a Mediterranean low meat, good fats, high fibre high fruit and veg diet
16. All of the above sustain two key attributes that allow you to live life on purpose fully – your willpower and your energy levels
17. Purpose sustains us through bad times. People who have been through severe earthquakes e.g. Pakistan show the science of purpose. 65% suffer from PTSD, while 35% do not. The latter accept their beliefs have been challenged and change them, the former don’t
18. Purpose helps resilience – Neuro-imaging by Reekum et al (2007) show people with strong purpose respond less to negative events
19. In fact the World Health shows that people in poorer nations have a stronger purpose to get them through and it sustains them
20. In conclusion “Get a purpose. It might not be perfect but it’s better to have one than wait. In fact, at the risk of sounding alarmist, we need it.”  
You must USE IT!

## Quotes from the book we liked

1. Purpose is "A higher order goal of deep value. The higher you set it the better you perform"
2. Strecher's purpose "To help others create purpose in their lives and help each student as if they were my own daughter. To be an engaged father and husband and enjoy love and beauty"
3. Beware the purpose you choose "Hitler had a purpose!"
4. Chrissie Hynde of the Pretenders purpose was " Make the other band members look and sound good. Bring out the best in them, that's the job"
5. Red Sanders "Winning isn't everything it's the only thing". The counter to that is "The best coaches care more about the wisdom derived from the process that led to winning than winning itself"
6. Hindu priest " In our philosophy you are born with the atman. It's exposure to the world that makes us sinful"
7. What Nietzsche & Kierkegaard present on purpose are opposites that lead to the same goal – purpose. "One extreme is rejecting societal values & finding one's own purpose (even if society doesn't understand it.) And the other extreme is rejecting societal values and living according to God's purpose (even though society might not understand it)"
8. "Must we begin with God? There have been a lot of purposeful atheists – Carl Sagan, Einstein, Edison, Arthur C Clarke, George Bernard Shaw, Beethoven and Mozart..."
9. "Heaven feels like a long vacation. Why should we feel urgency and get things done in life?"
10. "When a man does not know what harbour he is making for, no wind is the right wind"
11. Henry Nyombi – paralyzed in childhood, an orphan in a society (Uganda) that stigmatized those with disabilities said "Without purpose in life I would have committed suicide a long time ago". He is now head of Uganda's program for disabled people
12. "It's our approach and interpretation of the past that generates resilience
13. "A purpose driven life isn't a panacea. But it can provide guidance for the choices we make through our lives".

### Where the book is strong

- It's an incredibly accessible read from a man who knows so much about the science of purpose
- The author clearly lives his purpose, he travels a huge amount and spreads the education on purpose – he walks the talk and you feel that in the breadth of his knowledge of the subject
- It makes a clear scientific case for why getting a purpose, even if it isn't perfect, makes you live longer and stronger and find trials and tribulations easier to handle
- It offers a framework to find your purpose based on your values and it shows scientifically the benefit of living a value driven life on your health
- It's packed full of real life stories of amazing people which really bring the content to life
- And critically the "real life interest stories" connect and back up the science – they aren't there for the sake of it
- It offers the key principles to sustain a purpose driven life using the SHAPE approach
- Few books go into as much detail about how to SUSTAIN a purpose driven life which is incredibly valuable to those who want purpose to be something they maintain
- Unlike many books in this space, this book is fully researched and the principles are deeply rooted in evidence versus opinion
- We'd argue it's one of the strongest scientific books on this subject, period.

### Areas where it is weaker

- It's not strong on the "God debate" – it's "in there" but many people of faith will feel that this is missing in the text. Having said that the author is honest about saying he's agnostic and that's his position – so to be honest you wouldn't expect it from this book
- The principle of listing your core values and finding the higher ones you care about is, in our experience, very sound. However, without intervention we find that people can end up with a list of values and end up a circular debate about which one is key OR and worse, they can't decide on their key values – so they end up feeling stuck
- Why is this? The truth is your values are only your core values if they've been tested by life, you only know what you truly stand for *under duress*
- In addition the book is not strong on showing examples of how a list of values translate into a clear purpose – the book says "translate it" but it doesn't show a process or the steps on how to achieve that – there aren't a list of examples that show step by step how to do this – just a framework and then the text leaves it to you
- So our view is it needs more examples to show how to find real life purpose as opposed to the concept. Pragmatic people are very likely to go – well the science is interesting but *I just want to get this right!*
- In addition, we've found that without a deep dive into your personal history, this (values) approach can be superficial because, essentially, you forget things of critical importance to your purpose if you don't do a thorough and complete audit of your entire life. You omit key learnings which are the key (and overlooked) reason for your life purpose and that's really dangerous, it's like founding your purpose on quick sand
- We feel the latter is a genuine hole in the book's scientific narrative and one uuness plugs. We'd expect future versions of this book would have an expanded section on this as the author is very thorough.