



# virtues & vocations

HIGHER EDUCATION FOR  
HUMAN FLOURISHING SPRING 2024

## Purpose

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SPRING 2024

# Purpose



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**Virtues & Vocations: Higher Education for Human Flourishing** is an open invitation to a conversation, a community, and a set of contested aspirations for both how we ought to live together in this world and how higher education might serve those aspirations. It is a product of an initiative with the same name, Virtues & Vocations, sponsored by the Kern Family Foundation and hosted by the Center for Social Concerns at the University of Notre Dame. The initiative—comprised of a set of publications and convenings, both virtual and in person—seeks to foster a community of thought and practice to integrate questions of character, meaning, and purpose into the fabric of higher education. The telos of this community is human flourishing.





SUZANNE SHANAHAN, EDITOR

# Welcome

**We are travelers on a cosmic journey, stardust, swirling and dancing in the eddies and whirlpools of infinity. Life is eternal. We have stopped for a moment to encounter each other, to meet, to love, to share. This is a precious moment. It is a little parentheses in eternity. —PAULO COELHO, *THE ALCHEMIST***



Coelho's *The Alchemist* was first translated into English in in 1993. In the wondrous, hopeful tale of a shepherd, Santiago, pursuing his destiny from Andalusia to the Egyptian pyramids, the search for purpose and meaning are inherently heroic, and our shared flourishing is a product of the individual quest: “When we strive to become better than we are, everything around us becomes better, too.” *The Alchemist* offered a recipe for the life well lived, and quickly became a cult classic—published in eighty languages and selling more than 150 million copies. Coelho says it only took him two weeks to write the manuscript because “it was already written in his soul.”



I consider *The Alchemist* part of my own introduction to questions of vocation, purpose, and human flourishing. I may well have spent more time reading and re-reading it than Coelho did writing it. Published before Bill Damon's seminal work on purpose or his decades long collaboration with Howard Gardner and well before programmatic interventions like Duke's Purpose Project or the Purposeful Work initiative at Bates College, Coelho's story has much in common with both current scholarly conversations about purpose as well as the more popular fascination with pursuing it. Indeed, we see how Belmont University President Greg Jones' essay in this issue is deeply resonant with Coelho: "By framing questions of purpose, character, and entrepreneurial mindset more clearly in terms of what it means for human beings, individually and collectively, to flourish, we as higher education leaders may see far greater impact on creating and sustaining the flourishing world at the heart of our own sense of purpose."

And yet, I have recently come to question the emphasis on purpose and popular culture's current fascination with it. This fall, while searching for a day planner for my daughter, I came across a lovely "Live with Purpose Planner" that suggested a banality of purpose that disquieted me. Is finding purpose as simple as 10 easy steps? Could the aspiration for self-transcendent

purpose becoming just another narcissistic journey of self-actualization?

During a recent conversation with Stanford's Dave Evans, he described meaning as the new money. I loved that notion, but later wondered whether it signaled an over-instrumentalized, over-individuated purpose. There was a moment during the pandemic where the individual pursuit of purpose and human flourishing seemed quite thoughtfully aligned. Was this deep alignment just epiphenomenal? How can we avoid hollowing out the value of purpose?

In this issue of *Virtues & Vocations: Higher Education for Human Flourishing*, ten essays and an interview with scholar Bill Damon center a robust engagement with purpose. For me personally, they offer an antidote to worries of trivialization or individuation. While deeply personal, they illustrate how important self-transcendence is for the pursuit of purpose. And yet, their humor and reflection also remind us that not everything in life needs to be purposeful. As Jesse Summers, Director of University Initiatives with the Purpose Project at Duke, writes, "We see that more clearly if we ask not what a life is *for*, but, instead, how to love the worthiness of what we *do*."

This set of essays is perhaps more analytically autobiographical than those that have appeared in previous issues, with many




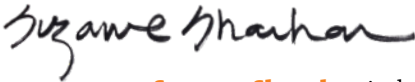
contributors sharing wisdom from their own pursuit of meaningful, self-transcendent purpose at very different moments in their life course. Authors—some still in their twenties, others approaching their nineties—examine their personal journeys to find, maintain, or reconstruct purpose. Illness, death, disappointment, and failure feature alongside narratives of love, commitment, professional success, sport, and unmitigated joy. In each of these essays, as in *The Alchemist*, hope and purpose are inextricably linked.

Our authors also explore the purpose of education, and of work, and what it means to educate for purpose. Director of Formation at the Francesco Collaborative, Kelli Hickey, writes,

I've come to believe that the meaning and purpose of education, like that of a crisis, is to sift. Our education should

shake up our categories, challenge our priorities, and call into question our dominant visions of success. It should plunge us into debates about purpose, meaning, faith, and the good. It should center life's most important questions: who we are, where we are going, what we owe each other, who we ought to be. At its best, education is about formation. It's about learning to live a life in the fullness of our human dignity—and building the kind of world that allows others to do the same.

As always, we have selected art to accompany each essay to move us toward a richer, more robust engagement with the topic at hand. The art in this issue seeks to evoke a sense of movement not unlike Santiago's journey. We invite you to stop for a moment, experiencing one of the little parentheses in eternity that the pursuit of purpose affords. 



**Suzanne Shanahan** is the  
Leo and Arlene Hawk Executive Director,  
Center for Social Concerns, University of Notre Dame.









## PART I

# Pursuing Virtue

“Classically, colleges and universities have understood themselves as helping students discover a sense of purpose deeper than questions about skills and job prospects. Such descriptions often have been linked to language about vocation, calling, and character.”

L. GREGORY JONES



L. GREGORY JONES

# Formation for Flourishing in Higher Education

## *Reimagining Purpose*

**H**igher education as an industry needs to be re-imagined. The challenges we face are too numerous to think we are just dealing with a series of complicated problems that can be attacked one at a time. Rather, they are complex problems that require creative solutions. If we assume they are merely complicated, or hard, we will just focus on one without realizing that we are making related problems worse.

We need to re-imagine the purpose of higher education and connect it more explicitly to human flourishing. Doing so will require fewer incremental approaches and more of a transformed vision. To be sure, such a transformed vision should not be nostalgic for some idealized and romanticized past. We need a vision that embodies “traditioned innovation,” drawing on the best of higher education’s past for innovative approaches to current realities and anticipated trajectories.<sup>1</sup> This is







especially true for professional education and for preparing people for diverse professions.

What might such a transformed vision entail? Three ways of re-framing the imagination for higher education will illumine the outlines of such a transformed vision: (1) A rediscovery of purpose; (2) A holistic approach; and (3) An embrace of perpetual learning across the lifespan to cultivate human flourishing.

## A REDISCOVERY OF PURPOSE

Current headlines highlight a variety of challenges facing higher education. Americans have far less trust in higher education, with a historic decline in just the last decade. Many see faculty as far too politicized, and this criticism seems to be borne out by increasing tensions between state legislatures and public universities. Student struggles with mental health, especially at some of the most prestigious institutions, paint a picture of academia that is more grueling than it is beneficial. These issues, coupled with rising tuition costs, have caused many parents and students to question whether a four-year degree is the best investment.

These challenges have led to piecemeal changes to try to address these issues

one-by-one. But such a strategy feels more like playing “whack-a-mole” than making actual progress. And that is because the challenges we face are more symptoms that require a deeper diagnosis than they are isolated problems.

The heart of the deeper diagnosis has to do with questions of purpose: the purpose of higher education itself and the ways in which it can and should help students discover purpose for their own lives and vocations. There is no simple way, either historically or philosophically, to describe the crisis of purpose in higher education. It does not afflict every institution equally, nor is it the case that all institutions are unable to answer questions about purpose. Rather, across the twentieth-century and into the first decades of the twenty-first, higher education has tended to focus more on pragmatic answers of usefulness than deeper questions of purpose.<sup>2</sup> We have offered statistics on the economic impact of a college education, we have shown the benefits of our institutions to our local communities, and we have touted our research productivity in achieving breakthroughs across a variety of sectors.

At the same time, though, we have become less articulate about such classical themes as “truth, beauty, and goodness,” and whether our core purpose includes addressing whether there is an “ultimate”





Purpose with a capital P for human life, human communities, and the world as a whole. Obviously, this way of framing the issue will be different for those universities that retain a faith-based identity than those that are secular, “post-religious,” or public, but arguably questions about purpose and Purpose ought to be at the heart of any good educational institution. To raise the question of whether there is any ultimate sense of Truth, Beauty, Goodness (and thus Purpose with a capital P) is not to presume a positive answer. But keeping such questions at the center of the conversation will illuminate ways that students can discover purpose in the course of their college career.

This is deeply connected to whether higher education is called to help its students articulate their sense of purpose and help them ask questions about ultimate Purpose. Classically, colleges and universities have understood themselves as helping students discover a sense of purpose deeper than questions about skills and job prospects. Such descriptions often have been linked to language about vocation, calling, and character. And, as courses have cropped up recently in a variety of institutions addressing these topics—from Stanford’s “Designing Your Life” and Yale’s “Life Worth Living” through Notre Dame’s “God and the Good Life” to a course my wife and I teach at Belmont, “What’s Your



Why?”—we are re-discovering the strong appetite for such courses.

## A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Making questions of purpose central to higher education also invites a more holistic pedagogical approach. Too often in contemporary higher education we treat students as if they are simply brains that need to download information. But if we are only focused on conveying information or transmitting skills, contemporary advances in technology are rendering us increasingly irrelevant. Young people yearn

for more holistic approaches. For example, in 2019, a Gallup–Bates College Study showed a crucial link between purpose and work, along with how difficult it is for college graduates to discover that link. Higher education ought to be leading the way in helping students connect their work with questions of purpose by asking deep questions about a well-lived life and through internships and other extracurricular experiences that put those thoughts into action.

This is even more important given the growing challenges to mental health and well-being. Loneliness, anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation among young adults has increased significantly over the last decade. Higher education leaders have noticed these trends and sought to address them, but merely reactive efforts like hiring more counselors do not deal with the deeper issues that can only be addressed by fostering connection and community and addressing deeper themes of purpose and character.

Technology may be advancing in its ability to process information and write remarkable essays. However, questions at the heart of what it means to be human—including our emotions, our desire for wisdom, our embodied relationships with one another—invite a more holistic approach to character formation and to a discovery of what the New Testament calls



“life that really is life” (I Timothy 6:19). One need not be religious to yearn for what Miroslav Volf and his colleagues at Yale call “life worth living.” And nurturing that well requires us to take an institution-wide approach. At Belmont, a focus on “whole-person formation” is one of our five strategic pathways to accomplishing our mission and vision.

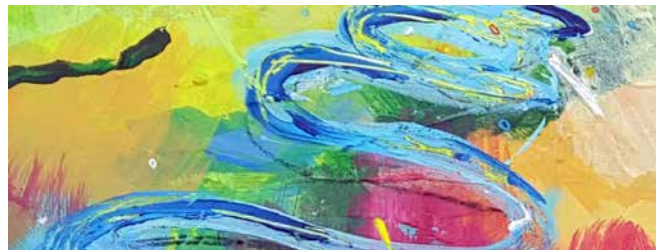
## FORMATION FOR FLOURISHING

Reorienting our practice around questions of purpose and the life well-lived drives us to a re-imagination of higher education for human flourishing. Most centrally, this invites us to focus on what it means for our students to flourish, both while they are students and throughout their lives.

A re-imagined higher education for flourishing would embrace opportunities and responsibilities to engage people across the life-span, while remaining focused on our mission of higher education. Rather than assuming that higher education exists only, or even primarily, for 18–22 year olds, whom we then seek to maintain relationships with as “alumni,” we would see roles for us in education and formation throughout the lifespan.

Higher education obviously has a stake in the education of people 0–18. They are, to

put it in business terms, our “supply chain.” If preschool and K–12 don’t do their work well, it makes it even more challenging for higher education. Rather than engaging in blame games about where the failures lie, we ought to embrace intrinsic partnerships that foster continuities in education and formation throughout life. Less often noticed is that we have a stake in the education and formation of people who are much older than 18–22. This includes opportunities for people who never went to college, or didn’t finish, to complete degrees later



Higher education ought to be leading the way in helping students connect their work with questions of purpose by asking deep questions about a well-lived life and through internships and other extracurricular experiences that put those thoughts into action.

in life. It also includes opportunities for college graduates to continue to learn and grow—whether to keep up with changes in professional expectations, re-tooling for new opportunities, or simply to grow in wisdom by learning throughout life.

Underlying this new approach is an entrepreneurial mindset that needs to be cultivated across higher education. Such a mindset includes, but is distinct from, innovation and entrepreneurship as vocations some people pursue. Rather, it is a focus on the future and how we can learn most fruitfully from what has gone before us, rather than an attempt to replicate the past or survive the status quo. Too many of us in higher education think and lead as if we are preparing for 1995 in case it ever comes back. We need to be oriented, and orienting our students, toward a “traditioned innovation” approach to the future that prepares them to think and live entrepreneurially for flourishing.

A flipped approach leads to a framing of higher education’s purpose in provocative ways such as the following: how can higher education, and in particular my institution,

equip people with the character, purpose, and skills for them to flourish, to help others in their families and communities to flourish, and to help the world flourish? The ways in which a faith-based institution such as Belmont or Notre Dame might address this question are distinct from an elite research university such as Duke or Washington University in St. Louis, much less from a public university such as Michigan or Cal State–Northridge.

Arizona State University is already providing fascinatingly innovative approaches to such a framing, ranging from their work across the lifespan to their engagement with communities near and far. We need to cultivate more examples from diverse institutions, and Belmont is working on such innovation. Rather than the isomorphism that tends to happen in higher education, we need to cultivate institutions doing very different experiments designed to foster purpose, character, and human flourishing for their constituents and broader communities. And those experiments should keep questions of Purpose with a capital P—including those of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness—at the heart of our diverse approaches to “higher” education.

The more we cultivate such diversity among higher education institutions, the more we will re-inspire trust and confidence both in the relevance of higher education and its



intrinsic importance. By framing questions of purpose, character, and entrepreneurial mindset more clearly in terms of what it means for human beings, individually and collectively, to flourish, we as higher education leaders may see far greater impact on creating and sustaining the flourishing world at the heart of our own sense of purpose. 🌱🌿



#### NOTES

1. For a more extended description and account of what I call “traditioned innovation,” see L. Gregory Jones and Andrew P. Hogue, *Navigating the Future: Traditioned Innovation for Wilder Seas* (Abingdon Press, 2021).
2. Amidst an extensive literature discussing these issues, notable is Julie Reuben’s historical account of the marginalization of ethical discussion in the modern research university. See her *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality* (Chicago, 1996). And, given the isomorphism of higher education, intensified by accreditation processes, even colleges and universities that bear little resemblance to a research university such as Harvard or Johns Hopkins have often mimicked their practices and assumptions.

By framing questions of purpose, character, and entrepreneurial mindset more clearly in terms of what it means for human beings, individually and collectively, to flourish, we as higher education leaders may see far greater impact on creating and sustaining the flourishing world at the heart of our own sense of purpose.



**L. Gregory Jones** has been the President of Belmont University since 2021, and before that, he served as the dean of Duke Divinity School. The author or editor of 19 books, Greg is a gifted speaker, media contributor and thought leader in higher education, social innovation and theology.







SABRINA B. LITTLE

# The Flourishing Runner

There is an uneasy place I often visit when I run.

It is a liminal space, or a border between two territories. On one side of the border are edifying discomforts—full of the kinds of chosen suffering my body can absorb and grow from. On the other side are unproductive pains and destructive suffering. On this side of the border are injuries, burnout, and other ill-effects for my body and mind long-term.

I want to securely position myself in the land of edifying discomforts, drawing as close to the border as possible without crossing over (a *The Price Is Right* calculation for my body). This way, I can maximize my potential as an athlete without overstepping my physical limits.

But, in practice, this is not easy to do. The border line is often blurry and difficult to detect while I am training hard. Also, its location shifts across a season, and year-to-year, as my fitness waxes and wanes. Being my best, yet not broken, is risky business. I sometimes get it wrong.



## LIMINAL SPACES

There is Greek myth that captures the approach of one's limits—the myth of Daedalus and Icarus. Daedalus, an expert craftsman, supplies Icarus with a pair of wings constructed of feathers and wax to escape from King Minos. Icarus is instructed to “take the middle way”—flying neither too high nor too low, lest moisture or the scorching sun destroy his wings (Ovid, VIII. 183–235). These are imprecise instructions for anyone, let alone a man who has never flown before, and Icarus does not heed them.

Icarus flies too close to the sun, and his wings melt. But I imagine that his wings do not melt in a single instant. Instead, they probably melt slowly over minutes and seconds as Icarus ascends through a liminal space, pressing further, uncertain where the boundary lies between ascendency and peril. Then, like an athlete who has pressed too far, Icarus falls from lofty heights.

## THE FLOURISHING ATHLETE

There is something that happens in the weeks preceding the Olympic Games and World Championships. Announcements begin to trickle out—at first slowly, then *en masse*—of athletes who will

not make it to the starting line. Their announcements are similar: I pushed myself further than I intended. I was faster, stronger, and more capable than I have ever been . . . until I lost my ability altogether. I pushed too far and came undone.

In my own experience, I broke an American record in my first World Championships. In my second, I broke my foot. In both cases, I straddled a line between preparation and destruction, not from hubris (as is often attributed to Icarus), but from some combination of inexperience and fear of not maximizing my abilities. Like Icarus, trying to abide the “middle way” is perilous business—especially when you are new to flying, and particularly in a sport where ascension depends on quieting the inner voice that tells you to slow down, rest, or fly a little bit lower.

To a certain extent, it seems that pressing and (sometimes) overstepping limits to our peril is part of the process of athletic mastery. It is difficult to know where your potential lies if you never push far enough to encounter your physical limits. Even the most practiced athlete sometimes pushes too far. But it also seems that there are certain ways we can be purposeful in how we occupy the sport—to take our humanity seriously, while striving greatly. We can acknowledge and embrace the existence of certain limitations in a human life.



And we can flourish, even as we aspire to great feats.

What does it look like to take humanity seriously in the context of sport? And how can we flourish as human beings, while also pressing limits and maximizing potential for peak performance? I have four ideas.

### 1. Make rest a habit.

Flying too close to the sun has physical costs. Sometimes these costs are felt immediately. We hit a proverbial wall, and our bodies falter under the strain.

Other times, these costs are delayed. Over months or years, we push ourselves too far without relief. We run an unsustainable number of miles, lift heavy weights, pay outsized attention to training, or insufficiently rest. At first, we may excel. We may run further or faster than we ever have! But eventually—as we ascend through a liminal space—our wings melt. We experience negative repercussions for our bodies long-term.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, we do not want to arrive at that point—for the sake of our health, or for performance. However, as I have said, our limits are often difficult to discern. It is challenging to tell the difference between *good* tired and *bad* tired, or *edifying discomforts* and *injury*.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes internal alarm bells sound in difficult workouts, telling

In my own experience, I broke an American record in my first World Championships. In my second, I broke my foot. In both cases, I straddled a line between preparation and destruction, not from hubris (as is often attributed to Icarus), but from some combination of inexperience and fear of not maximizing my abilities.

us to stop when we should have persevered. Other times, adrenaline permits us to abide in difficulties that should have alarmed us. Our internal barometers are fickle at lofty heights.

Because our physical limits are fuzzy, it can be helpful to build a habit of rest, rather than waiting to rest until we feel that we need to. We can build moments of rest into our daily routines or perhaps schedule a day completely free of training each week.

We can also structure our years to include fallow seasons—periods of time in which we reduce training to restore our bodies





It is challenging to tell the difference between *good tired* and *bad tired*, or *edifying discomforts* and *injury*.

and minds. Making rest a routine takes the pressure off of us, from having to recognize the signs of impending injury or fatigue. It can prevent us from digging ourselves into too deep of a hole through momentum or fatigue accretion.

## **2. Name (and embrace) the ways in which you are limited.**

Often, when we speak of limits as athletes, we mean bodily ones. We mean aerobic

constraints, maximal cadence, heart rate, and muscle strength. These are the limits we aim to extend, and we can do so, to a certain extent, through training. But there are other kinds of limitations in the human life.

For example, some of our limits are people. In an essay by Wendell Berry, he describes *cultural* limits. These include family, friendships, and “self-restraints implied by neighborliness.”<sup>3</sup>

Berry writes that there are people in our lives to whom we have obligations. We have responsibilities as citizens and neighbors, and we owe our friends loyalty, time, and attention. These obligations are a kind of limit that we sometimes tread on when we go “all in” in sports (or in any serious endeavor). If we are not careful, we compromise relationships in our striving.

There are additional limits besides these. For instance, we have moral constraints.<sup>4</sup> There are certain kinds of striving that are out of bounds in a good human life. For example, to win by cheating or to strive insatiably in a way that impedes our ability to see and appreciate worthier goods, should not characterize how we compete. Philosopher David McPherson also names existential limits—limits with respect to the *given*, or to what exists.<sup>5</sup> Respecting our existential limits as athletes involves gratitude that constrains our striving. It also involves recognizing what we can control and what is out of our hands.

As athletes, we can choose to repeatedly transgress the outer limits of our ability. We can be frustrated that we are embodied beings who require rest and are bound by relationships, morality, and our creaturely status. Or we can make peace with these constraints as part of a rich human life. We can be purposeful in embracing rest as part of the rhythm of training and not being

forgetful of our relationships as we aim for lofty heights.

### 3. Grow in contentment.

In his recent book, David McPherson describes a set of excellences he calls the “limiting virtues.”<sup>6</sup> These are concerned with recognizing proper limits in a human life. One such virtue of particular relevance for the striving athlete is contentment.

Striving can be insatiable. There are always bigger stages to compete on, and every time we step across a finish line, there is another start line to prove ourselves.

In Plato’s *Gorgias*, we meet Callicles’ tyrant—a man whose life is dominated by an insatiable appetite for pleasure. Socrates compares this tyrant to a leaky jar that is constantly filled but never full, and to a person who itches constantly without ever experiencing relief.<sup>7</sup> Striving can take on this character. We can feel compelled to keep pressing toward our performance objectives—to draw closer to our limits. We can become like the insatiable tyrant in our striving. Contentment is an important virtue here.

McPherson defines contentment as the virtue of “knowing when enough is enough, of not wanting more than is needed for a good life.”<sup>8</sup> It is not at odds with striving. Rather, contentment provides





We can be frustrated that we are embodied beings who require rest and are bound by relationships, morality, and our creaturely status. Or we can make peace with these constraints as part of a rich human life. We can be purposeful in embracing rest as part of the rhythm of training and not being forgetful of our relationships as we aim for lofty heights.

secure grounds for our striving. It involves a kind of recognition of gifts and opportunities that is not contingent upon satisfying our objectives.

There are other key virtues that help us to embrace our limits. One is humility, which permits us to “recognize and live out our

proper place in the scheme of things.”<sup>9</sup> The humble runner can acknowledge her weaknesses and learn from mistakes. Another is temperance, which involves having well-ordered desires, such that you are not ruled by your appetites and can focus your attention on worthier things. A temperate runner would not be marked by an insatiable desire to win. Her love of the sport would be well-ordered, rather than obsessive.

#### **4. Have a long view.**

The first thing I advise younger athletes who are becoming invested in distance running is this: Pursue a mentor from outside of the sport, preferably one who is much older than you.

There is a kind of presentism that animates the life of the athlete. Athletic careers are short. We want to maximize our few good years of peak fitness and the opportunities we have to run quickly when they are available to us. This can lead us to develop a myopic, single-minded pursuit of excellence in running that compromises opportunities outside of the sport, a wide range of interests, or a healthy life long-term.

One way to override this bias is to have someone you trust speaking into your life from outside of the sport, such as an older, non-running mentor. Maybe they will not understand everything about running or




your drive. But one thing I have learned is that what looks like *commitment* from inside the sport sometimes looks like *obsession* from without. And what often looks like *toughness* from within looks like *imprudence* from without.

Whether or not the athlete is really obsessed, imprudent, or is otherwise occupying the sport in a detrimental way, is not always clear. But it is valuable to have someone who wills the athlete's good asking hard questions so that the athlete is prompted to self-examine. Mentors aside, athletes should examine their running with a view to flourishing, health, and repercussions long-term.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

To some extent, pressing and sometimes overstepping limits to our peril is part of the process of athletic mastery. It is difficult to know where our potential lies if we never push far enough to encounter our physical limits. But there are ways we

can be purposeful in how we occupy the sport—to take our humanity seriously, while striving greatly. We can acknowledge and embrace our limits, and we can flourish, even as we aspire to great feats. 

## NOTES

1. Sabrina B. Little. (2021). Limitless. iRunFar.com.
2. For an expanded explanation of suffering and flourishing, see Chapter 7 of S. B. Little (2024). *The Examined Run*. Oxford University Press.
3. Wendell Berry (2008) Faustian Economics. *Harper's Magazine*.
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5. *Ibid.*, 5.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Plato. *Gorgias* 494c.
8. David McPherson. (2022). *The Virtues of Limits*, 3.
9. *Ibid.*, 2.



**Sabrina Little** is an elite distance runner and an assistant professor in the department of Leadership and American Studies at Christopher Newport University. A 5-time national champion, Sabrina previously held the U.S. record in the 200k and the 24-hour run. Her first book, *The Examined Run*, is forthcoming in 2024 with Oxford University Press.

KELLI REAGAN HICKEY

# Redefining the Gift

## **It's a distinct feeling, walking home from Yale**

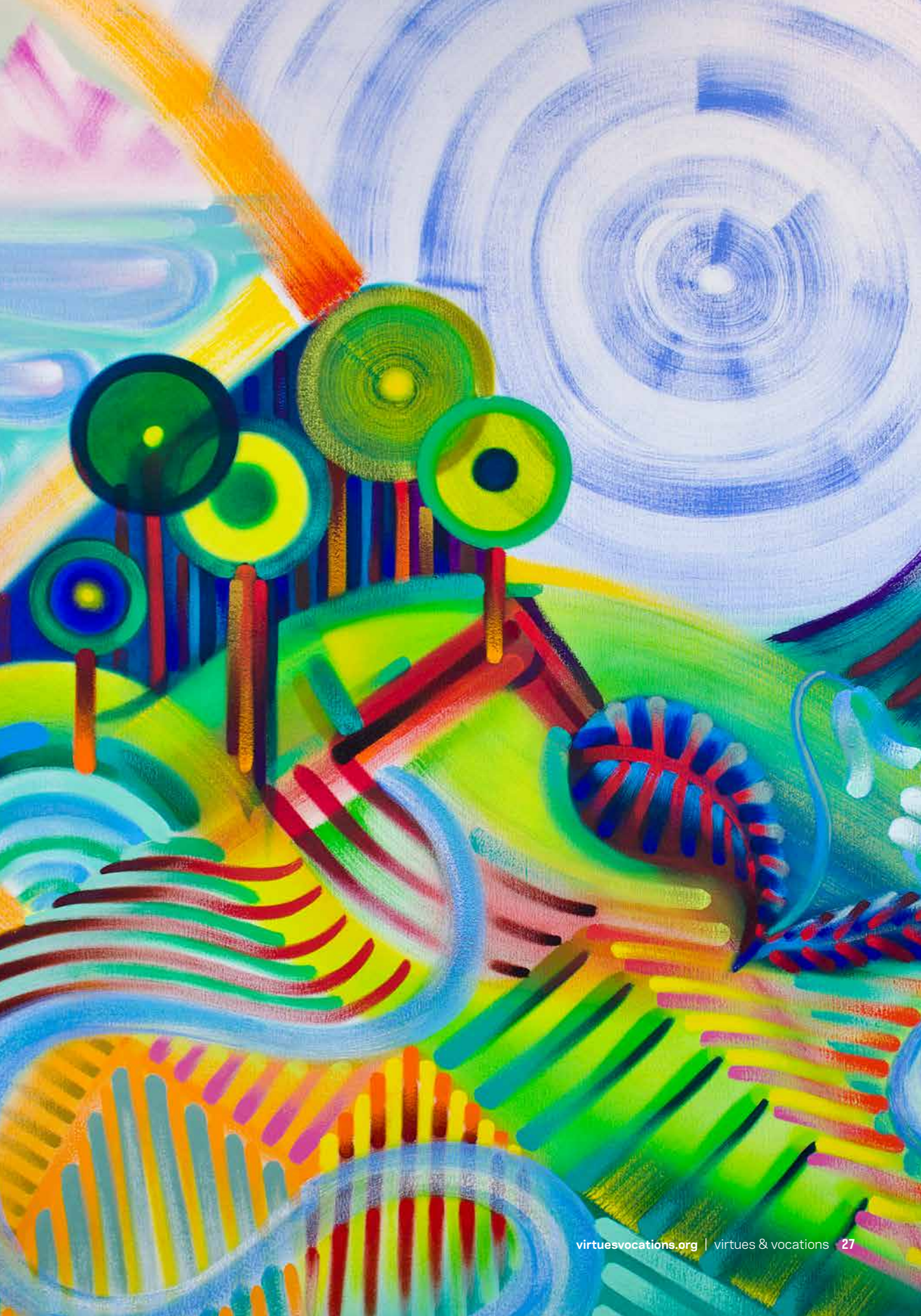
University's Sterling Memorial Library at night. Exiting the enormous wooden doors and stepping out into the dark is like breathing in the air of a million invitations, all at once. I'm there again, relishing in the hushed feeling of being unfinished and uncommitted, of having not yet decided. Somehow, it seems—in this place with these people—anything is possible.

The summer before college, my dad and I covered hundreds of miles on the dusty trails of the bosque, a charming patch of forest separating the Rio Grande River from the irrigation ditches that bring life to my hometown of Corrales, New Mexico. As a distance runner and new commit to Yale's Cross Country and Track and Field teams, summer long runs were for dreaming.

Each Sunday as we set out—my dad on his trusty mountain bike, me in my trainers—we would start with business: recapping races, dissecting the latest depth charts and predictions, reliving our favorite lessons from past seasons and dreaming about the ones to come. Business complete, our conversation would settle on our favorite topics. We would talk about God, about life's











ultimate questions. My dad, an armchair philosopher and theologian, would share the fruits of his latest theological explorations—we would marvel at Pascal’s wager and probe the idea that power, wealth, and ambition distract us from the work and humility of living a meaningful life. We would talk about purpose, about goodness, about the people we loved and admired most.

As I stood nervously on the eve of a new life chapter, dad would remind me that my purpose at Yale was to “get an education.” It was to continue discerning what it means to be a good and loving person in the world—grades be damned! Somehow, thirteen odd miles later, life always seemed simpler, deeper, more beautiful.

Barreling into the driveway, we would finish each run with the adage of my high school hero, American distance running legend Steve Prefontaine: *To give anything less than your best is to sacrifice the gift.*

The moment I arrived in New Haven, my heart was anchored in a particular understanding of “the gift.” In the opening lines of his famous prayer “Fall in Love,” Joseph Whelan, SJ writes: “What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, whom you

know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.”

At first, the gift was a series of moments: stretching out in flight each afternoon with my teammates, the miles ahead full of New England beauty, gossip, storytelling, bliss. Or crowding around a table in Morse dining hall, laughing and lingering just a while longer before beginning the cold, dark trudge toward an evening of study. Or entering St. Thomas More Catholic Chapel for late-night Sunday Mass, the pressures of exams and races melting away with God in our midst. The gift looked a lot like love—and meeting every encounter and opportunity with wonder and gratitude.

But somewhere between macroeconomics lectures with Nobel Laureates and my growing obsession with the Ivy League Track and Field record board, my understanding of the gift began to shift. Gradually, it began to look more and more like comparison, achievement, and striving.

Slowly, I lost touch with the ultimate questions I had fallen in love with over the miles with my dad. Instead, the unspoken values of the meritocracy—those characteristic of many elite research institutions—began to seep into my bones. Honoring the gift meant, above all, maintaining and improving upon a series of metrics: GPAs,

mile splits, affirmation from coaches, professors, peers.

Rather than seeking to be a good friend, Christian, daughter, citizen, teammate—I turned devastatingly inward. My only commitment was to an ephemeral notion of “success,” to the “next best thing.” Ross Douthat, *New York Times* opinion columnist, expressed a relevant idea in a recent podcast: “I don’t think Harvard was good for my soul.”

In his 2020 book *Let Us Dream*, Pope Francis writes about crises as moments of sifting: “To enter into crisis is to be sifted. Your categories and ways of thinking get shaken up; your priorities and lifestyles are challenged. You cross a threshold, either by your own choice or by necessity, because there are crises . . . that you can’t avoid” (Prologue).

Crisis came—unwelcome, as all crises are—the fall of my junior year. On a brisk October morning over a routine bowl of oatmeal, I learned that a dear friend and teammate had ended his life.

There are no words to describe the weighted sadness of a team funeral service, or the silence of a neighboring desk that days before was filled with life and wit. When I think about Hale, I still find myself wrestling with God—there’s so much that I don’t know, so much that I don’t



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understand. What I do know is that the world was immensely brighter and better with him in it. Hale was as fierce a friend as he was a competitor. He had a gentle spirit, a stinging sense of humor, and a contagious warmth. Hale was intrinsically, sincerely, and profoundly *good*.



I don't know how fast Hale could race a 5k, what place he finished at the Ivy League Championships, what internships he landed, nor the heights of his GPA. What I do remember are the long nights we spent finishing microeconomics problem sets over an enormous bag of trail mix. Or that time we celebrated our sophomore fall over Ashley's Ice Cream, trading hilarious stories of Christmas-traditions-gone-wrong. And that evening at our

team formal, falling to the floor in a heap of giggles after hours of badly-attempted swing dancing. The exchanged smiles, the start-line wishes, the mid-lecture nudges, the team dinner banter—Hale brought so much joy to the simple act of living. He was truly a light.

On the floor of my dorm room, sitting in the quiet of Hale's absence, I realized that I had no idea what I was building, no



conception what mattered or what I was working toward. My purpose and philosophy of life—the marks of “success” I had been carefully crafting and storing away—felt frivolous. For the first time, “the gift” was empty.

There’s a beautiful word at the heart of the Christian tradition: *metanoia*. Translated from the Greek, *metanoia* means “to change one’s mind” or “think beyond all known.” *Metanoia* moments, often, are painful—a favorite image for *metanoia* comes from Genesis 32:24: Jacob wrestles with God and God breaks his leg. *Metanoia* breaks us. Somehow, in our very bones, we are different than before. But, perhaps through grace, our brokenness and suffering usher us into a more beautiful way of being human in the world.

*Metanoia*, for me, began in the grief and tragedy of Hale’s death. And it unfolded—painfully, beautifully, unknowingly—with the invitation of two brilliant professors.

Wandering into a new semester ensconced in a cloud of confusion and purposelessness, I stumbled across a course that changed everything. David Brooks, columnist for the *New York Times*, was offering a seminar on “Successful Global Leadership.”

The course had nothing to do with successful global leadership. Its nickname, “Therapy with Brooks,” painted a more accurate

picture. At the outset, Brooks called into question the notion of success en vogue at places like Yale. Similar to his popular column “The Moral Bucket List,” he made clear that the work of the course was to center our attention on eulogy virtues, not resume virtues. *Résumé* virtues, he writes, “are the skills you bring to the marketplace. The eulogy virtues are the ones that are talked about at your funeral—whether you were kind, brave, honest or faithful. Were you capable of deep love?”

Brooks proposed a countercultural idea. He suggested that our purpose—“the gift”—is not found in the relentless pursuit of wealth and prestige, but in the way we live out structured and well-discerned commitments: to a place, a vocation, a calling, a philosophy of life. For the first time at Yale, I was back with my dad on the winding trails of the bosque—thinking about *ends*.

In the meager time I had to devote to my “core” economics coursework, I found myself ditching marginal rates of return and spending hours with Victor Frankl, Mother Teresa, Sheldon Vaunaken, and Dorothy Day. This kind of soul work—studying the wisdom, the trials, the warmth, and the humanity of who would become my moral heroes—colored my faith and intellect in ways I never expected.

After tracing trends in loneliness, deaths of despair, polarization, and declining





At its best, education is about formation. It's about learning to live a life in the fullness of our human dignity—and building the kind of world that allows others to do the same.

community, Brooks claimed that what our world needed most was a moral revolution: a movement to orient our lives, work, and conversations toward the good, the true, and the beautiful, toward ultimate questions of meaning and purpose. One charge from the course was particularly striking. “In your twenties,” he told us, “your job is to figure out your philosophy of life.” With my sense of purpose and self shattered by Hale’s death, I knew that I had found the questions—I had found the work—I would commit my life to.

But the charge to figure out a “philosophy of life” was a meaty one. It went unanswered until, in graduate school, I had a chance encounter with Catholic Social Teaching (CST). CST is an ethic of life inspired by the Gospel—it’s “a practical ethic that seeks to move the world as it is closer to the kind of world God means it to be.”<sup>1</sup> With great care, theologian and Christian ethicist Clemens Sedmak unpacked CST and its emphasis on dignity, solidarity, work, participation, and

care for the earth and the poor. Reading Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si’* and witnessing the heroic courage and legacies of those committed to CST, I knew I had found the answer to Brooks’ challenge. I had found my purpose, my philosophy of life. I had found the gift.

For Sedmak, CST is not a set of harmless ethical principles. It’s a theology, a means of discipleship—a way of following Christ in the world. CST privileges smallness, gentleness, dailiness, depth. It’s as much about *what* we do with our lives as *how* we go about them. It stands in stark contrast to the meritocracy, to the world’s definition of success.

Living CST is not about climbing upwards. It’s about what Dean Brackley, SJ calls “downward mobility”—that “those who wish to be Jesus’ companions in mission will have to resist temptations to wealth, prestige, and ambition and beg to follow him in poverty, service, and persecution.” It’s about, to borrow the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “really starting work on the Sermon on the Mount.”

CST transformed my understanding of the gift. The gift is my mom’s tenderness as she cares for my Grandpa in the final years of his life. It’s the way Sophie Scholl and Franz and Fani Jaegerstaetter stood up to the Nazi regime and lost their lives. It’s the way the whole town showed up for

my Grandma’s funeral, the way so many go unnoticed and dedicate themselves to the tedious, lowly tasks that come with stewarding communities and sustaining meaningful, worthwhile commitments.

Now, reflecting on my graduate and undergraduate educations and squarely in the first chapter of my education in the “real world,” I’ve come to believe that the meaning and purpose of education, like that of a crisis, is to sift. Our education should shake up our categories, challenge our priorities, and call into question our dominant visions of success. It should plunge us into debates about purpose, meaning, faith, and the good. It should center life’s most important questions: who we are, where we are going, what we owe each other, who we ought to be. At its best, education is about formation. It’s about learning to live a life in the fullness of our human dignity—and building the kind of world that allows others to do the same.




**Kelli Reagan Hickey** is the Director of Formation for the Francesco Collaborative, a team that partners with faith-based investors to reimagine an investment practice anchored in Catholic Social Teaching.

Kelli is co-author of the book *Counting the Cost: Financial Decision-Making, Discipleship, and Christian Living* and serves on the board of directors for the National Institute for Ministry with Young Adults and the Bethany Land Institute.



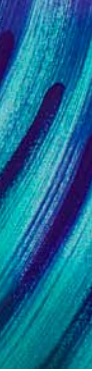
**SOMETIMES**, in the early morning miles of another dark, mundane Ohio run, nostalgia will creep in. I’ll find myself walking home from Sterling Memorial Library late at night, crossing Yale’s murmuring, storied campus. I’m overcome, again, with the magical, capacious feeling of *becoming*, the freedom that comes from being entirely unattached and uncommitted.

I’ll let myself linger there, just for a moment.

Then, thinking of Hale and returning to the warmth of my sweet husband, I’ll remember. And I’ll recommit to the gift. 

#### NOTE

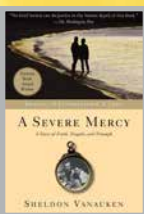
1. [socialconcerns.nd.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/CST-Intro\\_The-Welcome-Table.pdf](https://socialconcerns.nd.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/CST-Intro_The-Welcome-Table.pdf).





# Good Reads

We asked our authors to recommend a book they had read over the past couple of years. Here is what they said:



## A Severe Mercy

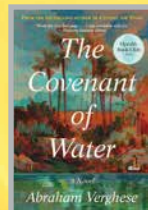
BY SHELDON VANAUKEN

In *A Severe Mercy*, Sheldon Vanauken guides us into the depths of human love and grief. He shows us that, remarkably, everything is gift—and that our greatest loves and most painful losses are equal channels of grace, mercy, and connection. —**KELLI REAGAN HICKEY**

## The Covenant of Water

BY ABRAHAM VERGHESE

A magisterial tale set across three generations in Kerala in South India. Vergheese is a master (as in his earlier novel, *Cutting for Stone*) at weaving medicine's progress into cultural and religious sensibilities and political complexities across the world, while beautifully narrating dynamics within and across families. —**L. GREGORY JONES**



## The Excellent Mind

BY NATHAN KING

King writes about the character traits of excellent thinkers and how important these traits are, not just for academics but in everyday life. He also tells the stories of people who embody traits such as intellectual courage, perseverance, and charity. It is an enjoyable, edifying text.

—**SABRINA B. LITTLE**



## The Day of Shelly's Death The Poetry and Ethnography of Grief

BY ROSALDO RENATO

This book expresses the journey of grief and mourning over the tragic death of the author's wife in an accident in a remote village while on their anthropological research trip. He pens mainly poetry and two brief essays to do so. It's compelling because it engages something all humans endure—loss and grief. —LUKE A. POWERY



## People Love Dead Jews

BY DARA HORN

Dara Horn has a PhD in comparative literature in Hebrew and Yiddish, and her thoughts about how Jews understand themselves in literature as well as figure in popular discussions is insightful, right, and, to that extent, tragic. The chapter on Varian Fry, rescuer of artists in the Holocaust, could be the foundation of an ethics class. —JESSE S. SUMMERS

## Arete Activate Your Heroic Potential

BY BRIAN JOHNSON

The book offers astute psychological and philosophical guidance for developing one's full potential, and does this with a clear moral compass throughout. —BILL DAMON

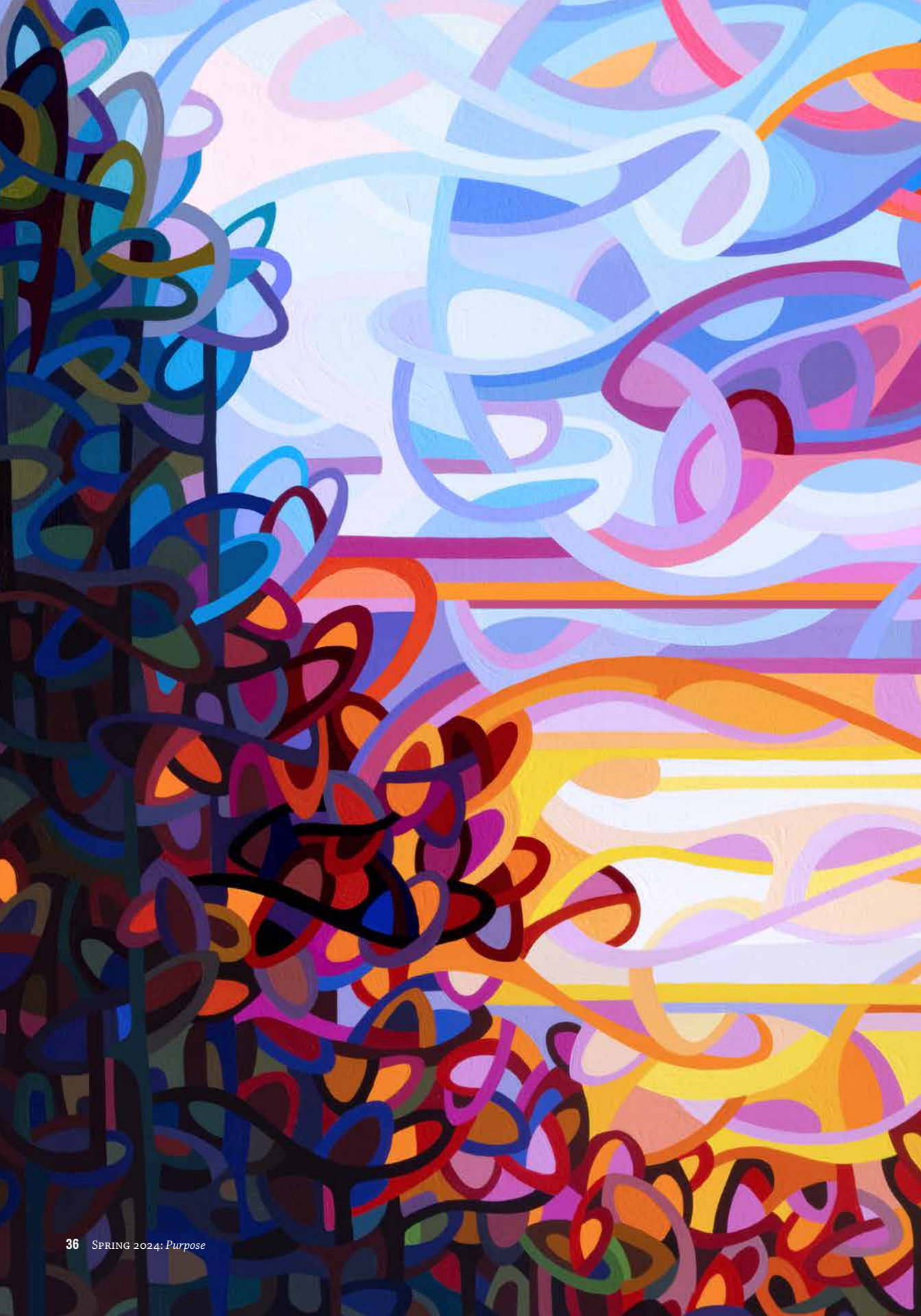


## The Bee Sting


BY PAUL MURRAY

My latest recommendation is Paul Murray's *The Bee Sting*—a tragicomic tale of one Irish family's drama from the banal to the serious. Read on a very long flight, I love how, in this equally long book, Murray juxtaposes the prosaic and the profound to illustrate how easily real life challenges interfere with our grand life plans. Purpose needs constant updating. —SUZANNE SHANAHAN









JESSE S. SUMMERS

# Putting Purpose in its Place

**M**y grandfather wrote music for as long as I can remember, though I only ever heard one of his songs, at a Christmas program in grade school. After he died, my musician uncle looked through what, to my young mind, seemed like an entire room of his music and said that it wasn't particularly good. He didn't say it with criticism or sadness that this was how his father had used his one and only life, writing music that no one would hear, and that the world didn't need anyway. It was just a fact. Most music isn't anything special, and this was like most music.

I was about to graduate college when he died, and in my mind, my life's trajectory was still going to lead to recognizable success, probably even some prestige. I wasn't going to be president (unless the



public clamored for it, of course, but even then only *reluctantly*), but no one would someday reflect back on my one and only life and find it lacking recognizable achievements; whatever papers I left behind would be worth looking through. Those achievements would ensure my life would not be without meaning.

“What is the meaning of life?” is a philosophical question if any is, but while getting the philosophy degree I was graduating with—and in the two and a half decades of philosophy classes that followed—I have never had to ask or answer that question. I suspect I have avoided the question because I already read philosophy books with self-help-like titles that make me feel self-conscious in public: *In Praise of Failure*, *Idleness*, and *Know Thyself*, to pick titles from only this past summer. Philosophers—or at least I—feel that we’re not distinct enough from

the fields we’re next to in the bookstore: Self-Help, Metaphysics, Religion. If we start asking “What does it all mean?”, then is there a difference? (And why insist on a difference? Psychology is also nearby).

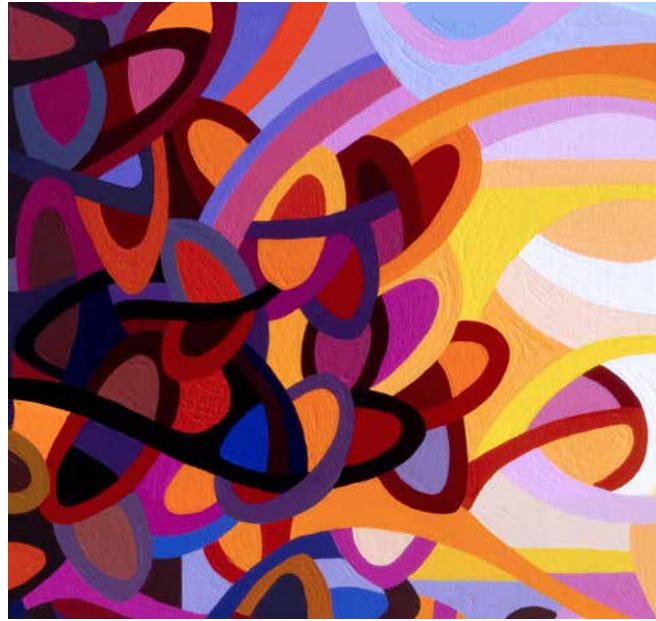
The philosopher Susan Wolf is an exception, and probably too self-assured to care where her book, *Meaning in Life and Why it Matters*, is shelved. Her decidedly philosophical account is that meaning is found “in loving objects worthy of love and engaging with them in a positive way.” Her view seems right, at least for bourgeois meaning: a life writing and reflecting on great literature is meaningful, and a life watching grass grow is not. But what about the dilettante and the *fâneur*? Some of us do what we’re bad at, won’t improve much, and posthumous success will not be the *machina, ex* which any meaning will be discovered. Can her account find meaning in my grandfather’s life of writing what no one will see or hear, or my own of doing the same?

The reason even to ask the question is that, when someone looks for meaning in life, their search switches almost immediately to achievements, to life’s *purpose*. We ask what the *point* is of all of this self-indulgent writing. In fact, in one of the very first instances of the phrase “meaning of life,” in Schopenhauer’s 1897 *On Human Nature*, he immediately follows “What is the meaning of life at all?” with “To what

purpose is it played, this farce in which everything that is essential is irrevocably fixed and determined?” (Possibly the first use of “what is the meaning of life?” is immediately followed by “as if there could even *be* one”: Schopenhauer’s gonna Schopenhauer).

Meaning and purpose are related, but not synonyms. Purpose has something to do with goals, results, ends, functions; meaning has something to do with how things fit together in larger systems or patterns. Now, one way that things fit together in a pattern or system is for each of them to be a part of a whole, where that whole is unified precisely by having some function or purpose. So having a purpose is one way to find or make meaning. The hair-spring finds its meaning within a watch because its purpose is to provide power to the whole mechanism; its meaning is different if placed in a museum display about the history of miniaturization.

But finding a purpose is not the only way to find meaning. Which is probably good, because purposes are risky when we move from asking about the purpose of a hair-spring to asking about the purpose of a human. Supposed human purposes have justified almost every historical tragedy, large and small: genocides, torture, expulsions, wars. An idle person will disappoint Kant by not developing their innate talents, but slackers don’t incite genocides.



Meaning and purpose are related, but not synonyms. Purpose has something to do with goals, results, ends, functions; meaning has something to do with how things fit together in larger systems or patterns.

This isn’t a coincidence. The upshot of finding a purpose is to find justifications and motivations to do what you otherwise wouldn’t, to find commitment where you would otherwise have doubt; and, while no





one reading this will sponsor a genocide, every bad action has had at least *some* justification for it, which a history of Great Men doing Great Things will readily demonstrate. Working toward a grand human purpose makes it easier to find those justifications and dismiss conflicting ones. The bigger the purpose, the bigger the justification, and a purpose-driven life drives roughshod over competing interests.

If we want our lives to be meaningful, though, is there an alternative to finding our purpose? There is, which will be easier to see after wondering if the near synonymy of the two terms is itself a historical anomaly.

The frequency of the terms “meaning” and “purpose” in published books moved in lockstep until the mid-18th century, but

**Supposed human purposes have justified almost every historical tragedy, large and small: genocides, torture, expulsions, wars. An idle person will disappoint Kant by not developing their innate talents, but slackers don't incite genocides.**

then the use of “purpose” escalated rapidly and stayed elevated until the 20th century. Not to overread limited data, but there's an obvious hypothesis for this change. The Industrial Revolution changed far more than what we thought steam could do. It also gave us a watch-like model to understand people and things functioning together, from machines to nations' comparative advantages.

In such a context, a person—like the machines they worked alongside—is whatever their role, their function, their *purpose* is in the larger whole. And if a growing percentage of the people in society work in roles with clear purposes every day, how could they *not* come to understand everything and everyone as purpose-guided? The world looks like Tetris to me after half an hour playing that game, so what would it look like after a 16-hour shift in the factory?

Of course, the Industrial Revolution didn't invent means-end reasoning or pursuing goals, both of which are much older than *Homo sapiens*, and such hypothetical imperatives are the core of pursuing purpose. Further, cooperation and specialization are inextricable from human civilization, so understanding ourselves as having a purpose did not arise with the spinning jenny. But social conditions shape our self-understanding, and it would be surprising if people *didn't* come to see

themselves and everyone else on the model of a factory-wide, village-wide, society-wide, even history-wide or universe-wide machine.

Whatever historical change happened might be as difficult for us to reconstruct here and now as it will be for future generations to understand the simple, quiet chaos and independence of our pre-internet, pre-cell-phone lives. As Alastair McIntyre has famously explored, Aristotle's *telos* and *ergon* are certainly not the "purpose" and "function" of our own conceptual repertoire. But, whatever the validity of my historical hypothesis, we've cleared a path to find meaning without purpose.

We search for meaning more often in a dictionary than in a life. How a *word* or a *sentence* comes to have meaning is, to exaggerate only slightly, the primary topic of late-19th to 20th century Anglo-American philosophy. The philosopher Charles Dodgson (with Lewis Carroll's *plume* in *Through the Looking-Glass* [1871]) can explain, in his distinctive way, one philosophical point of agreement about meaning:

"But," Alice objected, "'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knockdown argument.'"

"When I use a word," Humpty-Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can *make* words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty-Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."

As we're supposed to realize, *contra* Humpty-Dumpty, words' meanings are not only the speaker's intentions but are found within larger patterns of language and life: patterns of use, of sense, of definitions, of *something* more than the person's own mind.

By analogy, the meaning of a *life*—from the person leading it to the actions and events within it—doesn't come from what you privately want it to be. I don't become a writer by sitting in cafes with a moleskine notebook, and my intention to borrow, not steal, a book is irrelevant if the shelf I'm taking it from is in a bookstore. More dramatically, whether one is a traitor or a revolutionary is almost entirely up to history.

For something to be *meaningful* is for it to have a recognizable place in one of those larger patterns. "Meaningful" isn't "good," though: borrowing and stealing are both meaningful, as are treasons and revolutions. By contrast, lying on the ground watching grass grow isn't meaningful because it fits into no obvious patterns. But even watching grass grow isn't as far

from being meaningful as it might seem: countless suburban dads find watching grass grow to fit their social lives, and we shouldn't be too quick to dismiss where to find patterns of meaning.

Now, we might want meaningful lives, but what we really want is for our actions and our lives to matter, to be important. (*Meaning in Life and Why it Matters*, remember?) This is where purpose swoops in to make things easy. A recognizable, life-defining purpose both organizes your actions into a pattern and shows how that entire pattern matters. Monitoring one's suburban lawn is meaningful in a way that lying on the ground watching the grass is not, but neither obviously matter. (You, like my neighbors, might disagree). But if your purpose is to prepare a nice lawn for the outfield of the World Series, or as the only outdoor play space for local refugee children? This is why "finding your

purpose," by unifying disparate actions into patterns and explaining why the patterns matter, is a cure-all to a life that seems to lack both meaning *and* mattering.

So what's the alternative to finding your purpose? The alternative is in meaningful patterns that are not purpose-driven but still matter: being friends, playing games, being nice, being generous, loving one's family, having hobbies, knowing oneself, being happy, contemplating God. If we insist on finding a purpose for everything, we can find purposes for the items in that list, too, but we're overreading those patterns if we do. They're meaningful and matter even without any larger purpose; the further consequences of those patterns are not (and often *should not be*) the *purpose* of doing them. You shouldn't sustain friendships in order to live a longer life, even if the research says people with more friends live longer; and the purpose of a vacation needn't be to "recharge" for more productive work. Enjoying life matters.

I don't want to insist on a false dichotomy. Purposes in life are also good. Achievements have their own value. It's no coincidence that society has arranged itself in such a way that people find their purposes in ways that make it easy for us to get good food and enjoy air conditioning, and it feels good to contribute to society, even if only on the margins. But civilization doesn't






need everyone to find a calling and live with passion. Many are called, but few are the job openings, and you don't need to feel a lack if you're not one of the elect. The rest of us can live ethically, help where needed, and appreciate non-instrumental leisure, friendship, and play. We needn't find purpose in order to find life meaningful.

But do our purpose-less lives *matter*? Does writing little ditties, musical or philosophical, matter? Maybe; because, unlike meaning, what matters *can* be determined entirely by what's in someone's head: something matters because it matters *to me*. Or maybe not; maybe watching grass grow and writing down one's philosophical thoughts simply doesn't matter, no matter what anyone thinks.

But maybe what is meaningful in a life of writing ditties that don't matter isn't the ditties, it's the writing of them. Writing is a way of expressing one's creativity or intellect, even if the creativity and intellect are weak or go forever unrecognized. Creative human expression in those patterns is

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meaningful, and humans' expressing their creativity and intellect also matters. Not, as Kant would have it, because we're developing those faculties, though that might be true, but because those meaningful, purposeless patterns are themselves constitutive of a worthwhile life. We see that more clearly if we ask not what a life is *for*, but, instead, how to love the worthiness of what we *do*. 



**Jesse S. Summers** is Director of University Initiatives for the Purpose Project at Duke University and a senior fellow at the Kenan Institute for Ethics.

Blest be the tie that binds  
Our hearts in Christian love;  
The fellowship our spirit finds  
Is like to that above.  
—JOHN FAWCETT

LUKE A. POWERY

# Blest Be the Ties that Bind

Remembering  
a Purpose of *Religio*  
in Higher Education

**There is a breach in our world.**

A breach is a breaking, a gap, a hole, a divide in something that was once whole. I am not sure how whole we have ever been as the human race, but the breach is on full display these days through inhumane physical and linguistic violence—from international wars to mass shootings to political fights.











Poet Warsan Shire describes holding a world atlas map on her lap and running her fingers across the whole world. She whispered this question to the world, “Where does it hurt?” and the world answered, “everywhere, everywhere, everywhere.”<sup>1</sup> This includes the United States of America, that is more like the divided states of America. The perpetual violence should cause us to tremble in the face of incarnate terror but not numb us into social paralysis and inaction nor make us revolutionaries of retribution. Human hearts should be hurting and our souls aching, but the world is waiting for hopeful responses.

In times like these, there have to be multifaceted solutions to the pandemic of violence. One step or approach will not do. A part of the solution, I believe, is *religio*. *Religio* is the Latin word for ‘religion.’ It is a part of Duke University’s historic motto—*eruditio et religio*, ‘knowledge and religion’ or better, ‘knowledge and vital piety,’ taken from a Charles Wesley hymn in which he talks about uniting “the pair so long

disjoined.”<sup>2</sup> Serving as the Dean of Duke University Chapel provides me the opportunity to emphasize, embody, promote, represent, and moderate this joining in higher education, in general, but particularly at Duke. Because Duke University Chapel is located at the center of the university, *religio* is architecturally and figuratively at the heart of the university. This essay is a brief attempt to remember a critical purpose and promise of *religio* for higher education.

## A PURPOSE OF RELIGIO

Even if one is not a religious person in the traditional sense, it is important to remember, especially in light of the vast societal breaches, that the etymological roots of *religio* mean “to bind” or “to tie together.” Actually, this is what religious practice is ultimately all about—binding us to God and to one other. Again, even if one is not into “God-talk,” the idea of being bound together can be a



constructive aspiration in the face of devastating social chasms. *Religio*, therefore, is both theological and sociological, and it is the latter that is the emphasis of this essay.

Even if one is not into “God-talk,” the idea of being bound together can be a constructive aspiration in the face of devastating social chasms.

In discussing *religio*, I do acknowledge how often it—that is, religious people, religious institutions, religious practices—has not bound people together or bound people to God, but rather has divided and created a breach in human society. *Religio*, at times, has been ruinous. It has created chasms. It has hurt. It has burned people, literally, throughout history.

But what is also true—and this is what gets lost in the cacophony of complaint and criticism sometimes—is that *religio* has spurred a lot of good in the world as well, including social justice movements, creation of hospitals, and the establishment of colleges and universities. *Religio* has been a balm, and not just a bomb. The roots of *religio* spurred both the Rev. Dr.

Martin Luther King, Jr., to strive toward “the world house”<sup>3</sup> and the Rev. Howard Thurman to follow “the scent of the ties that binds . . . .”<sup>4</sup> At its best, this is what *religio* does—it joins us together into a deeper sense of communion across the divides.

This should spark a sense of hope in what is possible in higher education through *religio*. In the face of conflicts over global or local topics and the challenge to nurture civil discourse on campuses, *religio* has a place to play in bringing disparate groups together. The reality is also that religion is not disappearing on university campuses but rather reemerging and being reengaged in new ways and forms. As one book’s

title proclaims, religion in university education is *No Longer Invisible*.<sup>5</sup> Another book speaks of *The Resilience of Religion in American Higher Education*.<sup>6</sup> There is a future for *religio* in higher education and one of its key purposes is to be a resource to repair the social breach, to work toward becoming more bound to one another as human beings, to embrace our mutuality, to affirm the dignity of all people, and to stop the hate, the violence, the vicious vitriol against one another in whatever form. *Religio* can foster a deep sense of the ties that bind us together in God and with each other.

## THE PROMISE OF RELIGIO

Remembering this critical purpose of *religio* offers a promise in higher education that can be viewed as a blessing because, as the South African bishop Desmond Tutu once wrote, “all of us are made for togetherness.”<sup>7</sup> Remembering the core purpose of *religio* might help us re-member our shared humanity instead of all of the social splintering. Barbara Brown Taylor concurs implicitly when she writes: “When my religion tries to come between me and my neighbor, I will choose my neighbor. That self-canceling feature of my religion is one of the things I like best about it. Jesus never commanded me to love my religion.”<sup>8</sup>

These theologians point us to a truth from the Book of Genesis in the Hebrew Bible, but it is contained in other faiths as well: We are all dust, *humus*, “from the earth,” and to dust we will return. Our common ground is that we are all from the ground. We are bound to each other in the ground of God. This is grounds for acknowledging our common humanity and respecting, honoring, and valuing all people, thus affirming the humanity of the other.

In his book, *Just Mercy*, Bryan Stevenson discusses an encounter that shaped his career. He was a legal intern working in Georgia when he visited a man on death row named Henry to tell him that he would not be executed in the next year. What was supposed to be a short meeting lasted three hours. He writes, “It turned out that we were exactly the same age. Henry asked me questions about myself, and I asked him about his life. Within an hour we were both lost in conversation. We talked about everything . . . I was completely absorbed in our conversation. We laughed at times, and there were moments when he was very emotional and sad.”

Stevenson is even more struck when Henry is shackled again and while being taken away, begins to sing the Christian hymn “Higher Ground.” This religious song completes the shift in Stevenson. He says, “I didn’t expect [Henry] to be compassionate or generous. I had no right







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to expect anything from a condemned man on death row. Yet he gave me an astonishing measure of his humanity. In that moment, Henry altered something in my understanding of human potential, redemption, and hopefulness.”<sup>9</sup>

Henry was charged for committing a crime but he, himself, was not a crime. He was human and shared his humanity with Stevenson, and vice versa. Stevenson experienced the ties that bound him to Henry as a fellow human being. But it was the hymn, the religious song, the expression of *religio*, that completed the metamorphosis and tightened the forming bond between them, so that the other was affirmed. This is what *religio* can do in any setting, even in a prison.

In the Spring semester of 2023, I taught a divinity school course on the Spirituals in a federal men’s prison. The class was made up of ten divinity school students and twelve incarcerated students. Every Thursday morning, we had to pass through security to reach the human flesh of those in prison. For one class session, we were having a conversation about lament and hope, particularly in the spiritual, “There is a Balm in Gilead.” This religious song speaks to the human condition clearly: “Sometimes I feel discouraged and think my work’s in vain. But then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again. There is a balm in Gilead . . . ”



When the discussion was over and we took a break, one of the incarcerated students showed me something he had written down. He had written the word 'lament' on a white piece of notebook paper but around four letters in that word, he drew a box. Those four letters inside the word "lament" made up the word "amen." He showed me that there is an "amen" inside of every lament. For him, it meant hope in the midst of trials. There is no lament without an amen. I have been researching lament in preaching and theology for twenty years and had never seen this! A so-called threat, a prisoner, became my professor on that day. Again, it was a religious song, a spiritual, the expression of *religio*, that bound us together in such a way that I could learn from the human other in humility. *Religio* tied us together in a bond of lament and hope, a bond that was actually a balm. This is what *religio* can

do in any setting, including a university course within a prison.

The promise of *religio* is that it can resist the violence that acts as if we are domineering lords in control over each other's lives. Multifaceted violence has formed a breach in the United States and abroad. I believe *religio* can help repair it. Through the work of chaplains and campus ministers at colleges and universities, the purpose of *religio* can be remembered and renewed for such a time as this. It holds a promise for the future of higher education at Duke and beyond because it is actually the bond of love that ties us all together in the harmony of hope. It is a healing source for this wounded world.

In the face of the shocking violent assassination of Dr. King, the words of Howard Thurman then, still speak now, and points

implicitly to a reason why there needs to be a revival of *religio* in the world:

“it is the intent of life, that we, that we shall all be one people. For better or for worse we are tied together in one bundle and I can never be what I must be until you are what you must be: for better or for worse this is the only option. And to reject it is to reject life. And to reject life is...to make God repent that he ever gave us a chance to live . . .”<sup>10</sup> ❧❧

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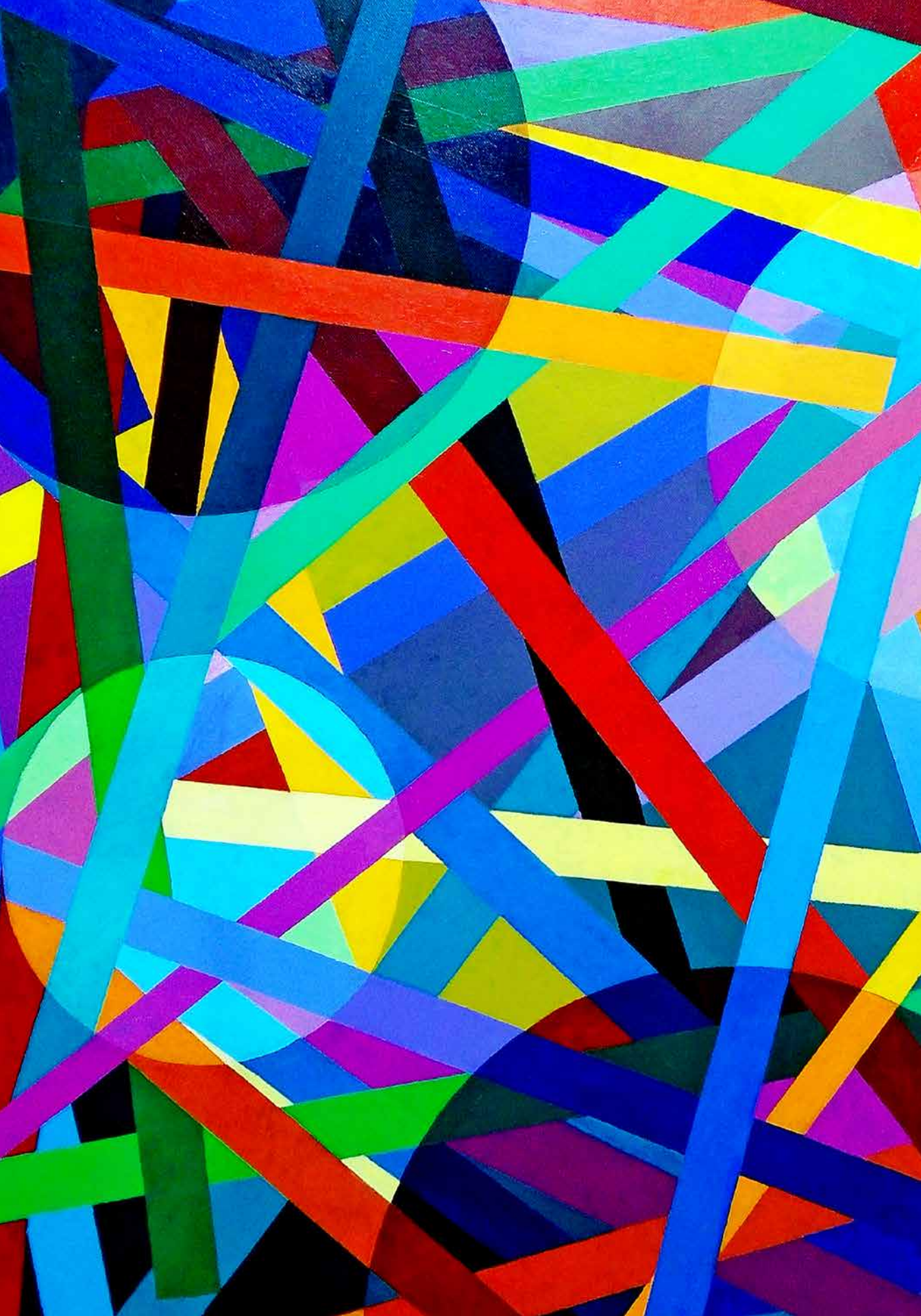
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His book, *Becoming Human: The Holy Spirit and the Rhetoric of Race*, was awarded the 2023 Book of the Year from the Religious Communication Association and the 2023 Book of the Year from the Academy of Parish Clergy.





## INTERLUDE

# Purposeful Pursuits



Bill Damon, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and Howard Gardner circa 2010

**B**efore purpose was a buzzword, Bill Damon coined it as a concept in psychology. His interest began during a research project with Howard Gardner and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (who died in 2021). Damon and Gardner have continued to develop the concepts of purpose and good work, each in their own way; and their lifetime of research and writing has been foundational for those who are interested in the purposeful pursuit of the good. For this issue, we invited them each to reflect on their professional work, personal sense of purpose, and their collaborative relationships.



INTERVIEW

# An Interview with Bill Damon



William (Bill) Damon is a Professor of Education at Stanford University and Director of the Stanford Center on Adolescence.

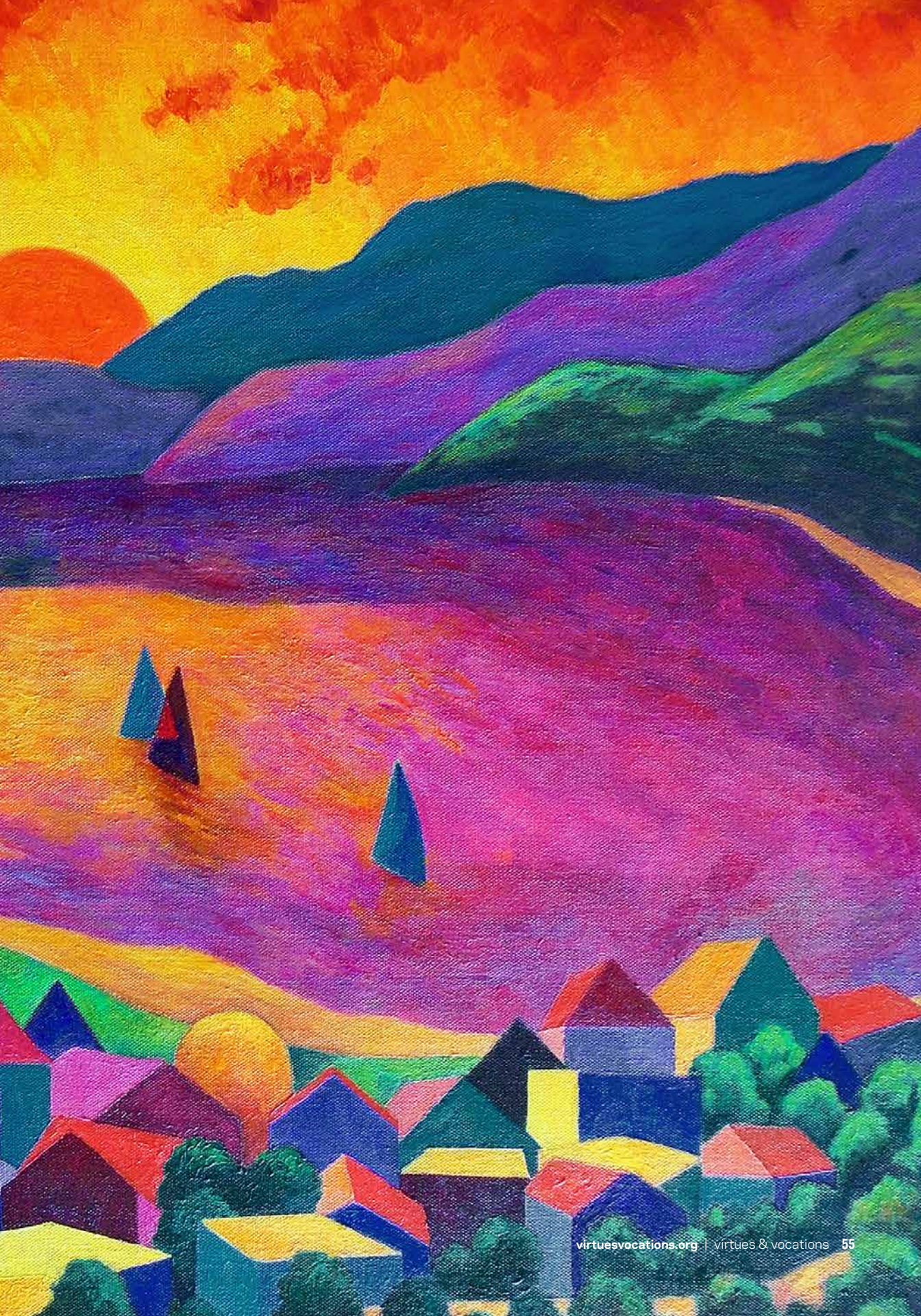
He is one of the world's leading researchers on the development of purpose and author of *The Path to Purpose*. We sat down with him to hear about more than a quarter century of work on purpose.

**Suzanne Shanahan:** As you know, there are many conversations about purpose across education, but also within professional spaces. For you, where did that work begin?

**Bill Damon:** My original interest was actually in moral commitment. My wife, Anne Colby, and I worked on a project that was lifechanging for us, about living moral exemplars—23 people











who had distinguished themselves in areas like charity, peace, justice, and civil rights. These were fairly well-known people whom we did case studies of and interviews with. We wrote a book from this project called *Some Do Care: Contemporary Lives of Moral Commitment*, which came out in the early nineties.

Our real interest was what makes these people tick, because they do so many things that are self-sacrificing and often frustrating in the long term. I remember one of the people who was working on poverty said, “I know perfectly well by the end of my life there’s going to be at least as much poverty in the world as when I began my work. But I still think I should keep going.” And that’s how all of these people working in great causes felt.

They also were very courageous, but felt that they didn’t really need courage for

what they were doing because they did something that was second nature. They didn’t feel they had to screw their courage to the sticking point or anything like that. All of that really amazed me.

**SS:** So how did you move from exemplars who were pursuing careers that some might describe as “do-good” work, to the concept of purpose, which is more generalizable to a variety of professions and pursuits?

**BD:** After we finished that book, I joined with Howard Gardner and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in a project that we originally called Humane Creativity—we later decided that was too obscure, so we changed it to the Good Work Project. In the Good Work project, I brought my interest in moral commitment and the methods that I’d used to study moral exemplars, and joined with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s interests in creativity and the great work he’d done on flow and engagement and Howard’s interest in cognitive excellence and leadership and supreme human performance. The Good Work Project went on for at least 10 years and we wrote a book called *Good Work* about it. And we each, because of our backgrounds and our interests, learned things from the data that were somewhat different. I won’t speak for Mike or Howard, but I can say what I learned, and this will answer your question about how I got to purpose.



The thing that struck me the most among the good workers—people across fields such as journalism, medicine, science, law, and the arts—all of them were amazingly articulate about the public mission of their fields. They all reflected on what their fields were bringing to the world. They were very insightful about why the field developed the way it did and how the field could be used to promote that mission.

After the project, I began thinking that mission has to do with a field of work, a vocation, and is kind of a sociological concept. I wondered what the psychological equivalent of a mission was. How do people develop their own inner sense of mission? And that's when I decided the right word there was purpose.

**SS:** One of the things that I find striking in your work is the analytic specificity

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and the deliberative approach from psychology. When we think about purpose at this moment, it's kind of everything and anything in popular conversation—it





**Purpose is a long-term, active commitment to accomplish something that is both meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self.**

includes conversations about well-being, about vocation, about meaning. Can you distinguish purpose and meaning for us analytically?

**BD:** I got the idea of purpose from Victor Frankl and some other people who had written about purpose—mostly philosophers, theologians. Even though Frankl’s book had been translated into English as *Man’s Search for Meaning*, “meaning” was not the word he used. He used a German word which is much more like a long-term goal.

I decided that purpose itself was its own particular capacity. It wasn’t just meaning. It’s meaningful, but it’s much more than that. And so it needed to be defined. We needed to develop a measure to study it. And we needed data about how people develop it.

In popular discourse everyone says, “I want to have a life of meaning and purpose,” as if those two words are joined at the hip. In the vernacular, people will obviously use language any way they want. But if you’re going to do

science or even structured practice, you want every word to have its own meaning.

When we started doing this work, we actually spent several months reading theology and philosophy, and seeing how the word purpose had been used in a systematic, scholarly way so we could import that into the psychological science. And here’s our definition: Purpose is a long-term, active commitment to accomplish something that is both meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self.

**SS:** Knowing you picked those words deliberately, can you say more about why the components of this definition are important?

**BD:** Sure. To say it's an active commitment means it's not just thinking about it. To say it's a long-term commitment means that it's enduring. It's not a one-time deal. You keep doing it. It doesn't have to last for life; you can change purposes. But you have to stick with it for a while at least.

There are two characteristics to this commitment that are important: It needs to be meaningful. That's why meaning is a part of it. In other words, if somebody orders you to do it, that's not purposeful. But it has to have more than meaning. It has to also attempt to accomplish something that goes beyond the self. There's a quality of purpose that has a kind of transcendence to it—you are dedicated to something not only about your own personal meaning. Reading a poem or going to a movie can be very meaningful, but it is not a purpose because you're not trying to accomplish something of consequence to the world beyond the self.

Purpose is an attempt to put your grain of sand on the pile in life, but you don't have to succeed at it. As I said, the people we studied in *Some Do Care* did a lot of good for people, but they didn't accomplish eradicating poverty or creating world peace

forever or anything like that. But they kept going, and they kept trying.

But I also don't want to make it sound like purpose is always heroic. It can be something as simple as raising children or doing a good job as a greeter at Walmart. It's a mental state where you're really trying your best to accomplish something that's valuable to the world.

**SS:** One objection I hear in discussions of purpose is that it's a matter of privilege. And I know in various pieces of work you've identified examples that undermine the idea that purpose is just an elite, privileged phenomenon. Can you tell us a little about those findings?

**BD:** Well, I can directly speak in this case from our data. We've studied purpose throughout the lifespan, and in none of our studies has it ever been empirically associated with socioeconomic status or with gender, race, or ethnicity. This came





out very clearly, especially in our study of later life, ages 50 to 90, where we had a large, randomized sample. It was absolutely clear that purpose was equally available to impoverished people, to wealthy people, and to people living in all kinds of communities, because people everywhere find things to dedicate themselves to. And I also can bring in international studies that have used our measures. And again, as far as I know, I don't know of any study that's shown any geographical differences, any cultural differences, in the extent to which people are purposeful.

And of course, in all populations there are a lot of people that are not purposeful, too, and those people are also evenly distributed.

**SS:** That's helpful. I was hoping that we could also address some of the conversations about purpose that might be slightly different than how you have described it.

One of the places that I see purpose conflated is in the well-being space. A lot of literature will say that having a robust sense of purpose improves your well-being, but sometimes purpose and well-being are discussed as if they are the same thing. Could you make the analytic distinction for us?

**BD:** Yes. First of all, purpose does not in and of itself create happiness. Purposeful

people are looking life right in the eye, and that's not always a happy experience because there's a lot of misery in the world.

It is true that purpose can then make those experiences satisfying, but it's not a recipe for happiness.

Purpose does, however, have a lot of psychological benefits. For example, it staves off self-absorption since it's beyond the self. When you're thinking about yourself all the time, that's one sure source of unhappiness, because you're worried and anxious. Purpose helps you get beyond that. People who think the answer to happiness is to become purposeful are making the same mistake people often make about happiness. If you have happiness as a goal, that's probably the worst way to go about finding happiness. It's not a sensible goal because happiness is a byproduct of doing lots of other things. It is the same with purpose. Purpose will be developed when you find something you believe in to dedicate yourself to, but pursuing it for its own sake or for improved well-being misses a central component of what it means to have purpose.

**SS:** As research about the benefits of having purpose have become more widely known, including through your book, it seems that not only parents, but high schools and higher education are really



pushing purpose. I had a conversation with a student the other day in a course about justice. He was frustrated, and said, “Now I’m expected to have purpose too?” Like, are you kidding me? I see students experiencing pressure that says you’re not a complete human being or you’re not going to be happy if you don’t have purpose. Rather than making “find purpose” another task on a student’s wellness to do list, how can we enable people, as you say, to develop this over time as they encounter work and study that’s meaningful?

**BD:** Pressure on young people or on anybody to be purposeful is counterproductive. We just finished a study of purpose development in college, and we found the kind of reaction that you mentioned when colleges, in a well-meaning sense, have agendas where they’re hoping students will develop purposeful commitments around issues that they have defined for

the students, like particular approaches to social reform.

Every person needs to find their own purpose or purposes. You can’t give somebody a purpose. But what you can do is present a menu of options. Young people don’t come with an innate knowledge of what’s happening in the world, so teaching them about the world, and presenting the needs of the world, is an important step that precedes them developing a sense of what their particular contribution could be.

Also, you can teach in a way that is meaningful, where you bring out the human dimensions of the subject. Education should be teaching about the world in ways that young people can relate to their own lives and their own future prospects. We want them to be able to identify the issues that they care about in the knowledge that

You can teach in a way that is meaningful, where you bring out the human dimensions of the subject. . . . We want them to be able to identify the issues that they care about in the knowledge that they’re learning, whether it be history or literature or psychology or science. And then students make their choices about what they want to commit to.





they're learning, whether it be history or literature or psychology or science. And then students make their choices about what they want to commit to. You don't give them a program and say, here's the problem in the world and you need to go out and make this your life purpose. That's what students are reacting against. But purpose develops when young people themselves find something important in the world to dedicate themselves to, and it is the job of colleges and K through 12 and parents to teach in a way that helps young people find their own worthwhile commitments in life.

**SS:** So thinking about this in the context of institutions of higher education, I'm hearing you say that we can't make purpose a requirement or an expectation, but we can create the fertile conditions for students to find meaning and self-identify a sense of purpose. And that's more about providing them broad exposure and engagement with various kinds of things and educating them about the world in ways that are accessible to them. Have you seen places that are doing this well?

**BD:** Yes. In our study, we found that the experiences that promoted purpose were courses that were field-based and sent the students out into the world and then made a connection between that and some domain of knowledge. Also, capstone kinds of courses, where the students produce

something actively, do their own research project, or something like that, promoted purpose.

If the college has provided counseling or advising that help the students identify what their own talents and interests are, and connects it to some need in the world, we found that kind of advising promotes purpose. A number of universities are beginning to have centers on their campus that are dedicated to purposeful vocations or purposeful work, and I think that can be very useful, because if students voluntarily get involved in it, it gives them a menu of options that they can explore. As long as you don't pressure them or tell them which options you want them to pursue, but just encourage them and give them the resources they need, that can be very helpful.

**SS:** What about relationships? To what extent can relationships help cultivate purpose?

**BD:** Relationships are absolutely critical in the development of purpose, particularly the mentoring relationship. We found that in all cases, people who become purposeful have somebody they're observing and hopefully getting to know who is a purposeful example for them. They always talked about somebody that was either a real-life mentor to them, or a virtual mentor to them. It could be somebody




that they never met. For instance, when we interviewed journalists who were good workers, an amazing number of them had a picture of Ed Murrow on their wall and said he exemplified the mission of journalism. So it could be somebody distant like that, but more often it was somebody who was a parent or a teacher or a manager who exemplified purposeful commitment.

When I write about our college data, and our study of higher education, I urge colleges to do whatever they can to provide meaningful advising to students because students really are looking for mentors.

**SS:** Thank you so much for your time with us. Is there anything else you want to share as you reflect back on this work and look at how it has evolved?

**BD:** Purpose has become a popular word in the 20 plus years that I've been doing work in this area, and I maybe take a little bit of responsibility for that myself, but lots of other people have contributed to that too.

It is satisfying to see how discussions of purpose have moved education beyond merely the transfer of knowledge for its own sake alone. Often in education, the “why” question has not been asked enough. “Why are we teaching chemistry to begin with to all these students, most of whom don't want to be in the class?” And if you ask that why question, you start to bring all different sources of knowledge into human life. I think the discussion of purpose has stimulated more people to ask these kinds of deeper questions, and I'm glad about that. 



**William Damon** is Professor of Education at Stanford University and a Senior Fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution. Bill's research examines how people develop purpose in their work, family, and civic lives. He is the author of *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*; and, most recently, *A Round of Golf with my Father: The New Psychology of Exploring your Past to Make Peace with your Present*. Bill is currently writing about how colleges and universities can promote purposeful learning among students with all varieties of interests.





HOWARD GARDNER

# Reflections on My Pursuit of the Good



As I enter my ninth decade and reflect back, I am reminded of several years ago when my friends Bill Damon and Anne Colby asked me about my sense of purpose. My first response then was that I have always been curious, but that's an individual trait and I knew they were asking about purpose beyond the self. On reflection, though, I said I hoped that I have been able to share the results of my curiosity with others—including, now, grandchildren as well as children. As I look back now, I can see many ways that my curiosity, though internally motivated, blossomed through collaborative relationships and still seems generative in new and sometimes surprising ways.





## FRIENDS & COLLEAGUES ENGAGED IN GOOD WORK

In the fall of 1994, I was joined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Bill Damon at the Center for Advanced study in the Behavioral Sciences, a retreat abutting the campus of

Stanford University in Palo Alto, California. By that time, Mihaly had made his name formulating the concept of “flow”—a psychological state in which skill and challenge are in balance—while Bill was a developmental psychologist, known for his work on children’s moral development and his interest in moral exemplars. I was



People involved in good work like their work (at least most of the time); they look forward to going to work (at least most of the time); and they often achieve that state of flow that keeps them energized . . . .

known chiefly as the theorist of “multiple intelligences,” an idea controversial within psychology but embraced by a wide variety of educators.

The three of us already knew one another and had planned to create a joint project. We were all interested in whether people should be held responsible when their creativity was repurposed for nefarious ends. For example, Albert Einstein had illuminated the relationship between mass and energy—but could he, and should he, be held responsible for the development of atomic weapons? On a humbler level, if educators sought to stimulate creativity in students, to what extent should the educators also ensure that students’ creations were benign rather than malignant?

Armed with a research question and a modest grant obtained from the Hewlett Foundation—the only funder that

considered our issue worthy of support—we decided to study admired leaders and practitioners of various professions. We assumed that such individuals would often be creative but also be concerned about the uses to which their creations were put. As it happens, we chose two professions that proved instructively different from one another: journalism and genetics. We asked informants to nominate individuals whom they admired for their accomplishments as well as the way(s) that they had achieved them. In each case, we (along with our research team) conducted open-ended interviews to discover which traits and behaviors characterize such exemplars.

After a while, we felt prepared to “go public” with our findings. In 2001, we published a book entitled *Good Work*. That book focused on the two elements that most predictably characterized our subjects: They were *excellent* at their work; and they carried out their work in an *ethical* way.

We went on to study respected professionals in seven other areas in addition to geneticists and journalists: doctors, lawyers, business executives, individuals in theater, professors (higher education), teachers (K–12), and individuals working in philanthropy. We soon came to realize that “good work” had not two but three essential elements, what we call the “triple helix”: the intertwining of excellence, ethics, and *engagement*. That is: people involved in



good work like their work (at least most of the time); they look forward to going to work (at least most of the time); and they often achieve that state of flow that keeps them energized—a fourth ‘E,’ if you will. This pursuit involved more than a decade of work, involving several dozen researchers, and culminating in ten books and many articles.

## DIFFERENT PATHS IN PURSUIT OF GOOD

While remaining close colleagues and friends, Mihaly, Bill and I proceeded thereafter along somewhat independent paths. Mihaly was a principal architect of the (now) world-famous movement of positive psychology. He established the Quality of Life Research Center at the Claremont Graduate University and focused on various

facets of flow throughout the life cycle, including the crucial role of mentors in catalyzing good work. (Alas, he died in October 2021, at the age of 87.) At the Stanford Center on Adolescence, Bill studied moral exemplars. He developed the concept of purpose to such an extent that it now constitutes an entire field of study in the social sciences, with applications from schools to workplaces, be they professional, business, or artistic.

As it turned out, I was the only member of the trio who stayed put on his original campus. Having been a founding member of an organization called Project Zero ([pz.harvard.edu](http://pz.harvard.edu)), I remained at Harvard. With extraordinary colleagues, I continued efforts to understand, unravel, and eventually promote the nature and realization of good work.

(I sometimes mused about why, unlike Mihaly and Bill, who had relocated to California, I had stayed put—and I came up with an answer that, at any rate, satisfied me: I travel—but chiefly in my own mind. And having recently entered my ninth decade, and now avoiding airports, that’s still my principal mode of locomotion).

Our Good Work research group slowly evolved into what we now simply call “The Good Project.” Over more than two decades, we have carried out a significant number of initiatives. Most recently, colleagues at

Project Zero have just launched a Center for Digital Thriving, much of it based on research originally carried out under the aegis of the Good Project. Our research group, including Katie Davis, Carrie James, and Emily Weinstein, sought to understand members of the “App Generation;” we pondered how it is important to devise and encourage activities that engage young people’s creative and critical faculties, helping youth become app-enabled—not simply app-dependent.

Other initiatives of the project during the last decade have included developing curricula for use in school: As developed by Lynn Barendsen, Shelby Clark, Kirsten McHugh, and Danny Mucinskas, The Good Work Toolkit contains games, exercises (e.g., a value sort) and curricular units—each designed to enhance the likelihood that the students will eventually become good workers—rather than compromised or even bad workers. The Toolkit is now organized around over a score of curricular pillars, which are being used—and adapted—in middle and secondary schools around the world. In the last few years, in collaboration with Wendy Fischman, we have created exercises and procedures that can lead to awareness of ethical issues among college students, who will soon enter the world of work. We are also participating actively in several studies and curricula focused on what it means to be a Good Citizen in a Democratic Society.



In itself, the Good Project should be regarded as a gigantic toolkit: it can and should be used (and adapted) by individuals and groups around the world. As the nature of work—and of play—changes—sometimes precipitously—we believe that the Toolkit can continue to be useful—even as it continues to evolve, sometimes in ways that we can’t anticipate.

## EDUCATING FOR MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES AND THE GOOD

In my long career, it’s been a privilege to launch a project with two valued—indeed invaluable—colleagues and to observe it evolve in so many ways—notably Bill Damon’s crucial work on a sense of purpose, as articulated in this publication. We have learned a tremendous amount, and we hope—indeed, we believe—that at least some of what we have learned has proved valuable to others.





Many, including me, have not always realized—and have not pondered—that an intelligence is essentially *amoral*. . . . Accordingly, it does not suffice to recognize, stimulate, and nurture our human intelligences.

Even though I have spent half of my life in research on the Good Project (and its various strands and branches), I am basically known as an educator. By far the work for which I am best known is the Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI theory)—the claim that, rather than constituting a single entity (as suggested by the IQ test), human cognition is better thought of as featuring eight semi-autonomous computational processes—which I’ve dubbed the “Multiple Intelligences.”

Along with others, I have spent lots of time discussing, debating, (and even, at

times, debunking) MI theory. But many, including me, have not always realized—and have not pondered—that an intelligence is essentially *amoral*. Linguistic intelligence can be used to write beautiful literary works (e.g. the German polymath, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe) but it also be used perniciously (e.g. the Nazi propagandist, Josef Goebbels). Interpersonal intelligence can be used to help individuals understand themselves (the sensible and sensitive therapist); but it also can be used to deceive others, mislead them, even torture them (the cult leader). Accordingly, it does not suffice to recognize, stimulate, and nurture our human intelligences. We—as educators, parents, citizens, scholars, and professionals—should reflect on our own ensemble of intelligences, note how we use them, and try as best we can to deploy them in benign ways.

Although my work with the Good Project is less known, it is an important addition for those who hope to foster intelligences for good.

## EVER CURIOUS


Even after a long life and career, in which I have had many opportunities, my mind is still active as I take walks, play the piano, or even simply rest. I have always spent a lot of my time alone with my mind, and I

still do. These days I have been pondering two questions:

First, what does it mean to synthesize? Though I am the “MI man,” I have come to realize that MI does not explain satisfactorily how I carry out my own work. With respect to intelligences, I am a typical scholar—reasonably linguistic, reasonably logical, with some musical and naturalist intelligence thrown in as bonuses. If I stand out from my fellow social scientists in any way, it’s because I am a skilled synthesizer—and most of my sustained writings are syntheses. But how to *understand* synthesis as carried out by a scholar/scientist/humanist has proved challenging. And that’s what I have been working on of late.

The second question I’ve been pondering is what we should be doing in our educational systems in the U.S. and around the world. I could easily write 2000, perhaps 20,000 words on that topic. But for now, let me simply say that I think that the fate

of the planet, of the natural world, and of our powerful but increasingly beleaguered species deserve to take increasingly large amounts of our scholastic space.

In the summer of 1965, I entered the field of educational research—courtesy of psychologist-turned-educator Jerome Bruner, who had created an effective social studies curriculum for middle school. The curriculum centered on three questions: (1) What is human about human beings?; (2) How did they get that way?; (3) How can they be made more so? I’d like my five grandchildren—along with many millions of other young people around the world—to have the opportunity to ponder those questions, come up with cogent answers, and act constructively upon them. The survival of the planet may well depend on good workers and good work. 

*Our current work is generously funded by the Kern Family Foundation, The John Templeton Foundation, and the Saul Zaentz Charitable Foundation.*



**Howard Gardner** is the John H. and Elisabeth A. Hobbs Research Professor of Cognition and Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He was a founding member of Harvard Project Zero in 1967 and held leadership roles at that research center from 1972 to 2023. Since 1995, he has been the co-director of The Good Project.

ARTWORK BY STEPHEN CONROY

# Playlist for Practitioners

**Purpose is not just cognitive.** Living into a vocation requires renewal of the heart, as well as the mind. Physician Abraham Nussbaum has developed a series of playlists for colleagues that he calls “The Listening Cure.” Nussbaum writes, “In the peculiar enclosures of the hospital, when your ears are ringing with alarm fatigue, a practitioner needs music.” You can find mixes ranging from “Operating Theater” to “Sleep Lab” at [abrahamnussbaum.com/listening-cure](http://abrahamnussbaum.com/listening-cure).

Here we share just one example, Emergency Department.

**“Everyone needs help: routine, urgent, and emergent. Sometimes you need a hero. They are waiting for you in the Emergency Department. It’s a hell of a place to wait. Not the kind of place from which you send postcards, except for this one from the NLM: Operation Emergency Room.”** —ABRAHAM NUSSBAUM

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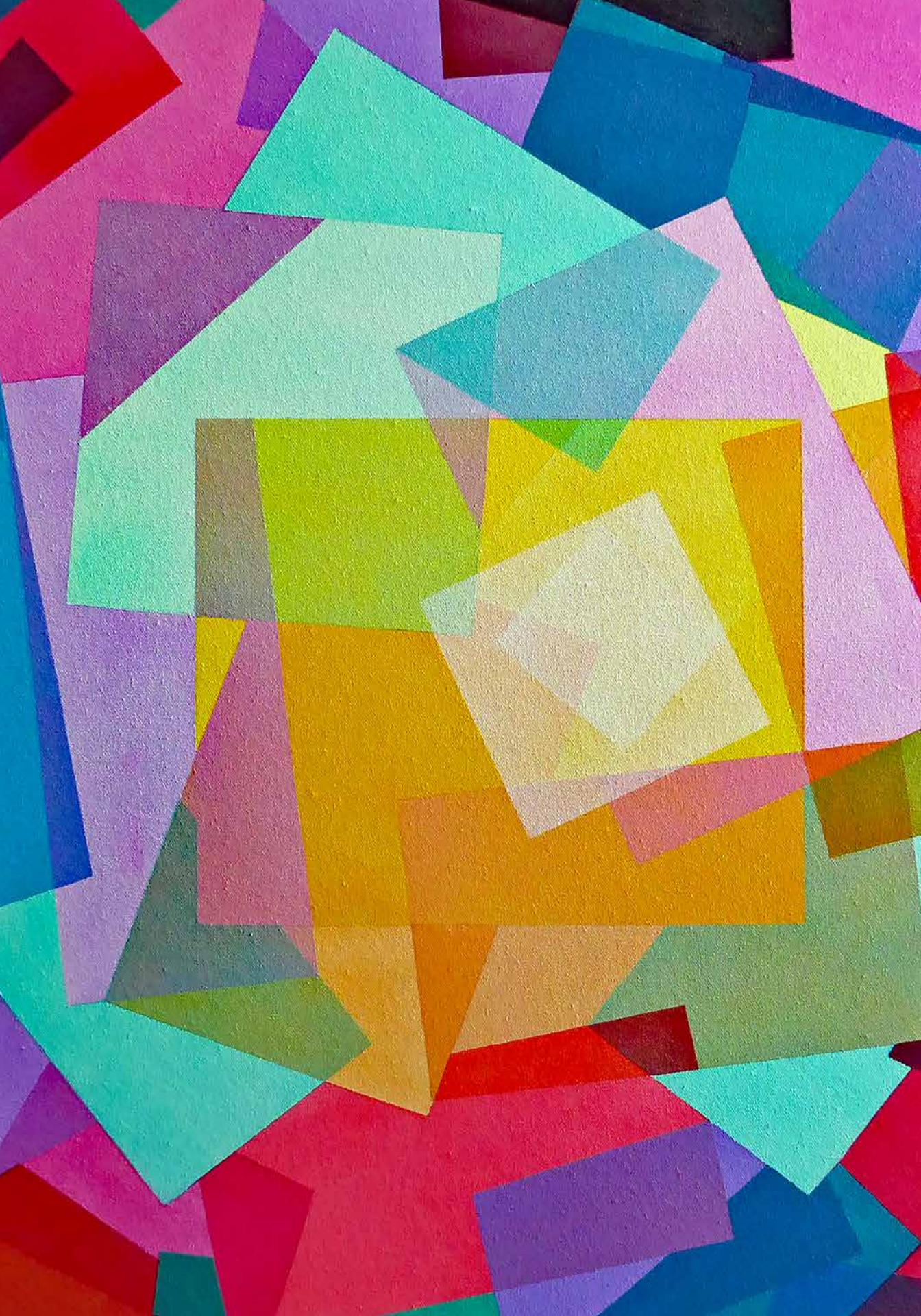
**Abraham Nussbaum, MD** works at Denver Health, an academic safety-net system, as an inpatient psychiatrist and Chief Education Officer. His next book is *Progress Notes: One Year In The Future of Medicine*.



## EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

- 1 \* Holding Out For A Hero \* *Bonnie Tyler*
- 2 \* Urgent \* *Foreigner*
- 3 \* Building Crash \* *Sound Effects Library*
- 4 \* El Accidente \* *Luis Vargas*
- 5 \* The Carroll County Accident \* *Porter Wagoner*
- 6 \* Wreck On The Highway \* *Bruce Springsteen*
- 7 \* Accidents Will Happen \* *Elvis Costello & The Attractions*
- 8 \* Help! \* *The Beatles*
- 9 \* 911 \* *Wycleaf Jean + Mary J. Blige*
- 10 \* 911 Is A Joke \* *Public Enemy*
- 11 \* Losing You \* *Solange*
- 12 \* Help Wanted \* *Keegan DeWitt*
- 13 \* Don't Save Me \* *HAIM*
- 14 \* Accident Aftermath \* *Sound FX*
- 15 \* Come See About Me \* *Gladys Knight & The Pips*
- 16 \* Rescue Me \* *Fontella Bass*
- 17 \* Stayin' Alive \* *Bee Gees*
- 18 \* I Need A Doctor \* *Dre + Enimen*
- 19 \* Check On It \* *Beyonce + Bun B + Slim Thug*
- 20 \* Should I Stay Or Should I Go \* *The Clash*
- 21 \* Waiting Room \* *Fugazi*
- 22 \* I Wanna Be Sedated \* *The Ramones*
- 23 \* Dangerous \* *Roxette*
- 24 \* All Through The Night \* *Cyndi Lauper*
- 25 \* Heroes \* *David Bowie*







PART II

# Pursuing Vocation

“Purpose is first and foremost the giving of self: of our talents, training and education, efforts and persistence, attention and discernments, imagination, aspiration, and passion.”

CAROLYN WOO



CLAYTON SPENCER

# Purpose in Work and Life

## A Case for the Liberal Arts

### THINKING ABOUT WORK

When I arrived in Lewiston, Maine in the summer of 2012 to become the eighth president of Bates College, I was captivated by its grand landscape of manufacturing. Enormous mill buildings, most now quiet, line the city's river and canals, their perfect rectangular forms, huge courses of impeccable brickwork, and row upon row of tall, symmetrical windows embodying the very essence of the industry they made possible. The number and sheer scale of these buildings speak to the might of Lewiston and its sister city Auburn as a textile and shoe manufacturing hub well into the twentieth century. The beauty and precision with which these structures were crafted reflect "industry" in a different sense—namely, the diligence and skill of the human beings who built the mills and ultimately worked within their walls.

It didn't take long for me to realize that I had landed myself in a world whose deep logic involved "work." Work as a beacon of hope for generations of French-speaking Canadians who saw in the mills of Maine the promise of a paycheck and a means to build new lives. Work as a source of vibrancy and community in a new country. Work in its most concrete form—making things.

Yet, I was charged with the seemingly cerebral task of leading an excellent undergraduate college devoted to the liberal arts and justly proud of its strong academic culture. How,







If motivating and equipping our students to live lives of meaning and contribution is a core purpose of the liberal arts, then work is central to the project.

then, was I to think about the work of the liberal arts in this particular setting? To be sure, a liberal arts education is not primarily about making *things*, but might it, in fact, involve *making*?

I found a compelling starting point in the words of Peter Gomes—Harvard professor, theologian, long-time minister of the university’s Memorial Church, and, as it happens, a Bates graduate. He died in 2011, after forty years spent sharing his wisdom with successive generations of Harvard undergraduates. About the aims of a Harvard education, he famously said: “We put the making of a better person ahead of the making of a brighter person, or a better mousetrap.”<sup>1</sup> According to Gomes, we do this by helping students figure out what kind of life they wish to lead: “What is my

purpose? How can my life be better? How can I help to make a better world? These are the questions worth asking, and college is one of the few places that allows you, even requires you, to do so.”<sup>2</sup>

## THE LOGIC OF PURPOSEFUL WORK

If motivating and equipping our students to live lives of meaning and contribution is a core purpose of the liberal arts, then work is central to the project. Whatever a person’s particular interests, choices, or constraints, most people wish to figure out a way to stay healthy and happy, to nourish human connection, and to leave the world—or at least their corner of it—better than they found it. For many people, this means, among other things, finding work that contributes to an overall sense of fulfillment, while also furnishing the practical and financial means to sustain a life.

Which is why preparing students for work and career should not be—as it has been for far too long at many excellent colleges and universities—an afterthought relegated to the waning months of senior year. (Remember the binders of banking jobs?) Nor can it be addressed by tactics alone—online hiring platforms, access to alumni networks, job shadows, internships, or industry info sessions. These practical



tools are important, but only as part of a framework that locates questions about work where they belong—at the center, not on the outskirts, of the project of the liberal arts.

Purposeful work, as we came to think about it at Bates, is not a *kind* of work. It is not found “out there” inherent in a particular type of job or career. It can be paid or unpaid, within a family or for an outside organization, part-time or full-time, manual or intellectual, artistic or managerial. It is not “do-gooder” work, though for some individuals it might be. Rather, purposeful work is about aligning who you are with what you do and how you choose to move through the world.

Because life is a journey and we evolve over time, even as *the* world and *our* worlds also evolve, the answers to the question of how we wish to live our lives change over the lifespan. But the essence of the exercise—learning to navigate the dynamic relationship between “self” and “world”—remains the core pursuit.

In a liberal arts setting, we give our students a great deal of choice about which courses they will take, what they will major in, and how they will populate their college experience outside the classroom. We also do our best to give them the tools to approach their choices with self-awareness, diligence, and discernment so that they

can carve out a path, in college, first, and ultimately in life, that will be authentically their own.

The concept and methodology of the Purposeful Work program are built on these core principles. It is not, for instance, about exhorting students to “find their passion.” Just as purpose is not found “out there” inherent in certain types of work and not in others, it also does not typically reside within a person as a pre-existing passion waiting to be liberated. Unless, perhaps, you are Albert Einstein, or Toni Morrison, or Yo-Yo Ma.

For most ordinary mortals, purpose tends to emerge in the “doing.” This is how Richard Courtemanche, a handsewer in one of the shoe factories of Lewiston, described his purposeful work.

An average handsew[er], back in those days, in the '60s, would probably do about twenty pairs a day. A good handsewer would do around thirty pairs a day, as he was considered to be fast. A real fast guy, we're talking, you know . . . thirty-five to forty pairs. I would do around sixty pairs a day, for many years. Myself and Vern, Vernon Daigle, locally, were probably the fastest handsewers. That was unheard of, what we could do. We did it because it was, it came natural, what other people would do, unnatural. So he was a good man. I



learned from him, because he used to handsew quite a few years before me. I used to watch, and I'd say, I can do the same thing. And then from there I picked up the tricks that my dad used to show me, then I picked up some others, then after that, I loved it.<sup>3</sup>

Richard Courtemanche did not start with a passion for shoemaking that he unleashed on the world. Rather he waded in, he paid attention, he learned the skills, and then along the way he discovered that he was really good at stitching shoes. Only “after that,” did he come to love his work. In other words, the passion did not precede

the engagement with work, it was the other way around.

Learning a set of skills or a base of knowledge is a fundamental aspect of identity formation, of becoming fully human. I can sew shoes. This is what I do. This is who I am. I am proud of it. “Myself and Vern . . . . That was unheard of, what we could do.”

For our students, most of whom have a luxury of choice that Richard Courtemanche could only dream of, purpose emerges (or not) as you try different things and get your hands dirty. But this only happens if exploration is paired with reflection. The

Purposeful Work team at Bates works with students beginning in first-year orientation to ease them into the notion that the starting point for making life choices is understanding who you are and what matters to you. The staff use various tools and strategies to help students gain an awareness of their interests, strengths, and values—what brings them joy, what kind of things they know they are good at, where they are, or are not, confident in their abilities, what sorts of things they might like to try, and how much risk are they willing to take, to name a few examples.

Unquestionably, the most important dimension of the Purposeful Work approach is the sense of agency and confidence it fosters in students as they make their way through various cycles of exploration, reflection, and adaptation. These elements are specific and concrete, and students internalize the process. Based on what you've figured out about yourself, what kinds of work would you like to explore? Once in an internship or a job shadow, how was the experience for you, and do you wish to pursue it further? If it feels like the right field, but the wrong role, you refine your choice for your next opportunity. If the experience does not feel right at all, you move on, consciously rejecting pathways that do not align.

Not only is the Purposeful Work program built on the core values of the liberal arts,




**Purpose emerges (or not) as you try different things and get your hands dirty. But this only happens if exploration is paired with reflection.**

it also reinforces them. The emphasis on self-knowledge as the starting point, and the structured approaches used to develop it, puts students in the habit of making conscious choices about many aspects of their college experience—whether in the classes they choose, the activities they jump into, or the leadership responsibilities they take on. Students begin to think of their college experience itself as their “purposeful work” during the undergraduate years, even as they look toward how they will find it after graduation.<sup>4</sup>

This well-scaffolded approach is proving to be powerful for all students. It is particularly important, however, for students who may be the first in their families to go to college or have not had much exposure to a broad range of careers. From the beginning, Bates conceived of the Purposeful Work program as an important piece of its equity promise to all students. Bates





is committed to providing broad access to the education it offers, and it has become much more intentional about supporting all students for academic success and full participation in the college experience. Purposeful Work adds another piece of the puzzle. A well-thought-out and well-executed approach to helping students bridge from college to work and career ensures that all students—not only those whose parents are able to connect them to networks of opportunity—have the skills and confidence to seek out career opportunities commensurate in scope and ambition with the education they have received.

## TESTING OUR ASSUMPTIONS

Bates developed its Purposeful Work program based on the intrinsic logic of a liberal arts education. Yet, the link between finding purpose in work and overall fulfillment resonates far beyond a particular set of colleges and universities and the students who attend them.

In the fall of 2018, Bates partnered with the Gallup organization to conduct a survey of nationally representative college graduates, of varying ages, career stages, and types of higher education experience, to examine how they think about purpose and work.<sup>5</sup> Since the mid 20th-century, Gallup has explored global measures of well-being in

terms of five interrelated elements: purpose well-being, social well-being, financial well-being, community well-being, and physical well-being. In examining the relationships among these, Gallup identified purpose (defined as liking what you do every day and learning or doing something interesting each day) as the most important element given its disproportionate impact on one's overall well-being.


The Bates/Gallup study was designed to build on the existing research related to purpose well-being by specifically examining the extent to which college graduates seek purpose *in their work*. The findings were striking. Eighty percent of college graduates say that it is very important (37%) or extremely important (43%) to derive a sense of purpose from their work. Yet less than half succeed in finding purposeful work, and purposeful work was found to be particularly important to the younger workforce. Reflection and self-understanding are central to finding purpose—graduates who align their work with their interests, values, and strengths are three times more likely to experience high purpose than those with low levels of reflection. Finally, graduates with high purpose in work are almost ten times more likely to have high overall well-being. Only 6% of those who have low levels of purpose in their work have high levels of well-being, whereas fully 59% of those with high purpose in work have high well-being.

I offer this study not as the definitive word on a topic as deep and rich as “purpose.” Rather, I mean to describe the impulse we had at Bates, as we moved forward in developing the Purposeful Work program, to pressure-test our assumptions with a broader audience not necessarily steeped in the goals and methods of a liberal arts education.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

We live in a world defined increasingly by complexity, uncertainty, and rapid change, where a college graduate can expect to have multiple distinct jobs before the age of 50. It is no longer sufficient or even plausible, therefore, to prepare our students for work or career based on the availability of a particular kind of first job, or on the notion of “career” as a stable and well-defined pathway through life. Instead, the ability to sustain work over a lifetime will increasingly depend on individual agency that combines the content knowledge, cognitive skills, and interpersonal abilities

required for employment with a mindset of informed self-determination and adaptability.

Far from being irrelevant to preparing students for work and career, these are precisely the strengths that a liberal arts education brings to the table. 

*To find out more about the Bates Center for Purposeful Work, visit [bates.edu/purposeful-work](https://bates.edu/purposeful-work). To learn about other efforts across higher education focused the education of the whole person for growth and transformation, visit [thecte.org](https://thecte.org).*

## NOTES

1. Gomes, Peter, *Never Give Up! And Other Sermons Preached at Harvard, 2008–2010*, ed. Cynthia Wight Rossano, Cambridge Memorial Church, Harvard University, 2011, p. 21.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
3. Richard Courtemanche, “Portraits and Voices: Shoemaking Skills of Generations,” Exhibition, Museum L-A, Lewiston, Maine (2012).
4. Almost half of Bates faculty have formally integrated aspects of Purposeful Work into their classes, and all Bates students at this point engage with the program over the course of their college, many in multiple ways.
5. The final report of the Bates/Gallup survey may be found in full here: [bates.edu/purposeful-work](https://bates.edu/purposeful-work).



**Clayton Spencer** served as the President of Bates College from 2012 to 2023. A lawyer by training, Clayton was the vice president for policy at Harvard for seven years, and she has also served as chief education counsel to the U.S. Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources.








JAMES E. COLEMAN, JR.

# Training Happy Warriors



became a lawyer to fight what I saw as widespread injustice against marginalized people. I am director of the Duke Law School Wrongful Convictions Clinic, which tries to identify and remedy wrongful convictions in North Carolina. Since 2011, ten of the Clinic's clients have been exonerated, two of whom after being incarcerated for more than 40 years for crimes they did not commit. But my hope for the Clinic is not only for our clients; I also am convinced that engaging law students in this work can instill in them a deep sense of purpose that I hope will make them warriors for justice, whatever career path they follow.

Lawyers are the trustees of our democracy and guardians of the rule of law. We take an oath when we become lawyers to support the Constitution of the United States, faithfully discharge the duties of the office of attorney, and



conduct ourselves at all times with integrity and civility.<sup>1</sup> Sadly, individual lawyers often subordinate these obligations to other goals, including those inconsistent with the oath. Lawyers were conspicuous among the people who tried to prevent the orderly transfer of presidential power after the 2020 national election for President. A former chief justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court, for example, allegedly gave advice to the then-president that the vice-president had the unilateral authority to refuse to count the votes in several contested states and thereby throw the election of president into the House of Representatives where extreme gerrymandering gave Republicans enough votes to choose the president.<sup>2</sup> There was no constitutional basis for such advice.<sup>3</sup> The refusal of the vice-president to accede to the false claim averted a constitutional crisis for the country. The actions of these lawyers to put the interest of power above their duty to the constitution have resulted in some being disciplined by the state bars that licensed them.<sup>4</sup> Clearly, it is important for our law schools to be cultivating a commitment to integrity, justice, and courage in our students.

In the criminal justice system, the failure of lawyers to live up to their oath denies criminal defendants the equal justice that the constitution guarantees. The Duke Wrongful Convictions Clinic investigates claims of innocence made by people who

have been convicted of major crimes. In our work, the Clinic endeavors to hold all lawyers involved in the criminal justice system, including defense attorneys, prosecutors, and judges, accountable for their sworn duty to defend and support the constitution. At a law school where only a few of our graduates will ever be directly involved in the criminal justice system, the Clinic faculty emphasizes that our obligation to uphold the constitution is not tied to the career path we pursue. Lawyers have a duty to pursue justice in whatever manner possible and to hold those actually working in the system accountable when they fail to do so.

The American criminal justice system is often marked by the role that race plays in its administration and by the public's widespread indifference to what happens in the system. As citizens, lawyers by their training and experience are able to change both circumstances by holding each other accountable when they engage in conduct that undermines justice. That is our goal in the Clinic. We expose students to the consequences of the system's failures by immersing them in every aspect of what we do to remedy wrongful convictions. First, we identify conduct that leads to miscarriages of justice and, second, we call out the actors who are responsible for the misconduct. Our hope is that when they become lawyers, our students will continue that effort as individuals.



When we started the Duke Innocence Project in 2002, we were part of a small group of law schools that answered a call for action from the national Innocence Project. The Project had successfully used DNA to identify an alarming number of innocent people who had been convicted of serious crimes, including many who were on Death Row. The Project recruited us to join what eventually became an international network. In North Carolina, Duke Law School and the University of North Carolina School of Law joined forces to create the North Carolina Center on Actual Innocence, a non-profit organization established to coordinate the identification and investigation of wrongful convictions by law schools in our State. UNC-CH and Duke later recruited North Carolina Central University's Law School to join our effort. Other law schools in the state also joined, including the Wake Forest School of Law. Initially, the purpose of the Center on Actual Innocence was to screen claims of innocence and to allocate the cases among the participating law schools to avoid duplication of effort. Today, the Center no longer performs that role; instead, it operates as an independent innocence project, actively investigating claims of innocence, along with the Duke and Wake Forest law schools.

At the outset, the Duke and UNC law schools sought to work directly with prosecutors around the State to remedy these


miscarriages of justice. Our assumption was that prosecutors would see our work as complementary to their own. A wrongful conviction was a threat to public safety; the actual perpetrator was left free to re-offend. Although some prosecutors saw our work that way, ultimately as we became more successful, many did not. But our attempt to work with prosecutors was recognition of the central role they play in the American criminal justice system and their ability to provide relief from miscarriages of justice without the delays and uncertainty that litigation in court entails.

## MINISTERS OF JUSTICE

On April 1, 1940, at a conference of United States Attorneys from across the country, former Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson gave a famous speech about the nature and role of the American prosecutor.<sup>5</sup> The speech is one of the most widely read essays on the subject in law school; it would be unusual if Jackson's speech was not included on the reading list of a law school ethics courses. Justice Jackson said that the prosecutor was "one of the most powerful peace-time forces known to our country." He explained:

*The prosecutor has more control over the life, liberty, and reputation than any other person in America. His discretion*





is tremendous. He can have citizens investigated and, if he is that kind of person, he can have this done to the tune of public statements and veiled or unveiled intimations.

• • •

Your positions are of such independence and importance that while you are being diligent, strict, and vigorous in law enforcement you can also be just. Although the government technically loses its case, it has really won if justice has been done.<sup>6</sup>

Reflecting this last point in Justice Jackson's speech, prosecutors are often called "ministers of justice." Indeed, that is how their role is described in state bars' rules of professional responsibility for prosecutors. In North Carolina, for example, the rules state:

A prosecutor has the responsibility of a minister of justice and not simply that of an advocate; the prosecutor's duty is to seek justice, not merely to convict or to uphold a conviction.<sup>7</sup>

As Justice Jackson noted, however, "[w]hile the prosecutor at his best is one of the most beneficent forces in our society, when he acts from malice or other base motives, he is one of the worst."

In the Clinic's wrongful convictions work, we always try to appeal to the

beneficent inclination of prosecutors to do justice. Often, however, we encounter prosecutors who are indifferent to whether our clients might be innocent. That is the ordinary injustice the Clinic has to combat. In their work for the Clinic, students experience both the exhilaration of an exoneration as well as the soul-crushing heartbreak of a loss that results from indifference and unfairness. Exposure to both is important for students searching for purpose in their legal careers, whatever path they take.

We tell our students that they will face many opportunities in their careers to act with courage and integrity, sometimes against prevailing winds. I had such an opportunity in 2006 when I came to the defense of members of the Duke lacrosse team who were falsely accused of sexually assaulting an African American "exotic dancer." What I did seemed heroic to some, but only because others, led by the prosecutor, rushed to judgment and assumed the students were guilty. Eventually, the North Carolina Attorney General replaced the local prosecutor and declared the students innocent. Whether our students rise to the occasion in such circumstances will depend on whether they can muster the courage to do the right thing, as they see it, as well as the courage to be guided by their values and sense of justice. The Clinic exposes students to experiences, good and bad,

that we hope will motivate them to do the right thing when opportunities arise.

## AN ATTICUS FINCH MOMENT

One of the oddities of the legal profession is that perhaps our most widely embraced hero is a fictional lawyer, Atticus Finch, from *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Atticus Finch is revered by lawyers and non-lawyers alike because he defended a black man falsely accused of raping a white woman, at a time when that was a heroic act. Today, we would not notice an Atticus Finch defending a man or woman charged with any serious crime. But we judge the courage and integrity of lawyers like Atticus Finch by the circumstances aligned against them.

The Clinic and the Duke Innocence Project have freed ten innocent men from prison since 2010. One of our most beloved clients, LaMonte Armstrong, died in 2019. When LaMonte was exonerated in 2012, after



17 years in prison for a murder he did not commit, the team of lawyers, students, and Duke alumni who had worked on his case gathered in a Greensboro, North Carolina, courtroom to witness the judge sign the order that freed him. Before signing the order, the judge spoke directly to LaMonte and the students and former students:

What I wanted to tell you is judges put their pants on one leg at a time, just like you do. And every day we go to court hoping to do justice, wanting to do justice. And at the end of the day, we leave hoping that we did justice, but we never know. I believe that I do justice on a daily basis, but believing isn't knowing.

The judge continued:

And I was telling a colleague earlier today, probably, this is as close to knowing that I'm doing justice as I will ever experience in my career as a judge, and it makes me proud to be a judge. It makes me proud to be a lawyer. It makes me proud to be a lawyer in this judicial district where we have prosecutors and police officers [who] are committed to doing justice, and I am proud of your lawyers and those students who were at Duke, who I understand are now lawyers, and it is my sincere wish that your life will go forward in a positive manner from today.<sup>8</sup>



At dinner that evening to celebrate Lamont's exoneration, I told the students and former students who had worked on LaMonte's case that what they witnessed in the courtroom that day was a real-life Atticus Finch moment, the honor that comes from the pursuit of justice. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, such a moment comes after the all-white jury convicts Tom Robinson and Atticus Finch packs his briefcase and walks dejectedly toward the door. As he approached the rear of the courtroom, the black people who sat in the balcony stood to honor him. That is when Rev. Styles says to Scout, Finch's daughter, "Jean Louise, stand up. Your father is passing."

But even when we fail in our attempt to overturn a client's wrongful conviction, the devastation that students experience when the result seems unjust or unfair will also motivate them to continue the fight. Our clients lose ultimately only when we and they give up.

## "THE ASSAILANT WAS A BLACK MAN"

In another case, after losing a motion to overturn our client's conviction in 2009, we learned three years later that prosecutors in the case had obtained a false affidavit from a former police officer and used it surreptitiously to undermine our client's claim of innocence. The evidence in the case suggested that the perpetrator

of a vicious assault on a white store clerk in Winston-Salem had been white. On the night of the attack, the victim was not able to identify or describe her assailant. Nevertheless, one of the prosecutors who was defending the 1997 conviction in 2009 convinced a former police officer to claim that on the night of the attack, the victim told her the assailant was, like our client, a Black man. Several years later, we learned about the false affidavit after one of the prosecutors sent an email to a former FBI official who had reviewed the police investigation in the case and concluded it was deeply flawed and did not support the conclusion that our client had committed the crime.

When we learned about the misconduct, we filed a motion to reopen the case, believing the false affidavit likely had been shared secretly with the judge who had ruled against our client in 2009. The prosecutors did not dispute that the affidavit was false or that they had used it to undermine our client's claim of innocence. That did not matter because the system itself protected them from accountability.

We filed our motion in 2012, asking the court to allow us to question witnesses under oath about use of the false affidavit and to hold a hearing to determine if the case should be reopened because of the State's use of the affidavit. The court agreed immediately to hold a hearing, but delayed ruling on our request to question



witnesses in advance of the hearing. A year later, in a conference room outside open court, the judge denied our request to question witnesses in advance but reaffirmed his intention to hold an evidentiary hearing on our motion to vacate the 2009 judgment. When we advised the judge that we intended to call as witnesses the same people whom we wanted to question prior to the hearing, lawyers from the Attorney General's Office who were representing the State told the judge they might have to "get out of the case" if that happened.<sup>9</sup> That likely meant the government lawyers had relevant knowledge about the prosecutors' secret use of the false affidavit. At that point, however, without explanation, the judge abruptly reversed himself and summarily denied our motion to vacate the 2009 judgment. There would be no evidentiary hearing. As we were leaving the conference room, the students fought back tears. I later told them to remember that feeling; it would help provide the empathy necessary to keep fighting this kind of out-of-sight injustice.



**James E. Coleman, Jr.** is the John S. Bradley Professor of the Practice of Law, Director of the Duke Center for Criminal Justice and Professional Responsibility and of the Duke Law School Wrongful Convictions Clinic. Before coming to Duke, he was a partner in the Washington, D.C. law firm of Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering; during his career, he also served as an assistant general counsel for the Legal Services Corporation, chief counsel

for the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, and deputy general counsel for the U.S. Department of Education.

I am almost 77 years old. When my family and friends ask why I continue to engage in this kind of frustrating work, my response is simple: showing my students how to fight for justice by example makes me a happy warrior. [WSM](#)

#### NOTES

1. See the Oath of the American Bar Association
2. "New Law School Dean Gave Trump Bad Legal Advice," *Inside Higher Ed* (January 5, 2023), [insidehighered.com/news/2023/01/06/trumps-jan-6-legal-adviser-leads-new-law-school](https://insidehighered.com/news/2023/01/06/trumps-jan-6-legal-adviser-leads-new-law-school)
3. "Trump's election fraud claims were false. Here are his advisers who said so." *Politico* (June 13, 2022; [www.politico.com/news/2022/06/13/trumps-election-fraud-claims-were-false-here-are-his-advisers-who-said-so-00039346](https://www.politico.com/news/2022/06/13/trumps-election-fraud-claims-were-false-here-are-his-advisers-who-said-so-00039346))
4. "Trump's lawyers keep getting in trouble with judges. Here are the 17 sanctioned so far," *Business Insider*. [www.businessinsider.com/trump-lawyers-sanctioned-by-courts-election-lawsuits-2022-12](https://www.businessinsider.com/trump-lawyers-sanctioned-by-courts-election-lawsuits-2022-12)
5. Robert H. Jackson, *The Federal Prosecutor* (April 1, 1940), 31 *J. Crim. L.* 3 (1940) (address at Conference of United States Attorneys, Washington, D.C., April 1, 1940).
6. *Id.*
7. Rule 3.8 of the North Carolina Rules of Professional Responsibility, "Special Responsibilities of a Prosecutor," Comment 1.
8. Transcript at \_\_\_\_.
9. *In Camera* Hearing Tr. at 74–76.

# Good Reads

We asked our authors to recommend a book they had read over the past couple of years. Here is what they said:



## On Sex and Gender A Commonsense Approach

BY DORIANE LAMBELET

Two of the organizations on whose boards I have served are spearheading a misleading effort to establish as a principle that “a girl/woman is a girl/woman,” whether she is trans or cis. Such a principle would destroy the category of female competition in many sports because of the biological differences between girls who are female at birth and those who are born as males and transition to being girls/women. This book will be a major contribution to our understanding that sometimes (biological) sex really matters. —**JAMES COLEMAN**

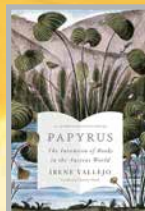
## Papyrus

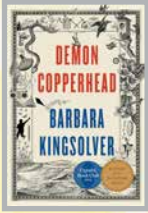
### The Invention of Books in the Ancient World

BY IRENE VALLEJO (TRANSLATION BY CHARLOTTE WHITLE)

I would never have thought that a book of over 400 pages, ostensibly about writing on a plant (!), would hold my interest. But like other great syntheses, it intertwines the invention of writing and books with broader historical trends and with the niche of various media in our own time.

—**HOWARD GARDNER**





## Demon Copperhead

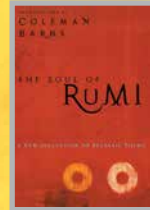
BY BARBARA KINGSOLVER

Barbara Kingsolver creates characters with human frailty and dignity who are caught in tragic life circumstances. She tells their stories with profound compassion and hope. —**JAMES PLEWS-OGAN**

## The Soul of Rumi

BY COLEMAN BARKS

Rumi is my favorite poet. He speaks so deeply about the co-existence of grief and joy, and the stance of welcoming all of life's experience, even the most painful. —**MARGARET PLEWS-OGAN**



## Go, Went, Gone

BY JENNY ERPENBECK

Erpenbeck is one of the leading contemporary writers in Germany today. The story is set in Berlin in 2015, at the time when African refugees were pouring in and setting up camp in one of the main squares of the city.

The protagonist is a recently retired professor from Humbolt University (formerly in East Berlin), and the story concerns his quiet struggle to construct a life of purpose and connection after retirement. Erpenbeck's writing is spare and elegant, and she conveys the interiority of her main character with subtlety and nuance. One of the best books I have read in the past several years. —**CLAYTON SPENCER**

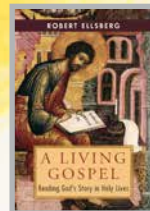
## Living Gospel

### Reading God's Story in Holy Lives

BY ROBERT ELLSBERG

Robert Ellsberg, with wit and expert strokes, illustrates how holiness is our calling through the lives of the saints and spiritual masters as they attended to God as their first and abiding love.

—**CAROLYN WOO**

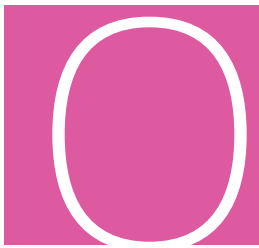




JAMES AND MARGARET PLEWS-OGAN

# Seeking Wisdom

## Purpose and the TurboCharged Life



On December 2, 2021, our lives cracked open. Jim was diagnosed with ALS, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis. ALS is often referred to as the one illness that a physician most fears. It is a rapidly progressive neuromuscular disease that eventually results in complete paralysis, robbing the patient of the ability to move, speak, swallow, and eventually breathe, while leaving the patient's cognitive capacity intact. ALS is 100% fatal. No one has ever survived. The average life expectancy after diagnosis is 2–3 years. One hundred years after the diagnosis was made famous by baseball legend Lou Gehrig, only a few minimally effective treatments exist, these aimed only to slow the course.









When given this diagnosis, patients commonly hear: “go home, hug your loved ones and get your affairs in order,” or “now’s the time to tackle that bucket list, and eat all the chocolate ice cream you want.”

At the time of the diagnosis, we were both busy clinician-scholars. Our lives were full and engaging, with meaningful work, close family, and a community of friends. We were runners, and loved camping, hiking, and exploring the world. We were activists, focusing on improving the care of vulnerable populations. With this diagnosis, our lives were completely upended.<sup>1</sup>

What is it that characterizes a life-changing event? We use language like “upended” or “cracked open,” appropriately referencing an earthquake, an event in which the ground literally opens underneath, shifts dramatically, causing structures to

collapse. A defining element to such an event is that our way of understanding ourselves, and our place in the world, collapses. Our purpose collapses. If my purpose in life is to be a good mother and my only child dies, how do I go on? The transformational question that is posed by such a circumstance is “why am I here on this earth? Who am I now that I am in this circumstance in which I can no longer be as I was before?” Moving forward, in a transformational way, requires a radical reconstruction of purpose.

For many years, the scientific community focused only on the negative effects of trauma. Post-traumatic stress disorder became a household term. Only more recently have we discovered that *positive* transformation can and does occur in the wake of severe life-changing events. The phenomenon of post traumatic growth, first characterized by Tedeshi and Calhoun,<sup>2</sup> has been well documented. Research has shown that people can report having more compassion, a greater appreciation for life, and a better understanding of the deeper meaning and purpose in their life. It has been postulated that the ultimate positive outcome of these transformational events is wisdom-gained, essentially becoming a better, more compassionate person in the wake of these events. In our wisdom in medicine study,<sup>3</sup> we interviewed physicians and patients who were coping with serious life challenges. Our study participants



were specifically selected because they themselves felt that in the wake of tragedy they had grown stronger and changed for the better. We were interested in understanding more about the process of moving through tough circumstances in a way that resulted, ultimately, in growth, in wisdom-gained. Our study participants described five elements that were important in this process: acceptance, stepping in, integration, new narrative, and wisdom.

Purpose was a central theme that ran through each of these elements. Transformative growth and wisdom-gained through adversity necessarily involved the struggle to reshape a new understanding of themselves, the world, and their place in it, redefining their purpose in order to continue to lead a meaningful life.

## ACCEPTANCE

One of the study groups included physicians who had made a serious medical error. Making a serious medical error has long been an action physicians most fear, and can lead many to quit medicine, and even to suicide. But some have been able to move through an event like this and become better doctors. For these physicians, the process of growth began with a brutally honest acknowledgement of their mistake, without excuse or shifting of responsibility. It meant a clear-eyed



Transformative growth and wisdom-gained through adversity necessarily involved the struggle to reshape a new understanding of themselves, the world, and their place in it, redefining their purpose in order to continue to lead a meaningful life.

acceptance that they could, and did, make a serious mistake, cutting adrift their notion of themselves as a “good doctor.”

Regarding our ALS diagnosis, when we say “our lives were cracked open,” we are in that moment accepting that life has changed

so radically that the way we previously understood ourselves and the world, our purpose, is shattered. This radical acceptance, this willingness to be adrift, is critical to opening the space for a rebuilding. To be, even temporarily, without purpose, is to be open to the transformational questions, “Who am I now? Why am I on this earth?” ALS is a disease that robs a person of almost everything that we might consider essential to our lives—the ability to move, to communicate, to eat and drink, and even to breathe. Viktor Frankl, having survived the Nazi concentration camps, famously writes, “everything we have can be taken from us but one thing, the last of our human freedoms, to choose one’s attitude in any given circumstance.”<sup>4</sup> It seems that by “attitude” Frankl is really talking about purpose, about the ability to choose how one is going to “be” in the world under even the most terrible and limiting of circumstances. Accepting the devastating breadth of particulars in this reality of ALS is almost impossible in the abstract. Allowing ourselves to be adrift for a moment, to ask ourselves “what does

this mean for our lives,” to talk about it with our children, is the opening up of the space in which we reexamine who we are, and who we are called to be in this circumstance.

## STEPPING IN

Stepping in to meet adversity head on is an active choice to engage with the new reality, with the intent of moving directly toward it. It is the opposite of avoidance. Engagement with the new reality may be a single step, but more often it is an iterative process that continues as the new reality unfolds.

For the physicians in the wisdom in medicine study, stepping in meant disclosing the mistake in an honest and forthright way to the patient and family. This was not easy. Stepping into adversity of this magnitude required intention, courage, and humility.

In the case of ALS, stepping in often begins with disclosing the diagnosis to loved ones. One by one the story is retold and the reality is experienced anew. Offering next steps helps the listener, while serving to cement the path forward for the one telling the story. Stepping in for us in ALS land also meant: exploring the medical literature for a deeper understanding of the illness, arranging second opinions, exploring options for clinical trials, closing a busy solo pediatric practice, and retiring





from an academic appointment. Each of these required a new bit of acceptance, a renewed decision to step in and move forward with patience and resilience.

Stepping in also includes engaging in the process of examining one's purpose. Who am I in this new reality? Sometimes, the new reality requires a complete restructuring of purpose. Jim is a well-known pediatrician and beloved figure in the community. On simple trips to the grocery store, we invariably encounter those who express their delight and their gratitude for having been his patients. With ALS, Jim can no longer function as a pediatrician. His purpose of caring for patients as their pediatrician no longer fits. But purpose sometimes runs deeper than the particular circumstance, and requires modification or refocusing, but not necessarily a complete restructuring. Advocacy, for example, has long been a defining purpose for Jim. Following the earthquake of ALS, how can purpose be reshaped given our new opportunities and limitations?

With ALS, Jim can no longer function as a pediatrician. His purpose of caring for patients as their pediatrician no longer fits. But purpose sometimes runs deeper than the particular circumstance, and requires modification or refocusing, but not necessarily a complete restructuring.

I Am ALS (IAA) is a new patient/family-run advocacy organization founded by Brian Wallach and Sandra Abrevaya, both former Obama White House staffers. IAA empowers people affected by ALS to use their talents, their experience, and their story to create positive change. Well-organized and supported volunteer committees work strategically to enact legislation and policy at the federal level. New volunteers are welcomed and offered the opportunity to have an immediate impact. Stepping in with IAA provides the chance to become part of a movement to change the course of ALS. In I Am ALS we have found our kin. We have found people who could help us to refocus our deepest purpose—to make the world a better place—informed by our new reality of who we are now and what we can do.





## INTEGRATION

In the wisdom in medicine study, the element of integration was the most complex. For the physicians, it meant integrating their mistakes into a new understanding of themselves as doctors. They must ask questions such as, “How can I be a doctor when I know that I can make a mistake?, How do I integrate this very real awareness of my own fallibility with my notion of a ‘good’ doctor?, How does this change me and the way I understand myself?”

Life with ALS changes everything. Many patients diagnosed with ALS are athletes or military personnel, with a self understanding that generally includes a strong and capable body, as well as a high level of independence and self-reliance. As the disease progresses and disability ensues, daily challenges become the norm. Rudiments of hygiene, feeding, mobility, communication, and the coordination of clinical care absorb ever increasing amounts of the day, and integrating these limitations into one’s self concept is a severe challenge.

The clinical course of ALS is routinely tracked using a validated 12-item scale known as the ALS-FRS-R (**Figure 1**).<sup>5</sup> With each clinic or research visit, the ALS-FRS-R is used to generate a numeric score documenting the progressive decline in function.

Graphing the numeric score over time can provide an estimate of the rate of decline, and thus be used to predict a rough estimate of time remaining. At each clinic visit, the patient’s decline is carefully documented.

Life with ALS, it would seem, is a life measured solely by its decline. In this scenario, hope naturally becomes a hope for a slower decline.

Integrating ALS into a rich, purpose-filled life takes more than hoping for a plateau of decline. Living a purposeful life requires more than reactively adapting to the ever-present obstacles of disability.

Since being welcomed into a new kinship of the ALS community, primarily with IAA, it has been plain to see an abundance of purpose-filled lives. Many of the same virtues honed by those who bravely face ALS head on are now being used to generate growth and refine purpose. The virtues (courage, endurance, compassion, perseverance, trustworthiness) are used to create new legislation, to raise funds for research and better care, to generate new possibilities for mobility and communication, to make the world a better place, if not for themselves, then for others who will follow them. In their actions, people living with ALS, and those who care for and about them, embody the markers of post traumatic growth and the attributes of wisdom. Why, we have wondered, isn’t

This flip side of the grief and devastation of a disease like ALS does not necessarily come naturally, and is easily overwhelmed by the degree of loss each day. But with intention, practice, and the help of others, this flip side can help balance the journey—actively seeking beauty, engaging in gratitude practices daily, setting aside time for contemplation, receiving the kindness and love of community, finding ways to make the world better, and letting the absolute absurdity of trying to cope with this disease generate both tears and laughter. All of these practices allow us to integrate grief honestly, to deepen and refine our purpose, and to have a sustaining hope.



this being measured, documented, recognized, even facilitated, by the healthcare community?

What if we began tracking ALS with a companion scale that documents progressive growth? What if we claimed that a new purpose, call it Turbocharged Living, might coincide with the clinical course of ALS. Let's call this the ALS-TLS, Turbocharged Living Scale (**Figure 2**).<sup>6</sup> A heightened appreciation for kindness seems an obvious potential by-product of living with ALS. Humor is still humor when it is the dark humor emerging amidst moments of absurdity. Discovering new capacity for innovation while adapting to the obstacles of disability might easily

translate to innovation in other parts of an active, purposeful life. This flip side of the grief and devastation of a disease like ALS does not necessarily come naturally, and is easily overwhelmed by the degree of loss each day. But with intention, practice, and the help of others, this flip side can help balance the journey—actively seeking beauty, engaging in gratitude practices daily, setting aside time for contemplation, receiving the kindness and love of community, finding ways to make the world better, and letting the absolute absurdity of trying to cope with this disease generate both tears and laughter. All of these practices allow us to integrate grief honestly, to deepen and refine our purpose, and to have a sustaining hope.

**FIGURE 1**

## ALS Functional Rating Scale—Revised (ALS-FRS-R)

BULBAR	FINE MOTOR	GROSS MOTOR	RESPIRATORY
<p><b>Speech</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Normal</li> <li>3 Detectable speech disturbance</li> <li>2 Intelligible with repeating</li> <li>1 Speech combined with nonvocal communication</li> <li>0 Loss of useful speech</li> </ul> <p><b>Salivation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Normal</li> <li>3 Slight but definite excess of saliva in mouth; may have nighttime drooling</li> <li>2 Moderately excessive saliva; may have minimal drooling</li> <li>1 Marked excess of saliva with some drooling</li> <li>0 Marked drooling; requires constant tissue or handkerchief</li> </ul> <p><b>Swallowing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Normal</li> <li>3 Early eating problems—occasional choking</li> <li>2 Dietary consistency changes</li> <li>1 Needs supplemental tube feeding</li> <li>0 NPO (exclusively parenteral or enteral feeding)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Handwriting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Normal</li> <li>3 Slow or sloppy; all words are legible</li> <li>2 Not all words are legible</li> <li>1 Able to grip pen but unable to write</li> <li>0 Unable to grip pen</li> </ul> <p><b>Cutting Food*</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Normal</li> <li>3 Somewhat slow and clumsy, but no help needed</li> <li>2 Can cut most foods, although clumsy and slow; some help needed</li> <li>1 Food must be cut by someone, but can still feed slowly</li> <li>0 Needs to be fed</li> </ul> <p><i>* There are different assessments for cutting food with gastrostomy.</i></p> <p><b>Dressing and Hygiene</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Normal</li> <li>3 Independent and complete self-care with effort or decreased efficiency</li> <li>2 Intermittent assistance or substitute methods</li> <li>1 Needs attendant for self-care</li> <li>0 Total dependence</li> </ul>	<p><b>Turning in Bed</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Normal</li> <li>3 Somewhat slow and clumsy, but no help needed</li> <li>2 Can turn alone or adjust sheets, but with great difficulty</li> <li>1 Can initiate, but not turn or adjust sheets alone</li> <li>0 Helpless</li> </ul> <p><b>Walking</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Normal</li> <li>3 Early ambulation difficulties</li> <li>2 Walks with assistance</li> <li>1 Non-ambulatory functional movement only</li> <li>0 No purposeful leg movement</li> </ul> <p><b>Climbing Stairs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Normal</li> <li>3 Slow</li> <li>2 Mild unsteadiness or fatigue</li> <li>1 Needs assistance</li> <li>0 Cannot do</li> </ul>	<p><b>Dyspnea</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 None</li> <li>3 Occurs when walking</li> <li>2 Occurs with one or more of the following: eating, bathing, dressing (ADL)</li> <li>1 Occurs at rest, difficulty breathing when either sitting or lying</li> <li>0 Significant difficulty, considering using mechanical respiratory support</li> </ul> <p><b>Orthopnea</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 None</li> <li>3 Some difficulty sleeping at night due to shortness of breath. Does not routinely use more than two pillows</li> <li>2 Needs extra pillow in order to sleep (more than two)</li> <li>1 Can only sleep sitting up</li> <li>0 Unable to sleep</li> </ul> <p><b>Respiratory Insufficiency</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 None</li> <li>3 Intermittent use of BiPAP</li> <li>2 Continuous use of BiPAP</li> <li>1 Continuous use of BiPAP during the night and day</li> <li>0 Invasive mechanical ventilation by intubation or tracheostomy</li> </ul>

Adapted from [alspathways.com/wp-content/themes/alspathways/assets/pdf/ALS-Functional-Rating-Scale-Revised-Guide.pdf](https://alspathways.com/wp-content/themes/alspathways/assets/pdf/ALS-Functional-Rating-Scale-Revised-Guide.pdf).



FIGURE 2

## ALS Turbocharged Living Scale (ALS-TLS)

### Adaptability

- 1 I enjoy my routine and I prefer to keep things as they are
- 2 I am learning to be flexible in new ways
- 3 I am now making changes to how I do things with minimal resistance
- 4 I am adapting to life in ways I could never have imagined

### Humor

- 1 I don't see any humor in ALS\*
- 2 I'm beginning to appreciate the moments of dark humor of ALS\*
- 3 I have enjoyed a good laugh due to something related to ALS\*
- 4 I look forward to sharing the healing effects of dark humor, even when life is tough

### Kindness

- 1 I am so grateful when people are kind to me
- 2 I recognize kindness in others' actions and acknowledge it in the moment
- 3 I have been outwardly kind to someone in the past 2 days
- 4 I actively look for opportunities to show kindness toward others, even when life is tough for me

### Compassion

- 1 I can't help but be grateful when someone shows me compassion
- 2 I recognize compassionate behavior in others and acknowledge it in the moment
- 3 I have shown compassion for someone in the last two days
- 4 I have a new capacity for compassion since having ALS\*

### Hopefulness

- 1 I am not a generally hopeful person
- 2 ALS\* has shaken my ability to be hopeful
- 3 I find new hope in the world around me all the time

- 4 I look for opportunities to share hope with others, even when life is tough for me

### Resilience

- 1 ALS\* has just about done me in. I don't think I can take one more setback
- 2 The progression of ALS\* decline is overwhelming, but I'm managing
- 3 I continue to find new ways to bounce back from ALS\* setbacks
- 4 I look for opportunities to help others through their setbacks, even when life is tough for me

### Altruism

- 1 My needs and desires must be my first priority
- 2 I am making room for others' desires in my life
- 3 I prefer to put others needs ahead of my own
- 4 I actively look for the opportunity to help someone else, even when life is tough

### Passion for creating change

- 1 I am content to plod along in life
- 2 I am happy to follow someone else's good ideas
- 3 I need to make a difference even if it means stepping out of my comfort zone
- 4 I have a zeal for making things better in the world

### Fierceness and Drive

- 1 I am not very good at pushing myself to do things that are new
- 2 I am learning that I need to step up to meet the challenges of life with ALS\*
- 3 Having ALS\* has given me a new drive to make things happen
- 4 I look for opportunities to bring out the passion for life in others, even when life is tough for me

### Advocacy for Self and Others

- 1 I am not very good at advocating for myself or others
- 2 I am learning to advocate for myself
- 3 I have gained confidence in advocating for myself and for others
- 4 I look for opportunities to be an advocate for positive change in the ALS\* community, even when life is tough for me

### Ingenuity

- 1 I am not very good at developing novel solutions to complex problems
- 2 I am learning who to ask when I need solutions to complex problems
- 3 I have gained confidence in finding novel solutions to complex problems
- 4 I look for opportunities to help others create novel solutions to complex problems, even when life is tough for me

### Vision and meaning

- 1 I prefer to focus on concrete ideas and tasks that need to be addressed now
- 2 I am learning to use my imagination to see new possibilities for myself with ALS\*
- 3 I have gained new meaning in my life with ALS\*
- 4 I look for opportunities to participate in work that shares and advances a vision for a world free from the ravages of ALS\*, even when life is tough for me

\* May substitute "difficult life circumstances" if not affected by ALS



## NEW NARRATIVE

Redefining purpose and integrating the practice of using virtue to buoy adversity are the foundations for building a new narrative. The question “who am I now” has an answer: “This is me now, this is how I am in the world, these are the actions that exemplify it.”

For the physicians in the wisdom in medicine study, the new narrative was what a “good but imperfect doctor” looked like. For many, it meant functioning in a more team-based way, or limiting the number

of patients they were responsible for, so they could give their full attention to each person. They became more willing to ask for help, to talk about and teach the reality of human limitations and vulnerability to mistakes.

What does a new narrative look like in the world of ALS?

ALS is by definition a series of losses, each with their own grief. In our new narrative, our new story of living with ALS, grief must coexist with a desire to live a turbo-charged life. Actively choosing to practice

virtues like compassion, curiosity, courage, and gratitude help to make grief more buoyant so that it does not drown out new growth and purpose. The virtues help us to sustain the coexistence of grief and growth. Also, a practice of buoying grief creates an opportunity for loss to inform purpose.

Our new narrative has included creating The Hummingbird Fund,<sup>7</sup> a small foundation we established to facilitate our new purpose in the face of ALS. The Fund has three guiding principles—closing care gaps, accelerating research, and leveraging opportunities for advocacy—each of which serve to engage others in the process of stepping in. The work of the Fund has created a mechanism for us to live out our deeper purpose of making the world a better place.

If you think of it, transformational change in the world generally begins with individuals who have been transformed by adversity, and are driven by a deep hope that change is possible. Change is hard, but those transformed by suffering have a purpose that is stronger and deeper than the inertia that resists change. The courage and strength exemplified by those who choose to respond to adversity with new purpose inspires others. Living a turbo-charged life is living a life filled with deep, life-sustaining hope. Living a turbo-charged life means being aware of and



surrounded by compassion and gratitude, humor, and beauty. It is a self-sustaining circle.

## CHOOSING WISDOM

ALS is a catastrophic illness that imposes relentless challenges and losses to daily life, with a steady stream of grief. Living with ALS does not necessarily mean being defined by ALS. Seeking wisdom, seeking to live a good life in the face of great challenges, involves everyday choices. Henri Nouwen puts it this way; “For every time there are losses, there are choices to be made. You choose to live your losses as passages to anger, blame, hatred,






depression and resentment, or you choose to let these losses be passages to something new, something wider and deeper.”<sup>8</sup>

Holding the reality of ALS, including its devastation, together with the continued practice of noticing beauty and kindness, fostering curiosity and gratitude, allows each to inform and infuse the other. Hope that is generated from this kind of wisdom-generating life is more than inspiring. This kind of deep hope generates life-sustaining purpose. It is not dependent on results, or on resolution of the true uncertainty that permeates life. It is the kind of hope that Jonathan

Wilson-Hartgrove talked about: “Our hope isn’t that we have the power to change anyone or any system, but rather that we can live here and now in the way of truth.”<sup>9</sup>

Seeking wisdom, living a turbo-charged life in the face of adversity, also involves letting go of the striving for answers, and instead falling in love with the questions, because living life in the face of adversity necessarily involves embracing the uncertainty and ambiguity of human existence. ALS is a cruel disease. It is easy to get lost in the search for answers, or cures, but the raw truth is that there are no answers and right now there are no cures. It does not mean we don’t strive for a cure, that we don’t put every ounce of focus toward helping to find a cure. Living a turbo-charged life of purpose can mean living life fully, without answers or cures. In many ways ALS may be representative of the human condition in its uncertainty and vulnerability. Rilke expresses this in letters to a young poet: “I want to beg you, as much as I can, to be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a foreign tongue. Do not seek the answers, which cannot be given to you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.”<sup>10</sup> 

NOTES

1. The opening paragraphs of this essay were presented as part of written and oral testimony to the Senate Committee on Aging hearing on Research and Treatment for Rare Diseases, on October 26 2023. [c-span.org/video/?c5090349/hearing-research-treatment-rare-diseases](https://c-span.org/video/?c5090349/hearing-research-treatment-rare-diseases).

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7. [hummingbirdfundva.com/about-us/](https://hummingbirdfundva.com/about-us/)

8. Nouwen H 2007 *Beloved: Henri Nouwen in Conversation*. Cambridge. WmB Eerdmans Publishing.

9. Wilson-Hartgrove. *The Hope of a Living Cross. Virtues & Vocations* Summer 2023.

10. Rilke R.M. *Letters to a Young Poet. Ulrich Baer ed.* 2022. pp 22–23. Warbler Press.



**Margaret Plews-Ogan** is the Brodie Professor of Medicine at the University of Virginia School of Medicine and former chief of the Division of General Medicine, Geriatrics, and Palliative Medicine. She is on the board of IAmALS, an ALS advocacy organization. She is a co-author of *Choosing Wisdom: Strategies and Inspiration for Growing through Life-Changing Difficulties*.


**James Plews-Ogan** is the Emeritus Associate Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Virginia School of Medicine. A pediatrician for 40 years, Jim has published articles on the care of children with medical complexity and disability. Jim's blog, *Offering Kindness*, started as a way to give voice to families facing medical complexity and disability. Now, the blog reflects Jim's journey with ALS.



CAROLYN WOO

# Purpose

## *Our Love Story*



**A**bout twenty years ago our son quipped with envy about how our generation, the Baby Boomers, possessed uncompromising clarity about what was important to us. My husband and I came of age in the era of Watergate, peace protests against the Vietnam war, the struggle for women's rights, and advocacy for racial equality.

Even as a young teen then, though overestimating the commitment of the Boomers to a peaceful and just society, our son was already pondering his purpose and had a growing frustration with not knowing what he should stand for and give his all.

The search for purpose inevitably turns our sight outward to the needs of the world and how we can make life better for others near and far. Yet, ironically, the journey must start with a focus on the self. To figure out our calling, we must first probe what we wish to offer and why. Before attention to others, purpose is first and foremost the giving of self: of our talents, training and education, efforts and persistence, attention and discernments, imagination, aspiration, and passion.



For purpose to be true to and worthy of us, it has to come from within. It is the ballad we compose and offer to the world from the notes and melodies pulsing in our bodies, minds, hearts, and souls, whether harmonious, discordant, sweet, or jarring. These are the notes that won't leave us alone, notes that only we can hear and turn into song.

## MY NOTES AND MELODIES

### Youth and Education

I was born in the British colony of Hong Kong shortly after my parents decided that they could not return to mainland China in light of the ascendancy of the communist government. My parents had fled to this tiny island during World War II to escape Japanese bombardment in southern China. They had always expected to return to their ancestral homes, which held much of their families' assets. Uprooted, they would start all over again. Prior social position, financial security, cultural familiarity, and even fluency with the local language would be lost.

I was the fifth child in the family as my parents worked their way toward having two sons, an heir and a spare. Blessed for me, the "spare" made his entry after me. My brothers were to become a doctor and





a lawyer. My sisters and I were simply to marry well.

Huddling around my mother, aunt, and their lady friends, I heard repeatedly the same story in different renditions of the vulnerability of women who were economically dependent on their husbands. Each of my grandfathers had four wives and concubines. The latter were considered fortunate to be provided for by men who claimed them. My biological grandmother had her feet bound, a torturous practice which somehow denoted the desirability of a woman for marriage in old China. My mother's investment suggestions to my father were casually brushed aside as women could not possibly comprehend economic matters. By middle school, I rejected the path of my mother and foremothers and determined to seek a future with self-agency through education.

Twelve years of elementary and high school with the Maryknoll Sisters, a missionary order from New York, formed my voice. More importantly, I came to recognize the responsibility for using that voice. Hong Kong was a wealth-driven society where power and wealth were the currencies for all transactions. Principles of unbridled

Purpose is first and foremost the giving of self: of our talents, training and education, efforts and persistence, attention and discernments, imagination, aspiration, and passion.

free market and competition reigned with little accountability to and concern for those left behind.

Guided by the Maryknoll Sisters, I came to understand privilege, its obligations, and the people who bore the costs. I learned from them that social justice mandates action. I saw how resources that did not exist at the start of the Sisters' service programs would eventually emerge from passion, creativity, and persistence. They made the students a part of their work and prayed with us to trust as they did in the Holy Spirit. From their faces, I equated faith with joy. Because God was real to them, God became real to me.

I was compelled to seek a college education in the United States. My father was short on both funds and the desire to see me go abroad. By then, I had become his intended companion in old age. I begged that he treat me as a son with the freedom to pursue a

profession. In return, I would assume the responsibility of a son to care for him and my mom. I would honor the name of Woo. From my older siblings, I raised sufficient funds for one year of tuition and room and board at Purdue University.

In college, I studied Economics for no better reason than a deep-seated notion that it is absolutely essential for women to understand business, markets, and finance. I had witnessed the precarious nature of women's wellbeing and dignity when they could not fend for themselves financially. Every ounce in me rebelled against becoming the victims in the stories my mom and aunt spoke with lament and tremor.

For my Ph.D. studies, I went into the field of Strategic Management. It was a completely new area of academic endeavor. "What is that?" was the most common response when people heard of my life choice for a profession. The field examines the success and failure of organizations in light of their internal facets (mission, culture, distinctiveness, resources) interacting with external forces (social, political, technological, economic).

It was a totally illogical pursuit given my lack of any business experience and the field's antipathy to assumptions in economic analyses and my natural strength of statistical modeling. Inexplicably, I was

hooked by the prospect of systematically examining external change from different angles and delineating likely consequences so as to enhance adaptation, innovation, and ultimate success. I moved forward despite the need to develop a very different skill set and the risks of unknown job prospects in a nascent discipline.

In hindsight, the childhood trauma of living in a world turned upside down by war, revolution, changes in technology, more wars in Indochina, dependence upon other countries for water and food, and financial reversals that affected people close to me must have imprinted me with the desire to have a firmer handle on things. Irresistible was the lure of more explicit understanding of the environment, greater preparedness, viable options, and my holy grail: stability. Strategic Management was my answer for the next four decades: it has been my role and contribution in every one of the over fifty organizations I have served as leader, staff, consultant, or board member. My professional path filled not only the vacuum in me for stability and the avoidance of chaos, but also became my offering to my communities.







## A Call to Leave

When Notre Dame invited me to serve as the dean of the business school, I flatly turned down the idea. I was prospering at Purdue University and felt that I owed my success, and therefore loyalty, to the institution that funded me through all my years of study. Many people personally invested in my professional growth and maturation. Purdue was family.

Shortly after I had given a firm “no” to provost Nathan Hatch at Notre Dame, I walked out of daily mass at St. Thomas Aquinas Center feeling very unsettled that God might have delivered a rather different missive. That day, Jesus in the Gospel reading of the parable of talents chastised the timid servant who buried his gift as a “lazy lout.” “Ai ya!” I exhaled the Chinese expression for all things calamitous. What did I miss?

At meetings with Notre Dame folks, I noted without hesitation that Notre Dame is uniquely positioned to define and demonstrate what is “Catholic” about Catholic business education. Business is often tolerated as a “necessary evil.” To me, that is wrong-headed thinking. Business is a necessary good, but it requires ethical leaders to unlock its potential. Done right, business honors human dignity, fosters co-creation with God, and offers the platform for channeling human ingenuity in the service of others. It stands to reveal

and share the bounty of God for all, here and now.

Clarity, conviction: I had these. Commitment to act: that would be up to me. The call came into focus. After years of observing exploitative employment practices in Hong Kong, I knew business students need to be inspired and imbued with the commitment to lead ethically and to serve the common good. The Maryknoll Sisters had formed me in that vision and responsibility. By now I had decades of experience in business and business education. These gave me a sense of what was possible. The mission had my name on it, and it felt wrong to turn away from it. In my final year at Purdue, I was choked up at every function. It would be my last time. I would be leaving home.

## Home Again

After fifteen years at Notre Dame, our mission of “business for good” had gained internal adoption and external recognition. The college received top ranking from the press. We stood on the message of an economy of grace and demonstrated its viability and veracity. As I felt my fingers around the brass ring, another call beckoned.

This time the invitation came from Catholic Relief Services, at which I had served as a board member for six years. On behalf of the U.S. Catholic Church, it was

founded in 1943 to bring refugees out of war-torn Europe, provide emergency relief, and engage in humanitarian development. By 2012, CRS had grown into a ministry which served over a hundred million people in about 120 countries. It focused on the most vulnerable people living without the essentials for human flourishing.

Though a board member, I really did not have the expertise necessary to guide decision-making in life-and-death situations triggered by extreme poverty, gang violence, political upheavals, and natural disasters. As I took a mental inventory of my knowledge gaps and professional deficiencies, the advice of my beloved mentor, Purdue provost Dr. Bob Ringel, flooded my mind. He pointed out that organizations would not seek me out for what I could not do, but for what they saw in me that they needed. At that point, CRS needed strategic redirection in light of major changes in funding requirements and the scale of their interventions. Indeed, that strategic challenge was my wheelhouse.

Should I step forward? I had great difficulty coming to a decision. Using all the analytical frameworks in my toolbox, I made no progress. I sought out a priest for spiritual direction. When I offered to recount my analyses, he pointed out that matters of the heart could seldom be resolved on the wavelength of pros and cons. Instead, I was to pay attention to my joys and fears. These

Done right, business honors human dignity, fosters co-creation with God, and offers the platform for channeling human ingenuity in the service of others.

were not subtle, and they would make themselves known. “Just keep a notebook and pencil at hand,” he counseled.

Indeed, fears announced themselves in nightmares. Looming large was the forfeiture of tenure, the ultimate guarantor of financial security and stability which had driven me since childhood. I had to recognize that I was no longer the child with that hunger. I had kept and delivered on my promise to take care of my family. More was just for the sake of more. An incredible sense of freedom filled me.

I was also preoccupied with concerns about my husband’s health and the dangers I would face in my work with CRS. In prayer, I was reminded that death is not a punishment—it is our return to God. I had to trust that our coming and going rests in his hands. That fear lost its grip on me.

Joys kept coming, overflowing my net just as Christ had filled Peter’s. On my list: the possibility of working with dedicated and talented colleagues, joining arms with people across all religions, restoring home



and hope, lifting people up, seeding new life, helping people believe again, forging unity among factions, promoting healing and peace-building, nourishing the mother who in turn nourishes her child, learning about cultures and the beauty of certain rituals, seeing communities come into their own, and many more.

Above all, I felt that I knew the people CRS serves—folks who were displaced, lost everything, forged new beginnings, endured risks and hardships for a better life for their children, persisted in the face of uncertainty, and relied on the goodness of other people. Looming large were the faces of women: their need for education, rights, opportunities, a chance to prove themselves, their dreams not only for themselves but for their children. I may not have known their names, but I knew them intimately. They were my people. I knew not only their struggles, but more importantly, their successes. By doing this work, I realized I would be going home.

## BEYOND SUCCESS

It is true that knowing and seeking to fulfill our purpose confers a certain efficiency and coherence. Most of us flourish with some degree of structure that delineates

our pursuits and offers the reassurance that these add up to something. That something builds from learning, mastery, labor, and sacrifice to forge professional expertise, compose an identity, make a living, and also serve others. Along the way, we refuel and redouble our efforts as we lift our heads from weariness and catch a peek of the destination. All this is good, but purpose is more.

Purpose is putting our finger on the default button and pushing it to the “off” setting. We often live unknowingly in the default mode. With the best intentions, our parents prepared us to succeed by their notion of success. Awards, recognitions and tangible privileges reinforce these definitions, and peers devise and enforce the punishing scale for “not making it.” FOMO (fear of missing out) may elicit nervous laughter, but it is tightly woven with very real and terrifying questions: “Do I matter? To whom? Will I make it? How? Am I a somebody? A nobody?” Society’s definitions and rewards for success sure seem a proven, workable, and reassuring solution to the FOMO questions.

On the other hand, seeking purpose is elusive. The work is unfamiliar and uncomfortable—almost beyond our experience and vocabulary. I would contend that finding our purpose is less hard work than it is heart-work. It calls for time to listen to our heart, tune out the approval of others,





and attend to our joys and fears. It draws from deep personal and visceral reservoirs of joys, fears, sadness, indignation, being loved, wanting to love in return, being rejected, promises made, promises broken, knowing goodness, witnessing cruelty, feeling blessed, knowing shame, living with disappointment, levitating with elation, healing, forgiving, or experiencing one's own power and powerlessness. These experiences are as unique to each of us as our DNA, fingerprint, or gait.

It is not beyond us to know whom we love, what we love, and how we will love in return. It is our story—evolving, gripping, empowering, and sanctifying. When our son became a father, I asked him about his experience. “I finally understand what it means to pick up the cross. You just do it; you just want to give the care needed; your own fatigue or the sports program you want to watch just have no claims anymore.” Love is the language of God. Purpose is our choice to speak it and pick up the cross with joy.

I would contend that finding our purpose is less hard work than it is heart-work. It calls for time to listen to our heart, tune out the approval of others, and attend to our joys and fears.

While direction plots the steps to achieving our best, purpose leads us to become the best offering, the best gift. Focus may eventually deliver acclaim and recognition akin to a flower at bloom, beautiful and admired. Purpose takes us to seed—what we give life to when we fall to the ground. The mirror of success shows our happy and satisfied faces. The mirror of purpose shows the gaze of God. Determination and ambition can deliver a good life; purpose takes us home to the good life.

Purpose draws from God in us.  



**Carolyn Woo** served as President and Chief Executive Officer of Catholic Relief Services (2012–2016). CRS is official international humanitarian agency of the Catholic community in the United States. From 1997 to 2011, she served as the dean of the Mendoza College of Business at the University of Notre Dame. She is the author of *Working for a Better World*, and *Rising: Learning from Women's Leadership in Catholic Ministries*.

# Reflections on Purpose

## SOUNDBITES FROM PAST VIRTUES & VOCATIONS WEBINARS

“The number one question you should be asking is ‘how does the world need me?’ Because the world needs you. There is no question about it. But how does the world need you is the question that will give you a sense of purpose and meaning as well as a sense of where your talents can best fit in the world.”

**Laurie Patton**

President, Middlebury College


“Pay attention to what really drives you and where your passions are and don’t dismiss that because you feel like you have another expectation that you technically are “supposed to” actually hit or fulfill. That’s not to say you should ignore those things. If you have a passion for something that doesn’t seem feasible, you might have to think creatively about how to get to that. But really pay attention to what those passions are and think creatively about ways to either be engaged in those passions, maybe as you’re doing something else from a practical standpoint, or ways to move forward in a bigger sense.”

**Nii Addy**

Associate Professor of Psychiatry and of Cellular and Molecular Physiology and  
Director of Scientist Diversity and Inclusion at Yale School of Medicine

Recordings of past webinars and information about future conversations can be found at [virtuesvocations.org](http://virtuesvocations.org).





**“I’ve got a new talk called ‘Is meaning the new money?’ . . . I think it is. What I mean by that is the hedonic treadmill—that thing of which ‘how much is enough?’ is ‘a little bit more.’ . . . In the workplace, particularly, the two classical engines of the hedonic treadmill were money and power—that thing of which I need a little bit more - and those two engines have driven capitalism to a very productive place. (Not solely, but they’re a big part of the program). And now everybody wants to be in a missional company doing the really cool thing, and so I’ll argue that the thing of which ‘there’s not quite enough, and I’m really more disappointed than I expected to be,’ now is meaning.”**

**Dave Evans**

Co-founder of the Stanford Life Design Lab, co-founder of Electronic Arts and co-author of *Designing Your Life*

**“Where does the salience of the passion principle come from? I argue that it is the tension between two things. One is the challenges of being a worker in the post-industrial labor market, where we have seen a rapid decline in worker power and stability. . . . That, in combination with the idea that we have to have self-expressive projects in our lives. . . . In a really chaotic postmodern world, we feel like we have to find meaning—meaning isn’t given to us—so we’re looking for self-reflexive projects. That in combination suggests that one way to resolve that tension is to find work that is self-fulfilling in the labor market regardless of the kinds of precarity that it might entail.”**

**Erin Cech**

Assistant Professor of Sociology, University of Michigan, and author of *The Trouble with Passion: How Searching for Fulfillment at Work Fosters Inequality*

**“We think about building character through having purpose—working on teams, working collaboratively, thinking about what you are working on outside of yourself and how it is being used for others.”**

**Gilda Barabino**

President, Olin College of Engineering



# Art credits

**COVER ARTIST: STEPHEN CONROY** [instagram @conroyphotos](#)

FRONT/BACK COVER: **Over the Rainbow** ©2021, acrylic on canvas

PAGE 8: **Landscape from On High** ©2015, acrylic on canvas

PAGE 52: **Four Circles in Light and Shade** ©2018, acrylic on canvas

PAGE 54: **Village in Bay at Sunset** ©2016, acrylic on canvas

PAGE 72: **Organic Forms within Grid** ©2022, acrylic on canvas

PAGE 74: **Myriad of Abstract Shapes** ©2023, acrylic on canvas

Stephen Conroy became a full-time artist nearly 20 years ago after years of studying and teaching art. Due to health issues, he began a life of isolation, with his small studio a place of sanctuary. There he creates paintings and paper art purely from his imagination, creating an escapist world of joyful colours, patterns and shapes—three elements that have been at the core of his fascination with art from the start of his ongoing creative journey. He lives and works in North Yorkshire, England.

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**DAN BENNETT** [dan-bennett.co.uk](#)

PAGE 26: **Fiume Liro** ©2017, oil on canvas

About his work, Dan Bennett writes: “I spend weeks at a time living in the landscapes I paint. Hiking the trails, climbing the rocks, swimming in the rivers, gazing at the stars and sleeping amongst the trees. I navigate woodland by moonlight, glimpse wild animals, befriend fellow travellers and explore the shapes, colours and textures of the natural world. Back in my studio I paint these experiences, capturing my memories of the places and the emotions they provoke. Partly factual documentation of the places I visit and partly dreamscapes, my paintings hover between the real and the imagined; blurring the physical spaces I have inhabited and the intangible spaces of memory and identity.” Born in Kent, England, he currently resides in Portugal.

**PAUL ALAN BENNETT** [paulalanbennett.com](#)

PAGE 64: **Driving Under the Phoenix Constellation** ©2021, gouache/printmaking

PAGE 66: **Time Traveler** ©2021, watercolor

Paul Alan Bennett uses a combination of transparent and opaque watercolors (gouache) in a manner that looks like weaving. The areas of his paintings that have a knit look are first painted with black or a dark color. After this dries, a “knit” layer of paint is applied using a small brush in a series of curved strokes. He has produced three books, had more than 25 solo exhibitions, and his work has frequently been used for book and CD covers and magazine illustrations. He teaches watercolor painting at Central Oregon Community College in Bend, and resides in Sisters, Oregon.

**MANDY BUDAN** [budanart.com](http://budanart.com)PAGE 36: **Crescendo** ©2013, acrylic on wood

Mandy Budan is a Canadian artist who paints abstracts of the landscape, emphasizing and rearranging the elements to show its beauty in unexpected ways. Inspired by nature, she uses strong color, discrete shapes and rhythmic patterns to create paintings which can be enjoyed for both their abstract and realistic qualities. She finds the majority of her inspiration in her home province of Ontario. She explores the provincial parks, conservation areas and hidden green spaces, looking for an elusive combination of light, color and shape.

**CLAIRE DESJARDINS** [clairedesjardins.com](http://clairedesjardins.com)PAGE 18: **In the Meantime** ©2017, acrylic on canvasPAGE 22: **Paradise Outer Limit** ©2018, acrylic on canvas

Claire Desjardins, born in Montreal, Canada, is a painter, sculptor and textile artist based in Gore, Quebec, who exhibits her work regularly throughout North America. Her paintings delve into the visual possibilities of gesture and color, emphasizing energetic, animated brush strokes and bold, colorful palettes. She strives to communicate a sense of the personal and unpredictable in her work, infusing her paintings with a sense of immediacy and depth of emotional expression.

**TOMORY DODGE** [milesmcenery.com/artists/tomory-dodge](http://milesmcenery.com/artists/tomory-dodge) | [instagram @new\\_weather](https://www.instagram.com/new_weather)PAGE 77: **The Tek** ©2018, oil on canvasPAGE 80: **Map Maker** ©2022, oil on canvas

Tomory Dodge, born in Denver, Colorado, has been the subject of recent solo exhibitions at Miles McEnery Gallery in New York City, and Philip Martin Gallery in Los Angeles. His work may also be found in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Minneapolis Institute of Art; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Smithsonian American Art Museum; Whitney Museum of American Art; and the Yale University Art Gallery, among others. He lives and works in Los Angeles. His works are reproduced courtesy of Miles McEnery Gallery.

**KEN DONE** [kendone.com.au](http://kendone.com.au)PAGE 4: **Night Birds** 1990, acrylic on paper

Since his first solo exhibition in 1980, Ken Done has become one of Australia's most famous artists. His work has been described as the most original style to come out of Australia, and his paintings are in collections throughout the world. Ken's paintings have become the creative source of a unique and very successful Australian business that continues to promote Australian art and design to a worldwide audience. He has been a UNICEF Australia Ambassador for over 35 years.

**HEATHER W. ERNST** [heatherart.studio](http://heatherart.studio)PAGE 10: **Garden** ©2020, acrylic and pastel on canvas

Heather Ernst, who resides in Tacoma, Washington, imagines the elements she paints in her abstract landscapes have intelligence, sentience, and belong to a larger spiritual community just like her own. Her contemporary abstracts read with the language her 25 years as an architect made natural to her when her drafting board was covered with millions of lines and shapes of our built world. Together the organic and built environments, from the resolute to the impish, can be as surprising and varied as the artist herself.

**EMMA HOLLINGSWORTH** [mulganai.com](http://mulganai.com)

PAGE 44: **Fire, Water and Country** ©2021, acrylic on canvas

Emma Hollingsworth is a Kaanju, Kuku Ya'u, Girramay woman who grew up in tropical far north Queensland, Australia, and currently operates in Meanjin out of her art studio. Her works are a reflection of her indigenous heritage, culture, and her own story, as she channels her youthfulness through the use of vibrant colors and designs. She paints about the land and waterways, the animals, the peoples and their traditions, and about how all of those things are intrinsically connected.

**FRED INGRAMS** [fredingrams.com](http://fredingrams.com)

PAGE 84: **Looking Back to Wissington** ©2018, acrylic on board

Fred Ingrams, who resides in Norfolk, England, has been painting landscapes of the marshland Fens for more than a decade, producing around 500 paintings in that period and a retrospective book of his work, *Flat Earth: Paintings of the Fens*. He has worked as a graphic designer and art director on many magazines including *The Sunday Times*, *The Field*, *Tatler*, *Vogue* and *House & Garden*. He divides his painting time between the Fens and the Flow Country, roughly 1,500 square miles of blanket bog in the far northeast of Scotland.

**CHRISTOPHER NOXON** [christophernoxon.com](http://christophernoxon.com)

PAGE 94: **Slow** ©2021, oil on canvas

PAGE 104: **Cloubs** ©2023, acrylic on canvas

Christopher Noxon paints and writes in Ojai, California, and prefers verbs over nouns. Author-illustrator of *Good Trouble: Lessons from the Civil Rights Playbook*, he also illustrated Daniel Sokatch's *Can We Talk About Israel? A Guide for the Curious, Confused and Conflicted*. As a journalist, he has contributed to *The New Yorker*, *Details*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Los Angeles Magazine*, and *Salon*. His illustrations have been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, and books including *Unscrolled: Writers and Artists Wrestle With The Torah*.

**TONY A. TIGER** [tigerartstudio.tumblr.com](http://tigerartstudio.tumblr.com)

PAGE 109: **Intertribal** ©2015, acrylic on panel

Tony Tiger (Muscogee/Sac & Fox-Seminole) is an award-winning painter, printmaker, and mixed-media artist who was born in Los Angeles. His artwork is shown in national solo as well as group exhibitions, including "Changing Hands: Art Without Reservations 3" at the Museum of Art and Design in New York City. He has curated several exhibitions, including "Art from Indian Territory: Contemporary Native Art from Oklahoma" at the All My Relations Gallery in Minneapolis, Minnesota.





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