

Don't Find Your Purpose:

Find the Road, Stay on the Road, Watch for Deer

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Abstract

Finding one's purpose is not a destination, but instead a journey, a road. There are countless excuses why Americans fail to make finding purpose an essential part of our lives. Uncovering purpose-limiting behaviors and thought patterns that obstruct the road of our purpose is essential to the tenacious pursuit of our purpose. As we gain clarity about the self-limiting aspects of our humanity, our preconceived notions of business, and our internal theology, we enter into alignment with our God-given purpose while here on earth.

I once thought rocking chairs were for old people. I viewed these chairs as places to sit when we have nothing better to do, when we are old and have all the time in the world to think, to rock, to think, to rock again. One day it occurred to me that rocking chairs are really for young people. What if we gave our young selves a time out to sit, perhaps sequester ourselves, to rocking chair thought? What if we would sit on these chairs when we were young to ponder the greater and more poignant reasons for our life? The rocking chair reminds me of the classic Silverstein (1964) book "The Giving Tree". In this story, the tree became different things for different reasons during the span of an entire lifetime. But, nonetheless, the tree, just like the rocking chair, serves instrumental in ordering our purpose while here on earth. Surely, moments of silence and introspection have never outright harmed us. Silence and introspection speak directly to the soul, to the invisible areas of our life that are desperate to be made visible.

There is a part of life that is fairly obvious to the naked eye. There are things that we can easily see, like our outward appearance, our relationships, our material possessions, our responsibilities, our financial obligations, and our past experiences to name only a few. In front of our eyes are the tangible and the obvious aspects of ourselves that we often allow to define us, to propel our decision-making, and to consume our days here on earth. What is in front of our eyes is often worthy of attention, perhaps even valiant, and for many of us, is a marker of success that is celebrated and even envied in our society.

For some of us the tangible things we acquire or achieve is the beginning and end of our story here on earth. In effect: we came, we conquered, we acquired, and then we passed away. The eulogy of this kind of life would be praise and appreciation for a life well lived, illustrative of going big and then going home. Things would look pretty good even at the memorial service.

On the outside, we do a good job of convincing ourselves most of the time that we have “arrived” at our so-called purpose.

It makes sense, with all the worldly pressure to acquire stuff and the societal accolades received for succeeding at this, that what is in front of our eyes is indeed worthy of some recognition and acknowledgement. Certainly, it is easier to fixate and celebrate the obvious than to explore the invisible. My contention is that what we see on the outside is only a very small part of our real story and purpose during our short time here on earth.

What is on the inside, behind our eyes? Behind our eyes are the invisible parts of us that the world rarely gets to know or see, but behind our eyes is also the place where our purpose resides. Our purpose is not something we can visibly purchase or hoard, so it is not easy for others to ascertain what it is without getting to know the invisible part of us. The tapestry of our purpose, rather, is something that is inside us. It is the thoughts and conversations we have with ourselves and with our Creator and it is mostly invisible, usually kept in a dark, dusty corner that we visit rarely, often only when we are feeling broken or confused.

Behind your eyes does not include a perfect road map or the answer to the one thing you ought to do while you are alive, because we won't find it there. Instead, you will find the road that leads you toward your purpose that spans from the present day until the last moment of your life. Simply put, this road will help you understand the “why” that drives your behavior and makes you who you are. The road leading you toward your purpose is not a far-fetched roadrunner cartoon type single road that bends off in the distance with the contour of the earth. Instead, it is a dusty road that moves from invisible to visible one intersection at a time. It is a road that is full of potholes and unpaved sections that require both growth of and contribution

from the traveller. Needless to say, traveling this road may not be simply or easy, but the result is having lived a purposeful life here on earth.

The road of purpose, although initially invisible, is far easier to find in the first place than it is to continue on. The demands of our society suggest that we should toggle at a fast pace between the obvious worldly markers of our success and the invisible road of our purpose. Further, the world rejects any prolonged focus on the invisible road of our purpose because the job at hand—the visible—is always there, always paramount, and always pressing us for action. With such pressure to meet worldly expectations, staying on the dusty, indistinct road of our purpose and seeking to make it visible feels more often like a struggle than a blessing.

And then there is the presence of evil or distraction on our road of purpose, a metaphorical wild deer that enters the road from the darkness and forces us swerve to avoid it. On the other hand, we might just stop to take photos of the deer, becoming lost and enamored by the distraction itself instead of staying on our road of purpose. There is no doubt that traveling on an unmarked, dusty, ambiguous, invisible, uneven, and even dangerous road of purpose has many challenges. Of course, our humanity always wants to return to the obvious, the visible, the tangible in front of our eyes instead of traveling on the God-given road of our purpose.

As we dare to have the tenacity and resilience to stay on the road of our purpose, I argue we will first struggle with the humanity of our purpose. Second, we will find the business of our purpose. And finally, we will arrive at the theology of our purpose. What we find will surely not be in outline form or in a tidy table of contents, but rather a work in progress, an unfolding road of purpose brought to us by the Creator of the Universe and found just behind our eyes. The Creator speaks in story form to us each day of our lives, on our road of purpose, in an effort to make the invisible visible. He leans on one foot and then the other at each intersection on the

road, waiting for us to give Him our attention, not because he needs us, but because we need Him.

The Humanity of our Purpose

The idea of “finding our purpose” has become almost cliché in American culture. Not many people would argue that they do not want to find their purpose. However, it is rare to see someone actually attempt to find his or her purpose intentionally or outwardly. In part, this is due to the invisibility of purpose, and the reality that it is located behind our eyes and rarely brought out for others to see or experience. For many, the concept of finding our purpose is hard to grasp since it is hard to see, an illusive preoccupation at times, and since we don't fully understand the totality of what it means to live with purpose we easily concede to the more immediate and temporary forms in front of our eyes.

The fact is, people who spend time behind their eyes make the rest of humanity uncomfortable. Perhaps the discomfort is caused by the reminder that we all have a purpose and yet also have the sinking feeling that there is no time or energy to pursue or engage it because we have to focus on the visible at hand. People who search for their purpose are rare and they challenge the status quo. They seek elegant simplistic answers to life's biggest unanswered questions, and they are relentless in their pursuit of their purpose even in times of distraction. The term *Humanity of Purpose* is the reminder that our base humanity will not serve us well as we seek to find purpose. Once we find ourselves on the dusty road of purpose, our humanness will constantly try to pull us back to the obvious, the tangible before our eyes. As humans playing a real-life game of survival, we have a rather grand excuse to exit the road of our purpose to reconcile the tangible in our lives. In studying the *Humanity of Purpose* we find that our failings and the sham of our adventurous lives are often the biggest roadblocks holding us

back from traveling the road of our purpose. Try as we might to avoid this, our humanity buys into the notion that “things bring purpose” and if we are not careful our entire lives can be spent acquiring material objects in an effort to purchase that false promise. At our most broken, we might seek to surmise the will of God and His purpose for our lives, but even this pursuit is often tainted and disrupted by our humanity. The *Humanity of Purpose* marks the first intersection on the unfolding road of our purpose and it is an essential reminder of our often-flawed attempts to find our identity and significance in the visible.

The Sham of our Purpose

Each of us is a sham yet most of us do not realize this. If we do realize it, we certainly do not want to admit it. The sham is that we attach our identity to what we do, not what we believe. The fact is that if left to our own devices we could spend our whole lives attempting to construct our own versions of purpose from a worldly perspective. We are reminded in John 3:30 (NIV) that our purpose is not our own: “He must become greater I must become less.” Outside of God’s purpose for our lives, all of our very best efforts to achieve significance, impact, and purpose will be a sham. In verse 16:2, the Psalmist wrote, “I say to the Lord, “You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing” (NIV). This reality does not feel at all good to humans. As a result, we often bounce back to the obvious tangibility of what is in front of our eyes, desperately looking for something to remove the sham. “Wait, look at what I did here!” we exclaim, in an attempt to find something in our lives outside of God that gives us permanence and purpose. But again, we fall flat.

My friend and mentor Martin Barrett, social entrepreneur and owner of Sozo Wine Company in Seattle, Washington, argued, “the benefit [of introspection] is knowing you are a sham and that grace is your answer” (M. Barrett, personal communication, January 16, 2014).

Why is it so hard to accept that we are shams? In not willingly accepting that we are shams, do we attempt to play the role of God by creating the purpose we seek? Perhaps at the root of our human condition, the humanity of our purpose is a protection mechanism that promotes us to create a series of shams around every good thing we do. While discussing this subject with Martin, we began to unpack all the possible areas of sham in our lives and we found that the list became endless. Below is only a sample of the various areas of our lives that are shams:

1. The sham of being influential
2. The sham of leadership
3. The sham of physical prowess
4. The sham of intelligence
5. The sham of being a great parent
6. The sham of volunteerism
7. The sham of being wise
8. The sham of being successful in business
9. The sham of being a social entrepreneur
10. The sham of being religious
11. The sham of being environmentally-friendly
12. The sham of being politically correct
13. The sham of wealth and material objects
14. The sham of having power relationships

After several minutes of talking through these various markers of sham, Martin suggested that that *Humanity of our Purpose* begs that we “strip down and remove our sham-ness in order to reveal our un-a-sham-ed purpose” (M. Barrett, personal communication, January 16, 2014).

The other day I was talking with a friend about all the blessings that I have experienced in my life including some material blessing. As I was talking I announced to my friend that I felt completely undeserving of the blessings that I had received. I didn't say this to sound humble, I truly feel blessed beyond any plausible thought of entitlement for the things that I have. This has not always been the case, which makes it more transformational for me to say. I am not just a natural-born grateful person. My friend, however, in response to my statement replied that he felt absolutely deserved of each and every good thing that came to him and usually it came "a day late and a dollar short."

I pondered this for a while and my friend's general view on good things that come to him and realized that there is sham in feeling entitled to blessing. For my friend, I realized that he is actually missing out on a whole world of amazing blessing and grace by thinking he deserves everything that comes to him. As we begin to get in touch with our shams we begin to get in touch with the things that hold us back from hearing the voice of God in our life. This voice is behind our eyes; it exposes the invisible and makes it visible. This very voice is the markers and street signs on the dusty unfolding road of our purpose. Un-sham-ing our life allows us to more clearly see God's invisible hand gently directing and guiding our purpose.

Groody (2011) contends, "Justice and liberation are not simply about reordering the economy but about reordering the hearts of people" (p. 29). Could such "disorders of our heart" keep us from examining what is behind our eyes (Groody, 2011, p. 28)? In the human search for significance and purpose, I argue that we have failed more often than not to understand what God's purpose has been with us all along: "Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" (Luke 12:7, NIV). Henry and Richard Blackaby (2004) argue that we are given "Gods Invitation" to his party, not our own. It is our

humanity that will often think we invite God to our party (p. 31). So often we view our life purpose as a party that we put on and invite God to show up if he's in the area and to do some magic within the constraints that we have put in place. The *Humanity of Purpose* is a reminder that our purpose is in Him, about Him, because of Him. Getting outside our "shams," getting outside our party, allows God to show up on the road of our purpose.

Red Sports Cars and New Spouses

The concept of the mid-life crisis is a real thing. Interestingly, this type of crisis is, at the root, mostly about finding or not adequately finding one's purpose. The *Humanity of our Purpose* is unavoidably illuminated during times of life crisis. Typically, what is highlighted are the deficits in what is in front of our eyes instead of the absence of what is behind our eyes. Men and women alike, for one reason or another, more often than not will come to a place in life, an Ecclesiastes-type moment, wondering about and challenging the meaning or meaninglessness of life: "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Everything is meaningless" (Ecclesiastes 12:8, NIV). Could this be God speaking to us? Could a mid-life crisis be God's attempt to say to us, "Hello friends, any chance we could get on with traveling the road of your purpose?" I believe that God speaks through us and into our life crises, and how and when we respond is embedded in the *Humanity of our Purpose*.

The *Humanity of our Purpose* is distracted by the tangible in front of our eyes once again. If we aren't careful, we could literally try to fill our purpose with the visible and obvious in order to avoid what is behind our eyes, that road of purpose we desire and yearn for. I use a "red sports car" as an example of the most obvious tangible replacement to the road of purpose, but it is only the beginning. We not only want to look good and purposeful, but we also want to feel good. If our spousal relationship is lacking, replacing that spouse is not off limits for many in

the quest for purpose. If our jobs don't provide purpose, we readily replace them at times of crisis. If our home doesn't provide purpose, we look to buy a new home. The Humanity *of our Purpose* proves to us that material objects cannot satisfy the road of purpose:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—are not from the Father but are from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17, NIV)

If only worldly possessions and material wealth could satisfy the heart, most Americans would have already arrived at their purpose.

Groody (2011) suggested, “in this system people are measured in terms of their net worth, accumulated possessions, and incomes rather than their human worth, the quality of their character, and their spiritual depth” (p. 23). The system Groody describes is the system we all live within. Groody suggested that breaking out of that system, toggling from the visible to the invisible road of our purpose does not come to us naturally, but provides “inner wealth” based on “what people possess inside themselves” (p.11). Bolstering our material accumulation of stuff, switching spouses, changing our looks, whatever the condition of the visible that we subscribe begins to subtly suggest that we are less a child of God and more a commodity of the earth.

Chesterton (1909) stated “how much happier [would] you be, how much more of you there would be, if the hammer of a higher God could smash your small cosmos” (p. 19). What if we could break down our small view of our purpose with the Chesterton (1909) “hammer,” those ill-informed identities and replace them with God's intended version? Could the societal ease of loading-unloading-loading our material buckets endlessly with stuff be perhaps the biggest

obstacle to entering and staying on the road of our God-given purpose? As I type, I realize that what I am really asking is, "Could our manmade purpose actually trump God's purpose for our life? Truly it seems we could be a red sports car or a new spouse away from trumping God once again on our purpose if we are not careful.

What's Your Will For My Life?

I love this question and I ask it a lot. And then one day I realized that I had become quite pathological at asking this question over and over and over. I like big questions but I don't like hearing big answers, I have realized. Big answers require action. When we are moved from the visible to the invisible, from the obvious to that road of purpose that God calls us to, we begin to respond to the big answers. His party! His plan!

In what I would call my darkest hour of 43 years, I lay in my bed in the middle of the day asking the question, "What is Your Will for my life, God?" With tears in my eyes, I was certain I was not hearing the answers to my big question. Could the answer be found behind my eyes on that road of purpose that I was yet to travel? In my quest to remain in the visible, in the tangible, I resorted to looking for a good word on YouTube with taglines such as "God's Will," "purpose," and "significance." I came across a short clip by an American Pastor named Francis Chan (youthleadersonly, 2010). In this clip, Chan described having a quiet time along the seashore with God and his Bible. He explains grabbing a cup of coffee and muffin from the coffee shop across from the beach and proceeding to set out a blanket and spend some time reading his Bible and praying. There came a point in his quiet time when Chan decided to ask God what His will was for his life and he recalls the answer to his question:

He didn't say what I thought he was going to say, but basically what God said or what I heard anyway was, 'Ah that's cute look at you with your little blanky, you know with

your little coffee and muffin, I hope your comfortable? Meanwhile, there are millions of people, millions of people, that I created on that planet and some will never get a chance to do what your doing right now. They'll never stand on a seashore and go what is your will for my life?' They're just trying to stay alive today. (youthleadersonly, 2010)

In that moment I realized that I was at risk of literally spending the rest of my life asking God what His will is for my life and yet never really do anything about it.

Approaching and wrestling with the *Humanity of our Purpose*, is realizing that our sinful nature simply has no interest in traveling on the road of our purpose. In our effort to self-preserve, we choose more often than not to ignore the big answers because responding to them would risk our earthy survival. The *Humanity of our Purpose* is the movement from what is in front of our eyes to what is behind our eyes. Our open willingness to give up the tangible worldly markers of success or non-success for a journey on the unfolding road of our purpose is what it means to wrestle with the *Humanity of our Purpose*.

Romans 8:28 sheds light on the road of our purpose, the invisible path that we are called to submit to in our daily life, our work, our humanity:

Meanwhile, the moment we get tired in the waiting, God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. He knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God. That's why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good. (The Message)

Why are we so reluctant for God's road of purpose in our life? At the heart, our humanness is our biggest impediment and must first be reconciled and reconditioned for the greatness of our God-given purpose.

The Business of Purpose

On the road of purpose it is attractive to view the act of finding our purpose as separate from engaging in the business world. Most of us either work in a business or frequently utilize the services of businesses in our daily life, so traveling on the road of our purpose is often threatened by the *Business of Purpose* because business is largely viewed as a self-seeking mechanism with little foundational support for purpose-building. Blasting apart those beliefs, viewing business as an active conduit for purpose-building that can be engaged in everyday life, allows us to safely travel on the road of our purpose without quitting our day job or seeing the road of purpose as something we do on our day off. Reconciling how we view business in general and how our businesses can be part of our road of purpose is essential to staying on the road and avoiding unnecessary distractions along the way.

Sinoway and Meadow (2012) reminded of the Microsoft culture, "You see, going into the job, I didn't understand that most of the people there were missionaries, out to change the world through software" (p. 121). Similarly, Sinek (2009) wrote that purposeful businesses, "stand[s] apart from the norm and their impact is not easily copied" (p. 5). Business does not have to be a static non-purposeful opportunity or a necessary evil in our lives. On the contrary, business can be the lifeblood of our purpose, a perfect conduit that allows our passion to collide with our talents, consumption, and provision.

As I consider business and its role in a purposeful life, I realize that many of the various aspects of business life are completely unnecessary rituals that play a very small role in the

profits or losses of a business. May (2013) suggested, “I believe subtraction is the path through the haze and maze, one that can allow us to create clarity from complexity and to wage and win the war against the common enemy of excess” (p. xii). May (2013) further challenged “what isn’t there [in business] can often trump what is ... you can cut through the noise and confusion of a chaotic world so that even the most complex things make more sense” (p. 4). I argue we need to lean our businesses, redefine them, and remake them as life-giving purpose generating centers for influence and impact.

Define it

“I’m curious James, what does your school say the purpose of business is” Martin Barrett from Sozo Wine Company asked me when we first spoke? As I searched for an answer in my head, I realized that I was better off returning his question with the same question. Martin obliged by responding, “Most businesses are fated to build an organization whose *[sic]* entire result is current wealth maximization – inflow. If you do not believe that your life is transcendent, then perhaps your business will reflect the same” (M. Barrett, personal communication, February 10, 2014).

I am reminded that the inception of most businesses begins with a problem, which provides the impetus for starting the business. Lynch & Walls (2009) suggested that business people and social entrepreneurs “find a pain and then offer an antidote at a price below the pain threshold” (p. 2). But what is the real and enduring purpose of business, from the start, back in the very beginning of time? This was the question Martin was really asking me.

Martin believed the original purpose of business was “social” in nature. I found this to be a radical idea until he explained further. Martin said that social business is not a new phenomenon; “the golden rule requires that business is purposed with loving our neighbors as

ourselves” (M. Barrett, personal communication, April 12, 2013). Demystifying the purpose of business, stripping down the buzzwords like “social business”, “social enterprise”, or “conscious company” allows us to view business from the lens of opportunity and purpose building as a tenant for why it exists in the first place.

Instead, the marketplace likes to draw a clear line between for-profit and non-profit businesses, between traditional business and social enterprise. Collins (2005) argued for a clear distinction in business structures:

A great organization is one that delivers superior performance and makes a distinctive impact over a long period of time. For a business, financial returns are a perfectly legitimate measure of performance. For a social sector organization, however, performance must be assessed relative to mission, not financial returns. In the social sectors, the critical question is not ‘How much money do we make per dollar of invested capital?’ but ‘how effectively do we deliver on our mission and make a distinctive impact, relative to our resources?’ (p. 5)

Martin considers the purpose of business to be universal and after reading Collins (2005) description of a social sector business; I agree that all businesses, in general, should be tasked with the same goal of making “a distinct impact, relative to [their] resources” (p. 5).

As an example, Bornstein and Davis (2010) challenged, Social entrepreneurship is inductive and outward-looking; it moves from observation and experimentation to institutionalization and independent adoption” (p. 35). I argue that all business is looking for inductive and outward-looking growth and that this is surely not reserved for the social sector and non-profit organizations. Collins and Porras (1994) reminded of an interview with William R. Hewlett, Cofounder of Hewlett-Packard:

As I look back on my life's work, I'm probably most proud of having helped to create a company that by virtue of its values, practices, and success has had a tremendous impact on the way companies are managed around the world. And I'm particularly proud that I'm leaving behind an ongoing organization that can live on as a role model long after I'm gone. (p. 1)

Inductive and outward thinking is either a realized or yet to be realized goal of business and those that operate them and without question the road to purpose can be traveled while at the same time conducting a profitable business.

My goal in defining "business" is to break down the collective thought that traditional business is only for profit and self-satisfaction, and that social enterprises and non-profits are only for doing good. By lessening the disparate gap in the praxis of business while accepting that any business can do good and still make a profit, we begin to adopt the philosophy that as individuals we can travel on the road of our purpose while at the same time work within a business structure and that these are not different unconnected roads.

Bornstein and Davis (2010) described the marginality of the ineffectual social sector as perhaps "Ferraris driving on mud tracks" (p 49). This points to the reality that non-profits are not always well-equipped to approach and solve social and world problems. A front-runner in for-profit philanthropy is Google.org; a for-profit philanthropic business nested in the everyday operation of the Google.com structure. Google separates itself from the chagrin of other non-profit structures in order to fund and innovative wide-sweeping change within its already formed, already successful corporate structure.

For Google, typical non-profit concerns over bricks and mortar, funding resources, and talent are quickly vanish and replaced with real results fueled by a passion to solve problems

within its own frame of reference and skill base. Reiser (2008) explained that non-profit rules typically prohibit single funders so Google rejected this for a for-profit philanthropic model, “*its* leaders ‘aspire to make [it] an institution that makes the world a better place,’ and have pledged to commit one percent of the company’s equity and profits to philanthropic pursuits” (p. 3). No longer is the important work of finding solutions to social problems left only to the underfunded, powerless, do-gooder non-profit sector. The Google model clearly proves that a huge for-profit company can be part of social impact and they don’t have to be separate to do it.

Reiser (2008) pointed out that the significant limitations present in traditional NPO arrangements contrast with the open political arena of for-profit philanthropy:

If Google, Inc. remained [Google.org’s] singular funder, federal law would allow ‘no substantial part’ of its earnings to be spent on lobbying. No regulation defines substantial, and few cases or rulings address it directly. The chilling effect of this uncertainty leads some charities to elect a series of optional and complex, but more quantifiable restrictions. These restrictions require lobbying expenditures to be maintained below a certain percentage of the entity’s operating budget. An entity that exceeds these limits faces penalty excise taxes; repeated infractions are punishable by revocation of exemption. In contrast, if a tax-exempt Google.org were deemed a private foundation, as is most likely, it would not be permitted to lobby at all. (pp. 22-23)

The model employed by Google exemplifies the notion that the *Business of Purpose* is possible within a thriving, tremendously powerful and lucrative business framework. Traveling the road of our purpose does not need to be interrupted by our need to interact and engage in traditional business. We can both be in business and live and maximize our purpose at the same time.

Buy it Now

Jeff Ericson, founder of Camano Island Coffee, once mentioned to me, “The buy it now button is the new come to Jesus” (J. Ericson, personal communication, October 1, 2013). He went on to say each of us wants to become what he calls “pro-sumers,” or consumers who not only want to consume products but also to purchase from companies whose values align with our own (J. Ericson, personal communication, October 1, 2013). Could it be true that our consumption choices play a role in helping us fulfill our purpose? Could we seek to live out our purpose through our consumer choices?

In front of our eyes is our consumer choices or the *Business of our Purpose*, which we eagerly make for a myriad of reasons, including our desire for purpose, our wish to influence how others view us, and all the other wonderfully temporal benefits of the obvious and visible. Ericson’s point touched on something much deeper, however. The fact is that we come up short in finding the purpose results we are looking for through our consumption behavior, so we have forced businesses to provide this impact and influence for us in exchange for purchasing their products. For Ericson, the phenomenon of pro-sumerism is the outgrowth of having a lack of purpose (J. Ericson, personal communication, October 1, 2013).

Wright (2000) argued, “we are bound up in each other’s fate and many entrepreneurs, social or otherwise, are building institutions that reflect this fact” (p. 124). The fair trade movement, for example, has helped consumers understand the economic and environmental ramifications of the coffee they drink and the clothing they wear on the lives of the people halfway around the world who produce or farm them. Perhaps globalization has made this more real to us. Personally, I am confronted with the reality of an entire world more often than not. Each time I post to Facebook, I imagine what my friends in Thailand or India might say or think.

In our global marketplace “each effort and action ... strengthens a sense of connection, builds empathy, and reminds us that our lives are contingent on others (Bornstein & Davis, 2010, p. 81). Business can and does absolutely play a distinctive role on our road of purpose.

Transactional

Jeff Ericson absolutely despises what he calls “transactional conversations” (J. Ericson, personal communication, October 1, 2013). He believes that all entrepreneurs and businesses start with transactional thinking and only a few great businesses move from the “what” or the transaction discussion to the “why” or the transformational discussion (J. Ericson, personal communication, October 1, 2013). Transactional thinking for Ericson is limited to trying to make a product fit the market or trying to monetize that product before it even exists. Instead, Ericson advocates making the market fit the product through a process that he calls “resetting the buying criteria” or “reverse engineering” (J. Ericson, personal communication, October 1, 2013).

Resetting the buying criteria means taking an in-depth look into the deepest human desire for meaningful connection and then communicating that in a marketing and brand message. In other words, Ericson dislikes the idea of selling lifeless, non-transformational products to equally lifeless individuals. Instead, Ericson seeks transformation in his own life, in the life of his company, and the lives of the customers.

Transformational

Ericson sees the transition between selling from a transactional standpoint to selling from a transformational standpoint as the propeller that allows the successful entrepreneur access to immediate and authentic impact and influence (J. Ericson, personal communication, October 1, 2013). In the transformational conversation, the successful entrepreneur is now able to garner the very influence that he or she has always wanted but never known how to achieve, while at

the same time challenging consumers to consider their own similar need for impact and influence. Ericson contends that when the successful entrepreneur and his customers begin to consider their active role in impacting and influencing the world, they move from customer to prosumer.

White (2006) suggested, “transformation is not changing what is, but creating what isn’t” (p. 124). Ericson exemplifies this approach through his work in resetting the buying criteria and accessing a deep understanding of base human motivation. Groody (2012) described the process of redefining the consumer message as “[transfiguring] one’s vision, enabling one to see with the ‘eyes of the heart’” (p. 231). Ericson views his business as an immediate and direct conduit for purpose, not only purpose for his own life but purpose for everyone that his business touches.

What is Reward?

The trumpet of reward is an elusive image. The *Business of Purpose* calls for us to consider and redefine what we define as “reward” for the businesses we run or frequent. Left to our own, we will consider the outward prominence, the visible, as reward enough for our hard work or dollars spent, but our heart for purpose calls for much more. The prayer for those who dare to see the invisible purpose of business is rather clear but far from simple:

God, I’m asking for two things before I die; don’t refuse me—Banish lies from my lips and liars from my presence. Give me enough food to live on, neither too much nor too little. If I’m too full, I might get independent, saying, ‘God? Who needs him?’ If I’m poor, I might steal and dishonor the name of my God. (Proverbs 30:9, The Message)

As we move behind our eyes in business, the transcendence of our business engagement comes alive and becomes an active player on the road of our purpose.

Transcendence

There comes a point where I began to realize the fact that God's nature and power are independent of the material world that we recklessly assign to Him. God does not operate by the same rules, the same paradigm, the same set of natural laws, or even the science of our humanity. Instead, God's transcendence creates a greater order far beyond what is in front of our eyes to what is behind our eyes. The road of our purpose is lined with the transcendence of God that the tangible world simply does not provide. Our systems of reward will forever differ from one human to the next, but the transcendence of God moves beyond the tangible, allowing us to see provision and business success as a merciful gift from the hand of the Creator.

The Theology of Purpose

Hands and Feet

Actor Will Smith once said "If you're not making someone else's life better, then you are wasting your time. Your life will become better by making other people's lives better" (AccelerateMe, 2010). I notice that Smith does not say it will make you feel better; he says your life will "become" better. Becoming is an interesting word because it implies that we are not there yet, but we are in process, on a road of sorts.

The challenge in attempting to find our purpose is that the statement itself implies that there is one right and absolute answer out there that has just not been secured yet. As we consider this road of purpose that we are called to travel on, we realize that finding our purpose is less about arriving at a destination and more about traveling or embarking on a journey. According to Deuteronomy 15:11 "There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land" (NIV). Zechariah 7:10 commands, "Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien

or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other”(NIV). Finally, Matthew 4:19 teaches, ““Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people”” (NIV). We are marked by the gift to care for others. Our action is non negotiable as we seek to be on the road of purpose while at the same time reconcile the *Theology of our Purpose*.

Oumano (1992), quoted Marianne Williamson’s words that challenged us to not shrink in order to make people more comfortable:

Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people will not feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone and as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give others permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others. (p. 190)

We must rise rather than shrink in the light of our God-given purpose and the call for our action.

We much make the invisible visible.

At the very end of the 1993 Holocaust film, *Schindler’s List*, there is a short yet profound scene in which Itzhak Stern rewards Oskar Schindler with a ring for his good work for the people. Oskar Schindler receives this ring and in one of the most touching and emotional moments in film history, he breaks down in tears, sobbing, “I could have done more, I could have done more” (Josh Wright, 2009). The reality is that someday, not too far in the future, each one of us will stand before the Creator of the Universe, and I am certain we will all say “I could have done more, I could have done more.” As I sense goose bumps travel up my arm, I wonder what that “more” is in my life. I’m not talking about “works” or trying to prove our heavenly entrance, but instead discovering those small things we are designed to do while we are hear on

earth that we have not activated yet in our life.

Ephesians 6:13 (NIV) challenges us “Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.” The promise of this verse is that as we “stand before the judge” as Romans 8:14 (NIV) describes, we will still be standing in heaven. With or without the concept of the “more we could have done”, we have taken on the full coat of God, and literally with our hands and feet marked the earth, the dusty road of our purpose, for Him. This is purpose; this is the *Theology of Purpose*.

The Broken Church

In late 2014 I met a man named Andy Ferguson who some 30 years ago was a fresh out of seminary new youth pastor. As part of his new job, he was tasked with the responsibility of recruiting small group leaders from the church body. “Didn’t seem too hard,” Ferguson reminisced as he reviewed the member list and identified the people he felt were dynamic leaders in the church (A. Ferguson, personal communication, January 13, 2014). Ferguson explained that many of these people were successful business people who stood out in his church as individuals who garnered respect but also fostered trust and rapport with others. Ferguson made a lunch appointment with one of the people on his list named “Jim”, who was a successful businessperson. He had gotten to know “Jim” personally and really liked him.

The day of the appointment arrived and Ferguson sat across from “Jim” at a local restaurant. The two of them exchanged small talk as they decided what to order. “Jim” seemed to know that Ferguson had a question for him, so finally he asked, “So what’s on your mind?” (A. Ferguson, personal communication, January 13, 2014). Ferguson replied by explaining that part of his job was to recruit small group leaders and he thought “Jim” might be a good fit for

that opportunity. Before Ferguson could complete the sentence, “Jim” held up his hand with his face scrunched as if to say, “please, stop.” Like any well-trained young seminary graduate, Ferguson did not take “no” for an answer and continued by listing all the reasons why he felt “Jim” would be a great small group leader. “Jim” again held up his hand to Ferguson and said “look, Andy, you are asking me volunteer to do this work when you get paid to do it” (A. Ferguson, personal communication, January 13, 2014). Ferguson was blown away with Jim’s statement, not because he was offended but because “Jim” had shed some light on the invisible. He had never considered the perceived disparity that could exist between the business community and church leadership.

Ferguson describes this moment as a “watershed” moment for him as the invisible became visible. “There is a complete lack of integration between the successful business person and the church ... how can business people be so powerful in the world and yet impact-less in the church”, Ferguson asked . “It’s a broken model and we are basically asking the businessperson to give the church their leftovers ... truly, we have succumbed to the world’s message that we are to get a job to pay our bills and then try to find something outside of that to get satisfaction” (A. Ferguson, personal communication, January 13, 2014).

Ferguson explained to me, “The fact that we’ve put a wall between the church and business, the church and our everyday life, is our fault and our problem in our society” (A. Ferguson, personal communication, January 13, 2014). Since my first meeting with Ferguson, I have begun to work directly with him in a new social enterprise startup company. The other night we were trying to schedule a meeting, and I asked if he worked on Sunday or took it off as a Sabbath. Ferguson’s response was “I don’t consider Sunday a day that I should work any less at God’s work” (A. Ferguson, personal communication, January 13, 2014).

Ferguson claims, and I agree, that the church is a broken unit when it comes to its relevancy in people's lives. Indeed, I am making a generalization here, as I know that some churches really understand that business and church can work together for good. But what I realized in talking with Ferguson is that in the typical weekly church assembly the successful American businessperson is asked to take a day off from what they do best to attend church. Ferguson nor I propose to skip a Sabbath day, but the church in general has not worked to bridge the gap between the *Business of Purpose* and the *Theology of Purpose* understanding and promoting that they can co-exist and even support each other in the process of traveling on the road of our purpose. The very activities that invigorate this successful person like profit-generation, marketing and branding, negotiations, etc., must be left at the church door, except for perhaps bringing checkbooks. Sabbath cannot mean having a case of amnesia. When I stand at worship time at church I tend to look around the room at who has chosen to be there with me. What I see is a lot of people with their hands in their pockets, shifting back and fourth from foot to foot, in anticipation of getting through the church service so they can get back to what they do best. "Isn't living out our calling a 24/7 process? ... Why should we be expected to operate in two worlds separately" Ferguson asked (A. Ferguson, personal communication, January 13, 2014)?

Ferguson explained how he met a Christian Jewish Rabbi who shed some light on what he believes is the true *Theology of Purpose*:

When a young Rabbi wants to start a new synagogue in the community he has to wait until he has the agreement of 10 business leaders to join him. So when they do a church plant, you know its not some group of six young people who are enthusiastic and willing to throw caution to the wind and go broke, and you know to make it happen. No, they

take 10 business leaders who have companies already, and they are producing income, and they say “okay we will do this with you.” And their idea is not to go necessarily evangelize and take on the world and create a 1500-member church, their idea is to create another community. Look at that model, okay, so 10 business leaders supporting that Rabbi. What automatically happens? (A. Ferguson, personal communication, January 13, 2014)

The invisible showed up for me at this point in his discussion as I repeated in my head, “church is broken.” Instead of engaging the business community in their work, the church generally attempts to transplant the business community in to a separate activity, a separate community, a separate road. Yet, of course, the congregation of a church is made up of members of the business community, whether by trade or consumption we are all in business and so we are all in the business of church.

At times church is like a club that we attend after all the dust has settled in our lives. Ferguson argued, “Church is for our leftovers” (A. Ferguson, personal communication, January 13, 2014). Ferguson once ran a “home church” that he was largely in charge of. At the same time, he was a successful businessperson in order to generate “real” income. Ferguson recalled, “catching flack” for spending too much time in his business work as it was taking away from his work in church. Tongue in cheek, Ferguson explained that asking highly successful business people to find satisfaction or live out God’s call on their lives by “stacking chairs” or “directing traffic in the parking lot” is not going to work (A. Ferguson, personal communication, January 13, 2014).

The *Theology of Purpose* supports the idea that we are all in the work of God’s church and that there is not a dividing line between the two. Whether we are lawyers, doctors,

mechanics, or pastors, custodians, we each have a specific position of influence and impact for God, for purpose. This is a hands and feet position meaning that we are literally engaging our hands and feet in the work of God that requires us to become good at making the invisible visible in our life and in the lives of others on the road of our purpose.

Working Out Our Salvation

The road of our purpose can become a self-seeking adventure if we are not careful. As we work to stay on the road, watch out for deer, and relentlessly seek God's design for our lives, surprisingly we can become rather selfish in our attempts. To keep the process pure, it is important to remind ourselves that our purpose really is to actively work out our salvation while here on earth. Perhaps this road of purpose is really the road to our salvation. Is there really anything different between purpose and salvation?

Often, salvation is treated more like a checkbox item rather than a life long pursuit and discipline. Many grab "salvation" at death's doorstep, as if it is the last bag in the back of the car trunk at the airport drive. Salvation is rather, our active, involved pursuit of God's purpose for our lives. Salvation is the deliverance through faith in Christ Jesus. Salvation is last on our road of purpose for a reason. Salvation is the meaning of it all.

In our pursuit of purpose, if we are not careful we could miss God's calling for us altogether. Jesus warned in the book of Matthew 7:21-23 that our active involvement in his Kingdom is His desire:

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and

do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. (NIV)

As I consider the road to purpose, I am reminded that what we are really seeking is impact, influence and hope. Our hard-wired desire for purpose is ultimately an attempt to make sense of the temporariness of our lives, to find certainty in an uncertain world.

Billy Graham (2013) stated, “Indeed there is only one way that leads to such certainty for today and the future... we need a sure hope” (p. 1). Traveling the road of our purpose is our Billy Graham-inspired “sure hope”, it is about salvation, and it is surely about the things behind our eyes. In a YouTube video clip of the late Science Professor, Dr. Randy Pausch, giving a commencement speech to students of Carnegie Mellon University before dying of cancer, Pausch contended, “We don’t beat the reaper by living longer. We beat the reaper by living well and living fully” (Carnegie Mellon, 2008). The *Theology of our Purpose* allows us the hope for today and for the future.

Conclusion

In the last days of my father’s life he didn’t sit in a rocking chair, he lay in a nursing home in Bothell, Washington. What surrounded my dad in his room were not all his worldly material belongings or accolades – and there were many. Instead, what surrounded my dad were the pictures of his loved ones. As I sat next to him night after night I realized that as the music fades on our life, there will be only a very few truly important things left. All the things before our eyes, the visible and tangible, will inescapably disappear in those final days. What is behind our eyes, however, the invisible that we have brought forth and made visible, this will be our salvation and our only sure hope. Finding the road of our purpose, staying on that road, and relentlessly avoiding all of life’s unrelenting distraction is perhaps our greatest expression of

love and gratitude for Jesus, his sacrifice for us, and the gift of our salvation.

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I AM SHAM:

Admit you are a Sham and Find your Un-a-Sham'd

Road of Purpose in Life James A. Colburn

Northwest University

ICCD Thesis Project

April 03, 2014

This project was submitted to Forrest Inslee for the course Practicum IV in the M.A. Program for International Care and Community Development at Northwest University on April 03, 2014.

Portions of this document were researched and composed for the following program courses:

ICCD Globalization and ICCD Social Enterprise.

Questions regarding this work can be submitted to James Colburn, colburnremote@gmail.com

Book Proposal

Book Title

I AM SHAM: Admit you are a Sham and Find your Un-a-Sham'd Road of Purpose in Life

Author

James A. Colburn

Synopsis

One day it occurred to me that we are all shams. Not as much that we are “fake” or “bogus” but rather that we live lives defined and marred by false identity and purpose. I argue that each one of us universally live shammed lives. Our sham is that we attach our identity to what we do, not what we believe. As self-deprecating as that might sound, the fact remains that if left to our own devices we could spend our whole life attempting to construct our own version of purpose from a worldly perspective. Over a period of years, we begin to use our shams to define our identity and we work to outwardly and proudly expose our shams to the world as a means to mark significance and value in our life.

Writing a book on our human shams offers an unlimited list of exploited shams to discuss, wrestle and grapple with. Shams come in all forms. To name only a few, there is the sham of our intellect, the sham of our good parenting, the sham of our money, the sham of our leadership, the sham of our religiosity, the sham of atheism, the sham of servant-hood, the sham of our athleticism.

Most people are drawn and compelled at one point or another in their life in finding their life purpose. This usually happens after our shams have failed in providing us with enduring purpose. Finding purpose is often a struggle and people usually give up their search due to the perceived complexity and challenge of arriving at a compelling purpose. When we give up on

finding our purpose we often return to our shams or attempt to invite new and exciting shams in order to unsham ourselves. The most classic example of this is obligatory mid-life red sports car purchase or replacement spouse as a means of unshaming our lives.

What is subtly suggested by looking for our purpose is that this purpose is actually just one single solitary thing that we must chase to find and then implement in our life. I argue that our purpose is an evolving and ever changing thing. What I realized is that purpose isn't just one thing but rather a road we travel, an unfolding journey. This road is a dusty, uneven road that unfolds (moves from invisible to visible) one intersection, one road marker at a time.

Arriving at that place where we both recognize and admit our specific adopted shams in life allows us to begin to more freely travel on that road of purpose in life. Without this recognition or honest introspection of our shams, our shams will continue to hold us back or divert our attention from the road of our purpose. In essence, our shams are the distractions that we affectionately return to when we are in struggle or intense growth and maturity in our life. If not managed, our humanity will unceasingly beg our return to the false comfort of our shams, our flawed identity in self, to avoid the tough life lessons of growth and maturity.

As I unpack the concept of sham, I use real life interviews and conversations with everyday people to develop the resonating truth that shams are a part of our everyday life, that the concept "I AM SHAM" is not just a catchy title but rather a liberating admittance of the very roadblocks we have setup in our lives that holds us captive from our road of our purpose. The book will be compiled as a collection of real life short stories of what it means identify and overcome our sham-ness and at the end of each chapter, my reflection on the doors that open to our road of purpose by doing so. The ultimate takeaway and call to action will be the realization

that sham is all around us and that as we accept our shams and allow them to fade from our lives - we begin to better see and travel on an un-a-sham'd road of our purpose.

I am captivated by elegantly simple, profound answers to complex big life questions. The human desire for enduring purpose is universal and the epidemic of our times is that “finding purpose” seems almost impossible as we live in the real life version of survivor. By identifying our shams and removing it as an obstacle to our purpose the reader is offered the necessary tools and compelling reasons to move beyond the desire of singular purpose to actively traveling on the road of purpose and experience all that it offers.

Our faith or connection to a larger power, God, Creator, plays a large roll in the notion that we have purpose beyond our shams in life. I am a Christian, although I specifically leave the “God-Speak” out of this book because I view the use of religious language as more often than not a form of literary laziness. Religious terms and endearments, although lovely to write, often are vague and meaningless to the non-believer, so instead I seek to use simplicity of plain everyday language. The goal is to engage as many readers that are caught in sham to consider their sham-ness, admit their sham-ness and then actually do something about it.

Discovering our sham, admitting it, and traveling on the road of our purpose allow us to minimize our life dissatisfaction while enhancing our authentic purpose. As we travel on the road of purpose we put in to high gear our life fulfillment and activate our ability to have and become truly significant while making a lasting impact in the world.

Competition

The following are the most poignant competitions for the I AM SHAM audience:

Carnegie, D. (1981). *How to win friends and influence people*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Sharma, R. S. (2003). *The saint, the surfer, and the CEO: A remarkable story about living your heart's desires*. Carlsbad, CA: Hay House.

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Demartini, J. F. (2008). *The riches within*. London: Hay House.

Clason, G. S. (2007). *The richest man in Babylon*. United States: BN Publishing.

Meier, P. D., & Henderson, D. L. (2009). *Finding purpose beyond our pain: Uncover the hidden potential in life's most common struggles*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

Marketing Plan

I AM SHAM Marketing Plan

Author, James A. Colburn

MY AUDIENCE

Group of readers you are targeting:

38-52 year old male and females

Secondary markets for my book:

Successful business people impacted by the ceiling of business due to the lack of purpose

Where to reach my readers:

PBS

- This Emotional Life (Blog)
- PBS Contributors
- bonnieb@vulcan.com
- www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife/about

Forbes

- Forbes (Blog and Website)
- Various Contributors
- pressinquiries@forbes.com
- www.forbes.com

Harvard Business Review

- Harvard Business Review (Blog and Website)

- Various Contributors
- apoftak@hbr.org
- www.hbr.org

Social Medial Outlets

- Instagram
- Facebook
- Twitter
- YouTube
- Pinterest

Launch Plan:

- Viral book trailer implementation (series of 3 trailers)
- Leveraged Seattle specific business and coaching industry to leverage relationships to expose the book to the booming influential business community in Seattle.
- Retain PR council to create viral buzz within the US and announce the book to a worldwide audience

Promotions Budget:

\$20,000 initial book launch budget.

Blog & Guest Post Topics

- Instant ways to access opportunities of purpose
- Ways to identify individual strengths and encouragement to live and improve in those strengths
- Finding and giving others opportunity for impact and influence in life.

- Mid-Life Crisis
- Finding Purpose
- Distractions in the process of activating purpose

Video Trailer

- Completed
- Format: YouTube and Vimeo
- Viral Exploitation

Pay per Click (Ad words etc.)

- Landing Page Creation
- Call To Action in All Ads deployed on Facebook and like blog opportunities
- Key Ad words: Midlife Crisis, Purpose, New Job, Self Help, Value, Permanence, Influence, Impact, New Life, God, Personal Power, Beliefs, New Beliefs

Chapter Outline

Table of Contents

Forward

Introduction

Our Humanity, to name only a few.

1. The Sham of Good Looks

A discussion with well-known supermodel unpacks the sham of physical prowess and how an unhealthy identity wrapped up in our looks can and does rob us from the road of purpose.

2. The Sham of Intellect

A compelling interview with a known intellectual business leader exposes the sham of intellect that holds so many people back from traveling the road of purpose outside of higher education and success accolades.

3. The Sham of Entitlement

Discovering the sham of entitlement that leads to a lifetime of discontentment and the freedom that is found for one individual that moved from feeling entitled to considering provision an unmerited and loving gift.

4. The Sham of Parenthood

An everyday discussion with a super mom presents how easy it is to get lost and validated by the sham of being a good parent that takes one off the road of purpose for a substantial number of years.

5. The Sham of Worthiness

A remarkable meeting with a largely Mother Theresa type individual exposes that our sham of worthiness keeps us from needing or desiring or pursuing the road of our purpose beyond our own construct of worthiness.

The Sham of Our Business, *to name only a few.*

6. Materialism and Wealth

A chance meeting with a Chinese billionaire exposes the sham of materialism, the “American Dream” and proves the emptiness at the end of that rainbow unless the road of purpose is traveled prior to death.

7. The Sham of Leadership and Power

A rare glimpse behind the curtain of one of technologies most influential and powerful leaders and the unavoidable sham that leadership and power creates and thus hold us back from traveling the road of purpose.

8. The Sham of Non Profit Work

An engaging meeting with a prominent non profit leader that has struggled and overcome the sham of non profit work as an interruption to travelling the road of purpose in life.

9. The Sham of Social Business

A discussion with a successful social entrepreneur about what it means to be in the “social business” arena and overcoming the self righteous platitudes that creep up to expose the road of purpose that moves beyond any business, social or otherwise that could be created or implemented.

10. The Sham of Entrepreneurship

The entrepreneurial trap is unpacked in discussing with a proven entrepreneur the traps of living in creation and startup up mode for an entire lifetime and how this mindset could, if reconciled, rob an individual of traveling the road of purpose in life.

Our Beliefs, to name only a few.

11. The Sham of Religiosity

A talk with an everyday pastor about what it means to experience the sham of religiosity and the almost shocking reality that one can be held back from a purposeful life by being a religious leader.

12. The Sham of Volunteerism

A discussion with a servant leader, my wife actually, who will turn the other cheek and give before she receives at every turn and how the sham of servant hood could and has taken her off the road of purpose more often than not.

13. The Sham of Church

A forthright discussion with an ex-pastor and his “aha” moment in realizing the church is broken and that the church’s sham literally holds it back from the road it is meant to travel.

14. The Sham of Being Right

The authors reflection on how being right is often the greatest sham of all because it holds us back from the magical side of life, that unfolding road we travel and how our definition of right is often dead wrong.

15. The Sham of Memberships

The sham of membership is resolved in discussion with a leading church evangelist in the area of what it means to release ourselves from thinking we are the haves in a have not

world and how be releasing ourselves of this we begin to travel on the road of our purpose.

Conclusion

About the Author

I grew up in the misty smog of the California foothills in Glendale. The youngest of 4 children, okay the baby, almost 10 years younger actually than the next sibling in line I lived an utter “only child” existence outside of holiday and birthday visits and cards. When not in school I road an orange big wheel and by night I drifted off to sleep with the oddly melodic sounds of coyotes eating their prey in the foothills, which was more often than not my neighbors pet.

Every day my Dad would drive me to school on the way to his big Los Angeles Times newspaper job. Both my Dad and uncle had prominent positions at the Los Angeles Times and I loved visiting them at work to see them sit behind their desk in their iconic all glass offices with stenciled name on the door. At the Times the journalism hum of the underwood typewriters would be my first experience with the romance of journalism that introduced me to the art of words.

When I was growing up I knew I wanted to be an army man, a limousine driver, an actor, a bartender, a magician, a high powered banker, a chef, a barber, but what seemed to stick more than anything was my desire to create and activate new ideas. I am an entrepreneur at heart!

I attended Cuesta College for my associate's degree and wrapped up a management and marketing degree at the University of Oregon. Yes, I'm a Duck. No, I don't have the slightest understanding of football let alone any sports for that matter, but I like the parties after a win. I have worked in the non profit industry, a door to door solar salesman, a marketing and branding consultant, a Real Estate Agent, and some 20+ years after my University of Oregon commencement I returned to graduate school at Northwest University in Kirkland, Washington and obtained a Masters in International Community Development which I summarize as a

“Masters in Doing Good Without Quitting Your Day Job.” Today I am an author on “purpose” while ideating and activating new social enterprise opportunities in Seattle, Washington.

Finding my purpose in life has been a 44-year process. Today I am living my dream because I am certain that I am absolutely on what I call “the road of purpose” and I am acutely aware of the many distractions that could take me from this road if I am not careful. My life passion is to shed some light on those distractions and to be the champion of others in seeking and mobilizing a purposeful life. When I am not doing this I love date nights with my wife Maurita, pizza nights on Fridays with our 3 children, tea parties and play dough sweet rolls with my daughter Madeline, building Lego creations with my son Lucas, and going to concerts and record stores with my oldest boy Eliot.

My life motto is “Everything is Perfect” and after I say that I make it my responsibility (not anyone else’s) to figure out why.

Proposed Back Cover

“A refreshing and transparent reminder of just how easy it is to align our identity and purpose with meaningless worldly constructed nonsense. James Colburn offers a compelling urgency to not only admit our shams but also understand just how high the stakes are in traveling on the road of our purpose while we are here on earth” – Well Known Author

As a little boy my son played soccer. I dutifully sat on the sidelines just waiting for the black and white ball to roll his direction so he could kick it and make a goal. One day the ball rolled perfectly towards him and it seems as if there was an invisible force field around him that didn't allow him to approach the ball. After the game and the refreshments I asked my son why he didn't run to kick the ball. He said simply, “the ball didn't roll into my area so I couldn't go get it”.

The ball reminds me of our sham. In life it is so easy to become so territorial about what we do, what position we hold on the field, that when confronted with the road of our purpose we literally don't feel like we have the permission to respond to it, to just kick it. By understanding our human propensity to live in sham, by really accepting and admitting our shams, we are able to freely pursue the road of our purpose in life.

Sample Chapters

Introduction

Chapter 6: The Sham of Building Wealth and Materialism

Introduction

I could write about finding your purpose, but that's been done time and time again. There is no question that American's have a fascination with purpose as evidenced by the wild success of *The Purpose Driven Life*, by Rick Warren. But what about all the barriers in the way of finding our purpose? My belief is that if we don't deal with the barriers, we will never find our purpose.

I AM SHAM is a book about the fact that we are, well, total SHAMS! Not that we are fake or bogus but that we have this crazy propensity to find and assign our purpose to really trivial things. I'm just saying that when it comes to our purpose, what we align with, what we assign our identity to, our value, our purpose really kind of matters. It seems we are so consumed with living a purposeful life that we will assign almost anything in our life that we are remotely good at or interested in as the purpose of our life. Instead of really figuring out why we are here on earth we often just hang our hat on the first couple things we are good at and these things are, drum roll please, our shams.

This, for some, is the beginning and end of the life story here on earth. In effect -we came, we conquered, we acquired, and then we passed away. The eulogy of your passing would be a sweet praise, an appreciation for a life well lived, for perhaps going big and then going home. Things would look pretty good even at the memorial service. On the outside, we do a really good job convincing ourselves most of the time that we have "arrived" to our so-called purpose.

As a little boy my son played soccer. I dutifully stood on the sidelines just waiting, praying really, for the black and white ball to roll his direction so he could kick it and make a goal. One day the ball rolled perfectly towards him and it seemed as if there was an invisible

force field around my son that didn't allow him to approach the ball. After the game and the refreshments I asked my son why he didn't run to kick the ball. He said simply, "the ball didn't roll into my area so I couldn't go get it".

This story reminds me of our shams. In life it is so easy to become so territorial about what we do, what position we hold the field, that when confronted with the road of our purpose, the ball rolling towards us, we literally don't feel like we have the permission to kick it. By understanding our human propensity to live in sham, by really accepting and admitting our shams, we are able to freely pursue the road of our purpose in life.

Shams are all around us. In fact, I could literally write an endless book on shams if I wanted to because the definition of sham is fairly simple; Shams are anything that we assign our purpose to that holds us back from traveling on the road of our purpose. My son's soccer example, although fairly simplistic in nature, illuminates the human propensity for us to get so wrapped up in our self-imposed purpose, the rules of the game, our position, that we literally don't even see the ball (our purpose) in front of us. Just like my son Eliot, when we are consumed by our shams its like we have a force field around our lives that holds us back from even considering any other purpose for our life.

When I hear people really wanting to "find their purpose" what is subtly implied is that this purpose is one single solitary thing that we aren't doing but we should be doing once we figure out what it is that we should be doing. Instead, I believe that purpose isn't one thing but rather a road that we travel. A dusty road that unfolds one intersection at a time that is uneven, full of potholes, but offers the prize of a purposeful life.

I was explaining this concept to my friend David Carlson. David is a guy that has worked in the non-profit world for most of his life. As a part of his work, he has invested in the lives of

Guatemalans, their livelihood, and their land ownership for some 25 years with Agros International. As I was explaining my road of purpose concept to David he interrupted me and said “Hacemos el camino caminando”. He smiled, as he knew that I didn’t have the faintest idea what he just said. “Your road concept reminds me of an old Spanish saying” David explained, “We make the road by walking”. I was intrigued. I have always been surprised when perfect little things happen. This entire book is a result of perfect little things happening. Maybe I should be less surprised at some point. “Please expand” I asked David eagerly. “It is paraphrased from a famous Spanish “caminante”, Antonio Machado”, David explained. I’m thinking, “What the heck is a caminante”. David, of course, knew I’m still in the dark and explained that “caminante” means “walker”. Upon further investigation of Antonio’s writings, it became clear just how poignant his writings were to my road concept, “Traveler, your footsteps are the road, and nothing more; Traveler, there is no road, the road is made by walking. By walking one makes the road”.

If you are a successful businessperson you might have adopted the Sham of Wealth and Materialism. If you have children, you might have adopted the Sham of Parenthood. If you are blessed with great looks, you might have adopted the Sham of Physical Prowess. Shams are an ever-evolving thing that we tend to replicate in our lives at the moment we sense one of our shams waning. In fact, since our shams are fleeting in nature and don’t provide true and enduring purpose, we are in a constant process of replacing our shams in order to unsham ourselves.

In the 2000’s I was a fairly successful real estate agent. My income was considered substantial. The irony was that even with all this crazy financial success and accolades, I was completely dissatisfied with my life. I remember hiring a business coach and I had one

requirement for her, “help me make more money”. She obliged my request and we started meeting once a week. What I found interesting is that we spent very little time talking about me making more money. Instead, she was more interested in why I was so unhappy with my life.

Among other topics, my coach focused our discussion on why I didn't feel comfortable playing with my kids. I really didn't know why, but it bothered me. I explained to her, “When I get home I just feel so wound up I can't even fathom playing Lego's with my boys”. She pressed further and had me explain to her what I felt was missing in my life. After much discussion, I realized that what was missing was a ...wait for it... a sense of purpose in my life. I was so busy trying to satisfy my sham of wealth and materialism that I could no longer see any other available opportunities in front of me. Sadly, at that time, my kids weren't what I considered my purpose and just like the soccer ball, I viewed them as outside my position on the field.

After some time passed, I felt I had a good handle on my value and where I had derailed in my business so I discontinued my coaching sessions. What was really interesting was that in no more than a couple days I was back at it trying to find a new sham for my value and identity. I remember frantically calling my coach and explaining that I really felt disenchanted with my marriage and that I needed her help sorting that out. Who knows what was going on, but in looking back it was probably just a bump in the road like any marriage would have, but when I called her up it was life or death. I distinctly remember her saying “this is normal, once you work through one barrier to your purpose, it is human nature to fill it in with a new barrier”. What I realize now is that I was trying to unsham myself with another sham. I was looking for purpose in my marriage, and of course, marriage alone can never be our purpose on earth. I was making my marriage my sham!

What shams do you have? What holds you back from the road of your purpose? What are those things that you have carelessly assigned as your identity, your value, and your purpose while here on earth that hold you back from the journey of your purpose? I AM SHAM is a book about everyday life and everyday people that struggle and wriggle out of the life of sham into the amazingness of traveling on the road of purpose.

Chapter 6: The Sham of Materialism and Wealth

December 24, 2005

Motionless I sat on the comfortable couch of my waterfront vacation home on Lake Goodwin, Washington as I looked out to the still water just beyond our dock. My eyes were fixated on a small surfacing rock just beyond the shoreline that had what seemed to be a small tree seedling growing out of it. If you could hover over that room in that moment, you would probably think I was living the epitome of a blissful and tranquil life.

You see this day marked the end of the most successful financial year of my real estate career. I had sold 110 homes in 2006 or 1 home every 3.3 days. Our income was beyond healthy - it was exorbitant. I had realized other great real estate income years, but this year was by far a banner year. We had gone to Hawaii twice in 2006, purchased 2 investment homes, a new car – the list goes on and on. We literally wanted for nothing, at least it seemed. Although we have always lived a fairly simple life (from the outside looking in), we did not operate within a budget. My wife would argue she did operate on a budget, and she probably did, but for me I bought what I wanted whenever I wanted it and at the end of each month there was always another big bucket of money to fill the checking account with. Today, I write this with borderline disgust, but back in 2006 I would say that this was the pinnacle moment of my life and what I thought defined me as a success while here on earth. After all, it was the thing I had set out to accomplish and I did it. In essence, I was fairly certain, “I had arrived!” But where?

You could hear the faint sound of my two boys playing Lego's and racecars in their room as I sat on the couch. My wife Maurita and her mother Mary were cleaning up after dinner and prepping for the Christmas day festivities. If you looked at me from the kitchen through my wife's eyes in that moment, you would think I was so calm and relaxed. If you were a visitor

that night, you might even be jealous; “I mean, look at this guy” you might think “who has made so much money just kicking back in his vacation home on a lake with feet up on the ottoman overlooking the water below on Christmas eve”. Little did anyone know that just beyond my calm outer veneer was an all out inferno of emotion, tension, and conflict within?

My head felt like it was spinning out of control as internal thoughts of inadequacy clanked around. On one hand, I was extremely proud of my accomplishments and on the other, I was scared to death of those same accomplishments. Thoughts of failure crept in as I wondered why my phone wasn't ringing that Christmas eve, “surely someone wants to buy a house, please phone ring, please phone ring I pleaded” as I attempted to mind will myself into getting out of the house to write “just one more offer” that night. As the minutes passed and the phone didn't ring I thought I was going to lose my mind. I was simply not okay with being still by myself, “had I lost myself, my identity, my value”, I asked myself?

I jumped up off the couch at 8:35 p.m. and asked my wife “do you think Costco is still open?” Maurita replied, “I think they are open until 9”. I grabbed my keys off the kitchen counter and yelled over my shoulder, “I'll be back shortly”. Costco was about 15 minutes away from our home so I knew that if I could just get through the entrance threshold of the Costco before 9 p.m., they wouldn't kick me out. We had intentionally never installed cable let alone a TV at the lake house over the years and I was on a mad dash to change that. I figured I could go buy a TV with an integrated DVD in it and a pile of movies to get my mind off my phone or the inadequacy of my worldly success in 2006. It's poetic really, now that I think about it.

I arrived at Costco at 8:56 and ran into the store flashing my membership card at the door attendant. Seems I wasn't the only one there that night now that I think about it, but everyone

else was buying gifts for others as I threw the first TV/DVD I saw in my cart and a handful of movies that I thought would help me get out of my head.

I arrived home at around 9:45 fairly proud of myself. “It was like Christmas come early,” I thought as I entered the home with the TV box; I had saved the day with a TV and a pile of movies! My kids emerged from their bedroom to see what Dad bought and looked at the covers of the movies. My wife glanced up from the kitchen sink to the TV and the movies and said, “I thought we didn’t want a TV at the lake house?” I said, “we didn’t” as I was plugging it in to the wall while ripping off the cellophane wrapper from one of the DVD’s. I threw in a rated R Nicholas Cage movie entitled World Trade Center and figured it would be “educational” for my 2 and 6 year old little boys. As the movie started and I got comfortable and cozy on the couch with my boys, my wife interrupted and said “oh no, not a rated R movie about terrorism on Christmas Eve with the boys”. I stared at the remote and her and back at the remote again and thought, “well, she does have a point but I just need to get my mind off of my fear of failure and this seriously could do the trick”. Reluctantly, okay maybe a little angrily, I turned off the TV and told the boys to jump in bed for stories.

I returned to the living room that evening after everyone in our house was asleep and all the toys were assembled and put under the tree. There was one flickering candle on the kitchen counter as I sat in the dark on the couch staring out the window. My heart was filled with so much sadness and I couldn’t figure out why. I reminded myself I had made so much money and yet I was empty inside. Part of me was scared that I might not keep up the same sales pace in 2006, “I mean who could keep up that pace,” I thought to myself. The pragmatic part of me was wondering why all this money and success didn’t make me feel better about myself, “Shouldn’t I feel really great about myself right about now”, I asked? I didn’t have all the answers that night,

but I was fairly certain that I had unhealthily placed my value and identity in the wrong thing. Christmas Eve 2006 became a defining moment for me and I refer to it as the “TV and stack of DVD’s” example of the one dimensional life that I had created.

A few years passed for me and the United States was in financial crisis. The real estate market was in a tale spin, which in turn means that the Colburn’s were in a financial tale spin. I was quickly adjusting to the new paradigm and modifying my budget with what seemed like monthly and sometimes daily adjustments and revisions to “make it all work”. We quickly looked for ways to liquidate rental properties and minimize the monthly burden of expected and unexpected monthly expenses. Although it was a difficult time, I remember thinking, “this is strange, we make less, we have less, but we still have enough and I still feel like I have value”. There was a certain peace in embracing what had always been true - that the provision for our family was never under my direct control. I no longer felt that I was the sole reason why we were successful financially and it was a great feeling. Today I attribute the lessons learned from my incredible success and real estate crash of August 2007 and the years of aftermath proceeding it as the very best thing that ever happened to me and my family and here’s why.

A few years ago I received a phone call from a Chinese businessman. Well, actually, I received a phone call from his interpreter. As a Realtor, it is not surprising to receive phone calls out of the blue, but this call was particularly interesting. The interpreter explained her client was an extremely wealthy Chinese banker who was in town on a limited one-month visa to visit his son who was attending a local private Christian school in Kirkland, Washington. So far, the story kind of checked out but I was still wondering why she was calling me? She continued that after only a few days her client stumbled upon a Toyota dealership and knee jerked into purchasing the largest Toyota tundra truck he could find on the lot. Still, I am wondering why

we are talking but found it intriguing that someone would buy a Toyota truck while on a limited one month Visa to the states. The interpreter explained that after a few days of parking the new truck at his hotel parking lot, he decided that he should buy a home so that he would have a better place to park it. Enter Realtor - enter James Colburn!

My new clients home purchase criterion was fairly straightforward. This gentleman simply wanted an ultra luxurious home on the Kirkland waterfront. No price requirements, just simply waterfront - luxury - Kirkland. The interpreter, a local Chinese born Seattle resident, explained that her client was enamored with finding the “American Dream” and seemed sort of set on seeking and acquiring this “dream” while he was here on the 30 day Visa. I promptly began to setup a tour of homes for this gentleman, after all it’s the least I could do to help the man (smile). It was a particularly slow time in Real Estate as the market was far from recovered after the 2007 crash so there were a lot of amazing high end waterfront homes available for purchase. After some preliminary work I set appointments to show 5 homes to the gentleman ranging from 1.2 to 6.7 million, most of which were nestled behind metal gates and long driveways. Actually, I paid special attention to the ones located behind metal gates as an effort to show him an iconic solution to the American Dream. I was really excited. I had only sold a few million-dollar homes, but never multiple millions. Additionally, the prospect of one single sale solving my entire income needs for the year seemed within reach, a palpable reality, if I could just enamor him enough with luxurious American home ownership and the “American Dream” that he sought.

Eagerly, I polished up my car and installed a water bottle in every cup holder in the backseat just in case my important Chinese banker client got parched while looking at homes. I picked up my client, his wife, and his interpreter at the hotel and we whisked off to see some

homes. At each home visit he spoke for what seemed like an eternity to his interpreter. The interpreter responding only briefly before he launched in to more discussion backed by elaborate hand motions and a variety of facial expressions. At the end of each home visit, he would turn to me and wink and say “very nice” with slight bow and hands touching. While driving to each home the interpreter would try to covertly explain what he talked about in English words that she knew he wouldn’t understand while he sat in the back seat. The content of his discussions seemed fairly meaningless but I figured that the interpreter was running interference between both of us.

The last home on our tour was a 2.6 million dollar home. We parked at the end of a long driveway and my new client asked if he could have a cigarette before we entered the home by holding up his lighter to me. In looking back on this scene it seems almost fitting that he slowed down the process with a ceremonial cigarette. We all obliged and he pulled out a silver tin with short little Chinese cigarettes and leaned against a wall at the property gazing off in the distance while melodically puffing on his smoke while at the same time scratching his cheek. I attended to a few emails while leaning on the bumper of my car looking up here and there to see how he, the interpreter and his wife were doing. “Okay!” he announced as he stamped out his cigarette butt and kicked it into a nearby flowerbed.

We approached the front door and I removed the key out of the lockbox to open the door. The businessman, his wife, and the interpreter stood behind me as I slowly slipped the key into the door. As the key entered the lock on the door the entire world seemed to stand still, almost frozen. I actually turned around and looked at my clients to double check that they weren’t frozen. As I slid the key into the door lock I remember hearing this voice in my head saying:

This man standing behind you is so wealthy, he has every material thing he could ever dream of. He arrives in Seattle and begins amassing what he considers the American dream - First the truck and now the house. One day not too long from now, this man will go to sleep and never wake up. My question for you James is what itch do you want to help this man scratch while he is here on earth.

I swung open the door to the home and my three guests entered the home not knowing what had just happened. I stood in the entryway of that home literally in awe of what I had just heard and the relevance it had for me personally. I thought, "I used to be this guy, chasing after the illusive American Dream, caught in the rat race, the accumulation and the never ending fear of loss and inadequacy that comes from it". Goosebumps traveled up my arms as I said out loud in that entryway "this guy is buying a TV and a pile of movies today".

I am convinced that we are all living shammed lives. But, what's worse is that the sham(s) we live are actually the things we are really good at. So good, that we often consciously and subconsciously assign them as the very reason and purpose of our life here on earth. For my client and I, building wealth and collecting material objects that outwardly denoted our success had literally become so much a part of us, so much our outward identity, that we believe that it was our purpose in life. We started to lose ourselves in the sham. For me, it became so big that I could not even sit still on a Christmas Eve. For my client, his 30-day trip to the states to visit his son became an all out pursuit to shore up and perpetuate the sham of his life.

As I type I realize that the sham of money and materialism isn't set-aside for the financial elite. The sham of money can even exist with those that have very little. I am reminded of a friend of mine who I usually hear from once a year and normally in January right after he has completed his list of new years resolutions. My friend will invite me to a coffee shop to "catch

up”. When he arrives at the coffee shop he is dripping with a fancy watch, cuff links, and designer clothes and shoes. He always offers to buy me a coffee and pastry as he pulls out a thousand dollar designer wallet making sure that I see it. Inconsistent with all his efforts to portray success, the content of our conversation usually centers around the fact that he is *not* making enough money but that he has a plan, a new years resolution, that he really believes in that will help him arrive at the wealth and material belongings he longs for.

As I listen to my friend talk, I feel a little pit in my stomach because I have been down this same road. I know just how fragile and tender it is to be caught (lost) in the sham of wealth building and materialism. Don't get me wrong; there is nothing, repeat, nothing wrong with building wealth. The “wealth” and “material belongings” alone is not the sham. The sham, however, is our human instinct to assign our value and identity to wealth building and materialism. But, what is worse is that having very little money or material objects doesn't remove the sham it sometimes perpetuates it or invigorates it.

This friend doesn't have much money at all, but he is completely lost in proving his worth and identity by relentlessly pursuing wealth and materialism. When I dig deeper with my friend, I quickly realize that he came from a very low-income family. My friend explained that his father always pushed his kids to make money and often preached that the “only way to get ahead in this world, the only way to amount to anything, was to make lots of money”. Not surprisingly, my friend is in a dead heat to make money and to prove to the world that he amounts to something. His lack of money and belief in the power of it is his sham and unfortunately that sham holds him back from his road of purpose. Until he admits the sham, he will be held in bondage by the sham of material wealth.

The sham of money is probably one of the more prevalent purpose robbing shams in our society. Admitting the sham of wealth and materialism doesn't mean give up on money, it means arriving at a point where we are no longer attached to money. The attachment to money and the results of having a lot of it is where the sham arrives. For me, I came to a place where I realized that the sham of money and materialism in my life was similar to the old childhood bible story in Matthew about building our house on sand. The sham of money and materialism created discontentment in my life. I never could have enough money or material objects and yet I knew that what goes up (our income and belongings) must come down. The notion that we are not on an endless growth cycle up and that even the most skilled and powerful in the world will at some point be let down by the sham of money and possessions gives rise to the idea that relying on the sham of money to provide our enduring purpose is like building our house on sand near a beach.

By becoming committed but not attached to money, I began the rather uncomfortable but cathartic process of surrendering my sham in order to travel on the road of my purpose. Sure, I still need to make an income to provide for my family, and I spend a good part of each day in that process, but my identity and purpose is not wrapped up in it. I guess, to put it another way, letting go of the sham of money and materialism has allowed me to not find my purpose in the things in front of my eyes but rather to dig deeper behind my eyes and travel on the road of purpose in my life without the limiting self talk that I am only as good as the money I make and the things I buy.