

P R O S P E R I T Y
— WITH —
P U R P O S E

“Reading Mike’s book and knowing him as a person is like hearing of a man’s quest to summit Mt. Everest, and watching him snowboard back to base camp. You are not going to want to put this book down.”

Danny Silk,

author of Culture of Honor: Sustaining a Supernatural Environment, founder of Loving on Purpose Educational Services and Global Transformation Institute.

“Prosperity with Purpose not only tells the story of Mike’s corporate success, but also his resolute determination to overcome tragedy. It acts as a worthwhile and heartening guide to whichever station of life you may find yourself. Mike is a personal friend and I know that he walks out the truths that he speaks. You will be inspired by this book.”

Mike Bickle,

author of several books including Passion for Jesus, Growing in the Prophetic, The Pleasures of Loving God, After God’s Own Heart, and Prayers to Strengthen Your Inner Man, and the Director of the International House of Prayer Missions Base of Kansas City (IHOP–KC)

Mike Frank is the real deal. He has known great success. He has experienced great sorrow. The Lord has tenderized his heart. If you want insights on how to keep life priorities and encouragement in making the hard decisions, read this book.

Don Finto,

author of Your People Shall be My People and Founder & President, Caleb/ Joshua Generations

I've heard Mike Frank tell his story in person four times, and yet reading his book brought details to me in a whole new way that made me feel more human and alive. He shares his life so personally that you feel like you were there with him step by step, seeing what he saw and feeling what he felt at the time. The things that changed Mike have the power to change us all. Mike Frank faced his pain. In facing it, he transcended it because God used it to transform him. This is the story of a man who dared to enter into the drama of his own life, and there he found God, along with his wife and children. Mike's success made him successful, but it was God Who made him rich in love. I hope many people read this. I recommend it highly, especially to men and women who really want their lives to count.

Sarah Sumner,

author of Leadership Above the Line

M I K E F R A N K



P R O S P E R I T Y
— WITH —
P U R P O S E

An Executive's Search for Significance



PROSPERITY WITH PURPOSE:
AN EXECUTIVE'S SEARCH FOR SIGNIFICANCE
Copyright © 2011 by Mike Frank



Slingstone Media, LLC
Redding, California

All rights reserved.

No part of this manuscript may be used or reproduced in any matter whatsoever without written permission from the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For more information, visit www.slingstonemedia.com.

Scripture taken from the New King James Version of the Bible.
Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

FIRST EDITION

Author Photograph © Mike Skilleter
Book cover design by Samuel Nudds
Layout design by Renee Evans and Layla Smith

ISBN 978-0-9838140-0-9
Library of Congress Control Number: 2011934020

Printed in the United States of America
www.slingstonemedia.com

TO LEXIE

who taught me how to love

CONTENTS

Author's Note 1

ONE Piercing the Cold Heart 3

TWO Court Jester 11

THREE Holding Hands with Love 19

FOUR The Most Dangerous Question 25

FIVE Green Card 33

SIX The Question 39

SEVEN In Wonderland 45

EIGHT A Test of Honor 51

NINE The Merger of the Century 57

TEN A New Challenge 67

ELEVEN Lexie's Story 75

TWELVE Not Thriving 85

THIRTEEN The Girl with the Pink Bow 95

FOURTEEN The Unknown 105

FIFTEEN The Yellow Dress 113

SIXTEEN True Masculinity 119

SEVENTEEN Nothingness 129

EIGHTEEN The Battle 137

NINETEEN Finding My Magnetic North 141

TWENTY Help From a Friend 147

TWENTY-ONE Safe-players and Risk-takers 155

TWENTY-TWO I Want to Congratulate You 163

TWENTY-THREE Ending Well 173

Acknowledgements 179

Endnotes 181

— Author's Note —

*“Try to become not a man of success,
but try rather to become a man of value.”*

ALBERT EINSTEIN ¹

NOT LONG AGO I sat in a coaching meeting while overlooking the ocean in Santa Barbara, the most luxurious city in California. Palm trees and European cafés line the walkways that lead to a quaint wharf, idyllic harbor, lengthy beaches and lapping waves. It is utterly pristine.

“To be honest, Mike,” my client said, his impatience becoming evident, “all I want to know is how you became successful.”

He had been an executive vice president at a respected college in southern California, had prospered financially, was happily married and had a seemingly healthy family. From the outside, he had *already* been successful, not only in occupation, but in life. He lived the American Dream.

Yet here he was in his 50's, still looking for a magic formula for what he referred to as “success.” What was he missing? Some describe it as a gnawing, empty feeling of something unknown, something unexplainable.

PROSPERITY WITH PURPOSE

Is this all there is? There has to be more...

After years of doing what he thought would bring him happiness, questions glared at him, demanding answers. He had none.

My answer?

He simply needed someone to give him permission to be a man outside of his job. Metaphorically speaking, my client needed to be given permission to go on the most significant journey of his life—to slay dragons, save a damsel in distress and send a rock spiraling through the air to knock down Goliath! How is that different than what he had already accomplished? It's a matter of perspective. He wasn't living an adventure, and the only way he could change that fact was to lend purpose to his prosperity.

Like many people, my client failed to realize that there is no success without significance, and wealth is a byproduct, not a goal. Hundreds of books have been written on wealth, but none of them contain the "Holy Grail" that answers the myriad of questions on the subject. They might have a modicum of breakthrough, or a few tactics and tips, but that is all. Most people want a step-by-step guide toward corporate success, but in good conscience, I must dispel this misplaced trust. There isn't a formula for success, significance or wealth.

There have been several impossible situations in my life that I would not wish upon my worst enemy. However, through these events, I have gained perspective that has enabled me to provide hope, comfort, and depth of experience. Within this book, I have included several life lessons that will hopefully assist you in your journey towards genuine success through legitimate significance, which may or may not include unfathomable wealth. But I should remind you that this is merely one man's journey. That being said, welcome to the story of my life...

CHAPTER 1

— Piercing the Cold Heart —

*“Now I know I’ve got a heart,
‘cause it’s breaking...”*

THE WIZARD OF OZ²

A YOUNG GIRL stood out from the crowd as we walked by huddled groups of women in the refugee camp. Her skin glistened with sweat and the distinctive red dirt of Africa. She was too young to be a mother, yet a tiny baby was nestled in her arms. Her desperation was evident, and I felt my heart surge with emotion.

The women distrusted us, a group of light-skinned male “rescuers” with World Relief. Some were even terrified. The men they had previously known raped their bodies, ravaging their self-worth. They wore ragged and faded clothes with gaping holes. I could see misery in their eyes. Hopelessness. Most of them were hollow beings, overcome by trauma. Their sanity teetered on the edge of insanity.

I was only just beginning to understand brokenness like theirs. Three years before I had been introduced to my life’s first tragic situation, and I still didn’t know if I would have the strength to

PROSPERITY WITH PURPOSE

recover. But now, by witnessing the sorrow that consumed these women, I was able to see a deeper perspective of my life—I was being ruined by compassion, and I was grateful.

It was time to leave. As I climbed up into the seat of my team's Land Rover, I noticed that the girl with the dark shiny skin had followed me. She ran up to the open door and shoved her little girl into my arms. I responded intuitively, cradling her small child before I realized what I had done. My arms ached for the weight of my two year old back home in Omaha, Nebraska. My baby girl, the one who I believed must have been sent to me for a divine purpose. Her birth had initiated my heart's greatest journey.

Using broken English phrases, the girl spoke forcefully, "You take her. I want you to have her. If she stays here, she dies!"

The year was 2000. Our World Relief team had traveled the dusty roads of Sierra Leone with the goal of bringing food and encouragement to the inhabitants of a war-torn nation. The girl that stood in front of me was a former sex slave of the rebel RUF soldiers.

Once again my heart was jolted at the sight of her desolation. I could not refuse her. What I could not do for my own baby back home, I wanted to do for this girl's child. Yet I knew that legally, I could do nothing. Nor was my studied and analytical expertise as a business executive helpful in knowing how to respond to her personal tragedy.

Oh God, I thought. How can I leave her this way?

The girl's forcefulness, turned into screaming, "You take her!"

My tongue felt immobile. Finally, I said painfully, "I can't! There's no way I could smuggle her out of the country."

She chose not to hear my words. "I can't keep her here! You must take her!"

PIERCING THE COLD HEART

I began to weep.

The girl turned and walked away without looking back.

I sat transfixed, emotionally torn and unable to take action.

“COUNT ME IN”

Clive Calver, the president of World Relief, had asked me to join him on this ten-day trip to Sierra Leone, which occupied the western hemisphere of one of the most fabled continents in history—Africa. British, armed with a PhD in Theology and a compassionate heart, Clive was fearless. Civil war, famine, and highly precarious situations never deterred him.

At the time, I was two years out of a company, Level 3 Communications, which was the darling of Wall Street. The company was flying high. I used to be one of their top men, running strong in the marketplace, competing to win, making a difference and being someone with power, influence and momentum. I hadn't wished to leave. In fact, I had clung to Level 3 as long as I could. But my family had been faced with multiple heart-breaking circumstances that required all of me. It was one of the toughest decisions I had ever made. I knew that leaving my corporate job to care for my family had been the right decision, but there was still a part of me that dreamt of soaring with Level 3 in the corporate world. I was floundering, not knowing who I was without my persona of “highly successful, money-making, head-turning senior executive” who was on the envious list of nation-wide headhunters.

I had obsessed about the scoreboard my entire life, thinking, *How am I going to get higher in the ‘pecking order’?*

Now I was challenged with questions I had never asked before:

PROSPERITY WITH PURPOSE

Who am I?

What is my purpose?

And most frightening of all, *Where am I going?*

As a result, peace eluded me. My sense of traction, decimated. I had become broken and disillusioned. The career I had so carefully built, trained toward, and fought to obtain was gone. When I looked in the mirror, I didn't recognize the old guy with the gray hair staring back at me. And so, as much as I wasn't interested in actually going to a Third World Country (not to mention a nation at war), I was desperately looking for something, a purpose that would make me feel alive again.

My wife Robbie, an incomparable woman of wisdom and support, spoke prophetic words that eventually coaxed me into accepting the invitation, "I feel that there's something for you in this trip."

I boarded the plane, still not convinced that she was right.

THE DARK CONTINENT

Sierra Leone is an African nation that almost succeeded in destroying itself. With one of the world's largest natural harbors, it was a port of entry for the transatlantic slave trade in its early known history. In 1787, some of London's "black poor," who had been promised freedom in exchange for service in the British Army, were dropped off on its coastline.

Five years later in 1792 through an arrangement with the Sierra Leone Company, Thomas Peters, a former slave, brought a second group of over 1,000 Black Americans. Together with other freed Africans, they established the capital city of Freetown. However, for

PIERCING THE COLD HEART

the next 150 years it remained an unmanageable and impoverished British colony.

Its people finally won their independence in 1961, but since they had only known the bonds of slavery, they did not know how to maintain that freedom. Numerous military coups seized control until finally in 1991, a rebel group called the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) launched its first attacks. Liberia, a neighboring coastal country, assisted the RUF, and for the next eight years, parties warred to gain power.

Sierra Leone became the bloodiest nation in the world. The city of Freetown, once established in honor of freedom, received into its dust the highest number of massacred bodies in the whole nation. Two million people fled across its lands to refugee camps while the RUF, under the influence of drugs and terror, scoured and burned village after village. They cut off resisters' ears, arms, and even their legs. They stole young children fit for becoming child soldiers and forced capable men to pan for diamonds to support their importation of weapons. During this time, the nation's average lifespan dropped to 30 years.

As our plane landed, it was evident from my window that the airport had been battered by artillery. Dismal looking UN soldiers, charged with "keeping peace" greeted us as we stepped off the plane. No doubt behind their stoic appearances, they hid the emotion from having witnessed insufferable cruelty. Staring past their rigid figures, I could see that the country's natural beauty was astounding. Its tropical greenery and rugged mountains reminded me of the craggy brush and rock formations of coastal California.

I said little as our caravan (and UN escort) drove toward Freetown. War's evidence was laid bare everywhere. And on the road

PROSPERITY WITH PURPOSE

itself, demoralized men, women and children slowly trudged en masse toward the capital city, desperate for sanctuary. What they did not know was that the RUF were attempting to shut the city down.

We passed through several checkpoints. Grim military personnel holding machine guns checked every document thoroughly. I suddenly realized that if we made one wrong or impulsive decision, we could perish. The situation was beyond what I had imagined, and as I lay on my cot that night, with little power or water in our hotel and insects swarming the windows, I began to regret my decision.

What am I thinking?

But by the time I encountered the young girl who thrust her daughter into my arms, I thought, *How can I ever complain about my life again?* Their courage paled my own. The depth of their suffering completely stripped me of my self-pity. They had nothing, yet they rejoiced as if they had plenty. They had seen their families and villages annihilated, yet they were thankful for the little they had. On fifty acres, the refugee camps housed thousands of starving bodies. They lived in cardboard boxes, some with just a blanket for warmth. The camps were disease-ridden and lacking proper sanitation. Hundreds of amputees waited for prosthesis. I realized that before this moment, I hadn't known sorrow.

Yet there were also hopeful stories. On the coast, we visited an Italian priest who had established a safe camp for former child soldiers to help them deal with their emotional wounds. After being captured from their families, these boys, some as young as ten years old, had drugged and then forced to murder innocents. With this priest's courage and compassion, and global support from other Catholics, the camp housed hundreds of young men. The kitchen was only an open fire pit, and they lacked running water, but they

PIERCING THE COLD HEART

had the richest gift of all, people that cared for and loved them.

As I moved past my self-absorption into their world, my mind cried out, *How can God handle this suffering?*

But as I witnessed the joy of the oppressed, the tenderness of Clive, the president of World Relief, and the Italian priest (not to mention the rest of my team), I realized that God had heard every single cry of the broken-hearted—the people I thought had been forgotten. He was using *us* to ease their pain.

WATERSHED

During my journey to Sierra Leone, I felt the gears shift into place. When I stepped outside of my own pain and witnessed the suffering of others, and in particular the young girl, I was not able to separate myself from her sorrow. I knew that my heart had finally been ripped open, and I had moved past my mind and into my emotions. The image of the young girl begging me to rescue her daughter has haunted me ever since. As she turned from me and walked away, fully believing that I would take her child, I continued to weep. She wanted to entrust her baby to me, but I couldn't do what she requested. At home in Omaha, I was a father to four children. I saw her pain. I wanted to help, but the matter was out of my hands. Finally after regaining composure, I handed her baby to the director of the refugee camp. That day I had faced an impossible situation my corporate success, connections, or wealth couldn't solve.

Sierra Leone was a watershed in my life. I had been a lower-middle class kid from Iowa who dreamed a daring dream of wealth and prestige. My drive to “be someone” quickly escalated me into being a senior level executive for corporations listed as the top 50

PROSPERITY WITH PURPOSE

by Fortune Magazine. Money abounded (and so did my ego). I began to live the life I had vowed to have as a child. But what I could never admit to myself was that I felt I was a “poser,” a man that believes he knows everything because he has reached the zenith of corporate success, but who is also scared to death he will be proved inadequate.

And so, when I encountered suffering in its most desperate form—the pleas of a broken young girl who wished a new life for her daughter, my journey toward selflessness became real. For the first time, I saw beyond myself. In fact, I was an emotional wreck, completely undone and unable to process what was occurring.

No longer was I the narrow-focused high flyer who was far removed from outside trauma, unable to come close enough to suffering to feel its unjust stench. The anxiety about my own progression and vitality was dispelled. I was experiencing suffering firsthand, and began to understand how my talent and connections could benefit others.

I was beginning a journey that is fundamental to any man, whether business executive or priest—to be trusted with the hearts of others.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Have you had a watershed experience in your life? What has it revealed to you?
2. Have you allowed yourself to walk alongside those in need to share in their suffering? Why or why not?