

PROFIT SEEKS PURPOSE

*How To Make Money
Without Losing Your Soul*

A Modern Business Fable

Harland Merriam

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Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental. The characters are composite creations inspired by the author's experiences and conversations.

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Dedication

For anyone who has ever wondered
if there might be more,
not instead of success, but within it.

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The story that follows grew out of a retreat with the current mastermind I facilitate. The vision and voice are my own. I'm grateful for the editors, peers, and tools that helped refine the manuscript through feedback and careful revision.

Finally, to **you, the reader**. Thank you for taking the time to read these pages. My prayer is that you will not only find encouragement but also discover the joy of seeking and living your God-given purpose.

With gratitude,
Harland Merriam

Introduction

***"You can't go back and change the beginning,
but you can start where you are and change the ending."***

— often attributed to C.S. Lewis

Many successful business leaders can point to moments when the world applauded, yet they felt empty.

Perhaps you are one of us, a successful but restless leader.

The numbers work. The projects succeed. The dreams come together. Yet something inside us whispers, *Is this all there is?*

This story is about Caleb, a business leader, who is running fast but can't shake the sense that something deeper is calling. He asks how you can build something meaningful without losing yourself.

What follows isn't a roadmap for you to copy, but a story to wrestle with.

You won't leave with a system. You'll receive an invitation to:

- Ask better questions.
- Pay attention to people and important things.
- Explore if faith might play a part in your journey.
- Choose a better path.

Turn the page...

Harland Merriam

P.S. Check out a couple of questions for each chapter in the Appendix. I invite you to join the Profit Seeks Purpose Community at www.ProfitSeeksPurpose.com/community

1

The Victory That Didn't Satisfy

Beneath the glow of a single lamp on Caleb's desk lay the unopened folder labeled "*Echelon 417*."

Victory wasn't supposed to feel like this.

Caleb's biggest purchase ever closed yesterday. He'd been watching this apartment complex for three years and had jumped when his broker called. This was the complex that other investors would point to and say, "He's at the top of his game."

The lamp cast long shadows across the office. His team had descended on the property yesterday as soon as he signed the last document. They were working through a comprehensive takeover checklist, celebrating the achievement.

He'd read the texts with photos and updates from his team, but he hadn't responded.

This wasn't new. For almost a year, moments like this had come with applause, only to leave the room quiet again.

He reached for his notebook, the one he carried everywhere. He held the pen for a moment, then wrote:

What now?

He picked up his coffee mug. It felt cold. He sipped anyway.

Bitter. Fitting.

He'd spent months poring over spreadsheets to achieve his victory.

But the coffee's lingering bitterness told a different story.

Ping.

A text from his good friend, Nathan.

It read: *Let's connect this morning. I have something for you—something important.*

Caleb and Nathan were both attending Ezra Collins' Apartment Investing Conference in Orlando. A similar conference, held seven years earlier, had lit an entrepreneurial spark in him.

But he couldn't find the fire this morning.

He picked up his pen and wrote one more line beneath the first:

There's got to be more.

He underlined it twice.

Caleb put the pen down, closed the notebook, and went back upstairs to shower and get dressed. He tried not to wake his wife, Sarah, or his daughter, Sophia.

The Orange County Convention Center was about ninety minutes away, depending on traffic. It was in the heart of Orlando's attractions. Caleb poured fresh coffee into his travel mug and left a note for Sarah.

Then he stepped into the dawn.

The sky behind him was glowing orange as the sun promised to rise over the Atlantic Ocean. He climbed into his truck and drove west on State Road 44 in silence. No radio. No news. Just the sound of the tires on the road.

The quiet couldn't compete with the thoughts in his head.

Nathan's question, asked over coffee a few weeks earlier: "Why do you do what you do?"

Sarah's voice: "Sophia was looking for you at the piano recital." And, "You haven't been home for dinner all week."

Memories surfaced of that first Ezra Collins conference years ago and of his first eight-unit apartment complex off US-1 in Daytona, resigning from his day job as a financial advisor and going all in on real estate investments.

Caleb turned off State Road 44 onto Interstate 4. With each passing mile on the highway, an ache tightened within him.

Between Sanford and Maitland, Caleb noted a string of billboards along I-4, personal injury law firms. Dark suits, smiles, promises of big money.

Caleb noticed traffic slowing down ahead, so he pulled left into the express lane.

By the time he arrived at the Convention Center, the sun was up.

Caleb pulled into the parking garage, found a space, and stepped out of his truck. He made his way to the entrance, stopping to open the door for an older gentleman and his wife.

Inside, the lobby was noisy, with people laughing and coffee cups clinking. Caleb used to burst into a room like this, meeting new people, jumping into conversations about the market, seeking potential investors. Not today.

He spotted Nathan, waved, and closed the distance.

Wasting no time, Nathan said, "Caleb, I want you to join the mastermind I lead."

Caleb took a step back.

Caleb had tried one of the big national masterminds, the ones that gather for a weekend once a quarter, hear from business leaders, and help each other achieve their goals.

He almost asked, "What do you mean, a mastermind?" Then stopped himself.

Instead, he said, "Thanks, Nathan, I am grateful for you thinking of me, but I'm jammed right now."

Before Nathan could speak again, the ballroom doors opened. Investors surged from the lobby into the ballroom, pulling Caleb and Nathan inside. They found seats together. Caleb pulled out his notebook and pen.

A deep, unseen voice boomed through the speakers. "Ladies and gentlemen... please welcome your leader in multifamily investing, Ezra Collins." Everyone in the ballroom rose to their feet and applauded.

Collins took the stage, acknowledged the crowd, and said, "Thank you. Please take your seat."

When the room settled down, Collins opened with pictures of tenants. He told stories. The screens showed children receiving new backpacks at a back-to-school event, families playing games on the grass at a Fourth of July party, and picnic tables filled with smiling people. In every picture, Collins' staff were interacting with residents, smiles on their faces, too.

He didn't start with how to make money in apartments, but with how lives can be touched.

Caleb sat up.

Collins transitioned into his own story—the crash of 2008, his personal bankruptcy, losing everything, and rebuilding from scratch.

Caleb leaned forward and jotted notes.

When the lights came up at the end of the morning session, Nathan nudged him. "Lunch plans?"

Caleb nodded. "What do you have in mind?"

"The sandwich shop next door."

They stepped out of the convention center into the bright Florida sun. Caleb took a deep breath of the fresh air. The tension he'd held since dawn wasn't gone—but he was able to shake most of it out as he rolled his shoulders.

Oak pollen dusted the patio of the sandwich shop. Caleb and Nathan found a metal table and chairs beneath a sprawling live oak.

Nathan noticed someone scanning the area.

Liz Hernandez appeared in the lunch line.

"Liz!" Nathan called, inviting her over.

She pulled up a chair.

Liz was the founder of a significant property management firm. The people in the Orlando market listened when Liz spoke, not because she was loud, but because she kept her word. Caleb and Liz had worked together several times.

Their server arrived, took their orders, and left three glasses of ice water behind.

As they waited for the orders to arrive, Nathan repeated his invitation for Caleb to join his mastermind.

"As I said before, I am really busy right now," Caleb said. "We just closed on a large complex on the 417 in Sanford."

"I heard about that. Congratulations. How is it going?"

"It put us over two thousand doors, the goal I set for myself seven years ago. But I'm feeling flat today. I thought I would be celebrating. I don't get it."

Nathan nodded. A smile grew on his face. "Perfect."

"What?" Caleb asked.

"This mastermind might be perfect for you. I've been noticing in you something that happened to me years ago. Remember my asking you about your 'why'?"

Caleb lifted his shoulders. "I don't have time for anything else."

Liz jumped in. "Yeah. I didn't think I had time either before I joined."

"What? You're in the mastermind, too?"

"Yes. I wouldn't be where I am today without it." Liz answered.

She took a sip of water. "And we start with prayer."

Caleb's face tightened.

"Prayer?" he barked. "Seriously?"

"Is that a problem?" Liz asked.

Caleb's face turned red. "Yeah, it's a problem. I walked away from religion years ago. I have no place for it."

Liz didn't flinch. She said, "Three years ago, if someone had invited me to a group that prayed, I would've run the other way, too. I didn't have room for religious stuff in my life. It was all work, work, work."

Caleb's gaze dropped to his sandwich, then raised it toward Liz. "And this group helped?"

"It gave me a place to ask questions and open up about what was really going on," Liz said. "I'm rediscovering who I've always wanted to be. Would that interest you?"

Nathan added, "We toss our business and personal mess onto the table every week, don't we, Liz? There's nowhere else in my life I can do that."

An alarm went off on Liz's phone. Their conversation stopped. They paid their bills and returned to the convention center.

Back inside the ballroom after the lunch break, Ezra Collins launched into the nuts and bolts of apartment investing and trends in the current market. Numbers and graphs filled the screens. People scribbled notes.

Caleb kept thinking about what Liz had said. He wasn't sure whether he was more repelled or drawn to the idea.

As the conference ended, Nathan caught up to him and said, "Let's talk." He handed Caleb a folded note and walked on to his car.

When Caleb reached his truck in the parking garage, he didn't start the engine right away.

He called Sarah. Three rings later, she picked up. "Hey. How was the conference?" she asked.

"Fine," he said. "I'll be home at about 6:45."

Caleb could hear Sophia practicing the piano in the background. "Tell Sophia I'll make it up to her for missing her recital."

Sarah asked, "Caleb... what's going on?"

"Nothing. Let's talk after supper."

He hung up before she could ask anything else.

Caleb pulled into the driveway at 6:50.

He sat with his wife and daughter for dinner and even laughed at a few of Sophia's jokes. But his eyes kept looking out the window.

As soon as they finished dinner, Sarah said to Sophia, "We got started late tonight. Head upstairs for your bath."

Caleb and Sarah slid into their normal routine. Sarah washed the dishes at the sink. Caleb dried them and put them away. Both were silent.

He dried one plate three times.

Sarah set down the sponge. "What's going on?"

Caleb hesitated. "Nathan asked me to join a mastermind group."

"A what?"

"It's a group that gets together every week. Nathan leads it."

Sarah tensed. "Another meeting. That sounds like less time for us. You may have made it home for dinner tonight, but you might as well not have been here."

Caleb started to react. Then stopped. The kitchen grew quiet again.

Then he said, "I expected to be on top of the world with this property, but now that it's mine... Something's off."

"So are we, Caleb," Sarah said. "Something is off between us, too."

Their voices grew louder.

Caleb eventually said, "Okay. I'll try harder. I just need a couple of weeks."

Sarah's voice trembled. "You've said that before. You've said it after every deal. But you never change. I need you to actually change, not just say you will. I can't believe you are considering adding something else."

Color rose in her cheeks.

Caleb opened his mouth, but nothing came out.

Sarah sighed, "I'm worried about you... about us. Work takes up so much of you. There's not enough left for us."

The tension in his shoulders returned.

Sophia came bounding down the stairs and into the kitchen.

"Story time!" she announced as she held out a handful of books.

Caleb seized the interruption. "I think it's my night." He gathered the books with one arm and her with the other. As he and Sophia headed upstairs, Caleb felt Sarah's eyes on him.

Sophia and Caleb went up to her room to read stories and think of ideas for what to do over the weekend. Her eyes became heavy, so he tucked her in, turned out the light, and stood at the door, continuing to look at her until she nodded off to sleep.

Caleb retreated to his downstairs office.

He walked to the window, opened it, looked out toward the ocean, and breathed in the fresh salt air.

Sarah's words returned: "I'm worried about you... about us?"

On the bookcase was a photo of Sarah and Sophia. It caught his eye. He had taken the picture on the beach several summers before. Sarah had that smile on her face, a special smile she reserved for him, a smile he hadn't seen in a long time. Sophia's blue eyes sparkled. Her braids flew in the wind.

Just then, Sarah stepped into the room. "Can we pick up where we left off?"

He jumped slightly. "Yeah. Sure."

She stepped toward him. "I apologize for raising my voice earlier. I'd like us to work on some things that are bothering me. They've been building up lately. But right now, I'm interested in what's bothering you. Is it this new complex or something else?"

Caleb reached back and rubbed his shoulder. "It's not just work. It is, but it's more than that. It's this mastermind that Nathan invited me to join. It would mean another hour during the week."

"You mentioned that earlier. Something about business leaders getting together."

"Yeah...and they pray."

"Oh." A small smile formed on Sarah's lips. "So... it's not just spreadsheets and strategy?"

"It's the prayer stuff, it's not for me. You know that. And I don't really have time right now."

"I realize you don't care much for church talk," Sarah said as she took another step towards him. "If your friend Nathan thinks this might help, try it."

She moved closer to him. "Maybe the group is just what you need."

"I love you, Caleb. I just miss the man I married, who used to laugh more."

Her words landed.

Sarah waited in the doorway for a moment, looking back at him, then slipped away upstairs.
Caleb sank into his reading chair.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out Nathan's folded note:

It read: ***Tuesday, 6:00 a.m. Are you in?***

He reread it. Sat with it.

A small voice came from the doorway: "Dad?"

Sophia stood in the pajamas her grandparents had given her for Christmas. Tropical colors, dolphins, and starfish were printed all over them.

"I couldn't sleep."

"Do you want a drink of water or something?"

"You're crying!"

He wiped a tear away and opened his arms. Sophia climbed onto his lap, her hair smelling of strawberry shampoo.

"Sometimes I get sad," he said. "I'm realizing I have been missing so much of you and Mom."

Sophia reached up, hugged her dad, both hands around his neck, then leaned back and said, "Like when I play all the right piano notes but forget to hear the music?"

He let out a laugh as he squeezed her. "Where'd you get that?"

"My piano teacher, Mrs. Chen. She said it to me last week."

They went into the kitchen for a glass of water. Then he carried her upstairs and tucked her back in.

On the way down the stairs, he thought about replying to Nathan's recent text.

He heard Sarah's voice, felt Sophia's warmth.

He opened his schedule for the next week, stretched his arms out in front of him, and blew out a breath.

He typed: ***Yes.***

After a few seconds, he pressed ***Send.***

Sarah was likely reading in bed upstairs. Sophia would be asleep, with her stuffed bear beside her.

All the right notes were there. But where was the music?

When had that become his life?

His eyes returned to the Echelon 417 folder.

Earlier, the question had been: *What now?*

He pulled out his notebook and wrote:

Who now?