

Man's Search for Meaning Summary – Viktor Frankl

2 MINUTE READ

[Man's Search for Meaning](#) (1946)

by [Viktor E. Frankl](#)

Man's Search for Meaning is a gruelling, yet deeply liberating insight into the why behind each of our whats and hows - by holocaust survivor, psychologist and founder of logotherapy, Viktor Frankl. ([165 pages](#))

[Paperback](#) | [Ebook](#) | [Audiobook](#)

Note: This **Man's Search for Meaning summary** is part of an ongoing project to summarise the [Best Biographies](#) and [Best Self Help Books](#) of all time.

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Man's Search for Meaning Review

This short, moving and life-changing book was written by Jewish-Austrian neurologist / psychiatrist and holocaust survivor [Victor Frankl](#).

The book's brutal and honest first hand accounts of life and loss in a concentration camp (worth reading in and of itself) are a vehicle for Frankl's wider theories and deep insights into man's search for meaning. These theories were his life work (even before his transportation to [Auschwitz](#)) and are at the core of [Logotherapy](#) (logos = meaning), a major school of modern psychotherapy.

Man's Search for Meaning Summary

The Meaning of Life

"He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how." – Friedrich Nietzsche

The essence of Frankl's theory is as simple as it is universal and runs as follows:

Man's primary motivational force is the striving for meaning in one's life.

A frustrated will to meaning leads to an existential vacuum that is the mass neurosis of the present time.

This existential vacuum can be described as a private and personal form of nihilism and manifests itself primarily in states of boredom and anxiety.

But there is no objective or general meaning to life. We cannot strive for meaning as we cannot strive for success or happiness.

Instead, meaning (Why) ensues primarily from active purpose (a What) which can be a thing (a work or deed) or a person (love or responsibility).

However, life also questions us constantly with a passive stream of Whats (including unavoidable suffering) to which we must respond and from which meaning can also ensue.

In this case, a strong individualistic sense of self, of Who we are, becomes the Why for how we respond to those Whats.

No matter what external limitations we face, we are always free to choose Who we are and how we respond.

This allows us to tap into an unassailable source of inner freedom and personal value.

A Story About Fate

A short story from the book about fate that enjoyed I so much I thought it worth preserving/sharing:

"A rich and mighty Persian once walked in his garden with one of his servants. The servant cried that he had just encountered Death, who had threatened him.

He begged his master to give him his fastest horse so that he could make haste and flee to Teheran, which he could reach that same evening. The master consented and the servant galloped off on the horse.

On returning to his house the master himself met Death, and questioned him, "Why did you terrify and threaten my servant?" "I did not threaten him; I only showed surprise in still finding him here when I planned to meet him tonight in Teheran," said Death."

Man's Search for Meaning Contents

***Man's Search for Meaning* is a short book with only three chapters/parts...**

- **PART ONE:** Experiences in a Concentration Camp
- **PART TWO:** Logotherapy in a Nutshell
- **POSTSCRIPT 1984:** The Case for a Tragic Optimism

Best Man's Search for Meaning Quotes

These Man's Search for Meaning quotes come from **The Art of Living's** ever-growing central library of thoughts, anecdotes, notes, and [inspirational quotes](#).

"The existential vacuum manifests itself mainly in a state of boredom."

- [Viktor E. Frankl](#), Man's Search for Meaning

"Don't aim at success – the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue and it only does so as the unintended side effect of one's dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the by-product of one's surrender to a person other than oneself. Happiness must happen, and the same holds for success: you have to let it happen by not caring about it."

- [Viktor E. Frankl](#), Man's Search for Meaning

"An abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation is normal behaviour."

- [Viktor E. Frankl](#), Man's Search for Meaning

"The most painful part of beatings is the insult which they imply."

- [Viktor E. Frankl](#), Man's Search for Meaning

"No man should judge unless he asks himself in absolute honest whether in a similar situation he might not have done the same thing."

- [Viktor E. Frankl](#), Man's Search for Meaning

"Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the

human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way... It is this spiritual freedom – which cannot be taken away – that makes life meaningful and purposeful."

- [Viktor E. Frankl](#), Man's Search for Meaning

"We needed to stop asking about the meaning of life and instead to think of ourselves as those who are being questioned by life."

- [Viktor E. Frankl](#), Man's Search for Meaning

"Progressive automation will probably lead to an enormous increase in the leisure hours available to the average worker. The pity of it is that many of these will not know what to do with all their newly acquired free time."

- [Viktor E. Frankl](#), Man's Search for Meaning

"The Meaning of life differs from man to man, from day to day and from hour to hour... what matters, therefore is not the meaning of life in general but rather the specific meaning of a person's life at a given moment."

- [Viktor E. Frankl](#), Man's Search for Meaning

"Live as if you were living already for the second time and as if you had acted the first time as wrongly as you are about to act now!"

- [Viktor E. Frankl](#), Man's Search for Meaning

"We can discover the meaning of life in three different ways: (1) by creating a work or doing a deed; (2) by experiencing something or encountering someone; and (3) by the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering."

- [Viktor E. Frankl](#), Man's Search for Meaning

"To suffer unnecessarily is masochistic rather than heroic."

- [Viktor E. Frankl](#), Man's Search for Meaning

"The pessimist resembles a man who observes with fear and sadness that his wall calendar, from which he daily tears a sheet, grows thinner with each passing day. On the other hand, the person who attacks the problems of life actively is like a man who removes each successive leaf from his calendar and files it neatly and carefully away with its predecessors, after first having jotted down a few diary notes on the back."

- [Viktor E. Frankl](#), Man's Search for Meaning

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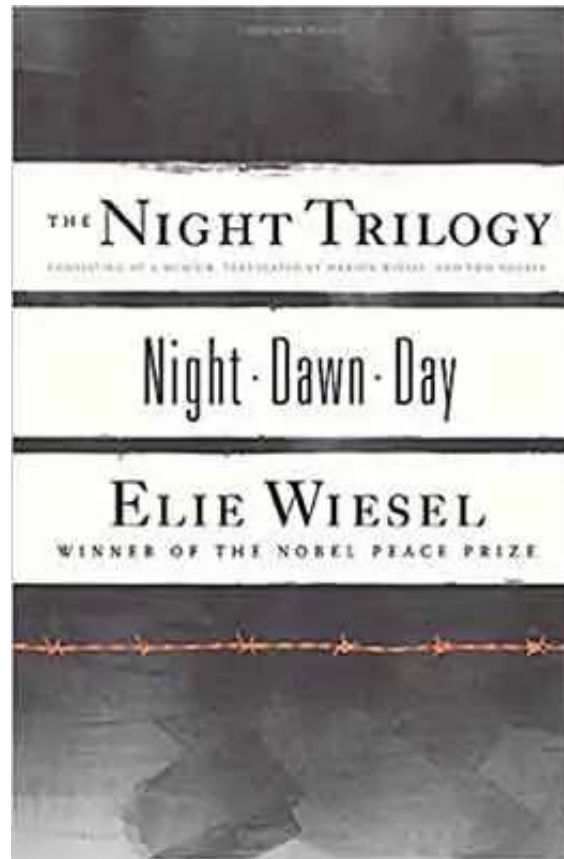
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Read More: 5 Books Like Man's Search for Meaning

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And in the meantime...

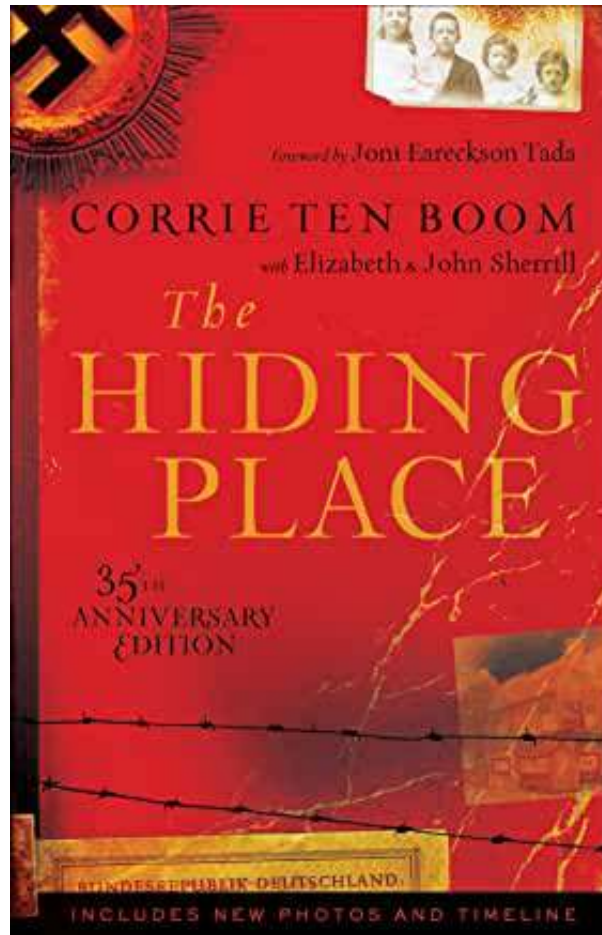
Here are 5 top books like Man's Search for Meaning...



1. [Night \(The Night Trilogy, #1\)](#) - [Elie Wiesel](#)

A haunting account of the events leading up to and during the author's internment and survival in the Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps as a young teenager - by author, poet and holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel.

Published 1956 // 115 pages // Rated 4.4 over 1,084,700 reviews [on Goodreads](#)



2. [The Hiding Place](#) - [Corrie ten Boom](#)

The Triumphant True Story of Corrie Ten Boom

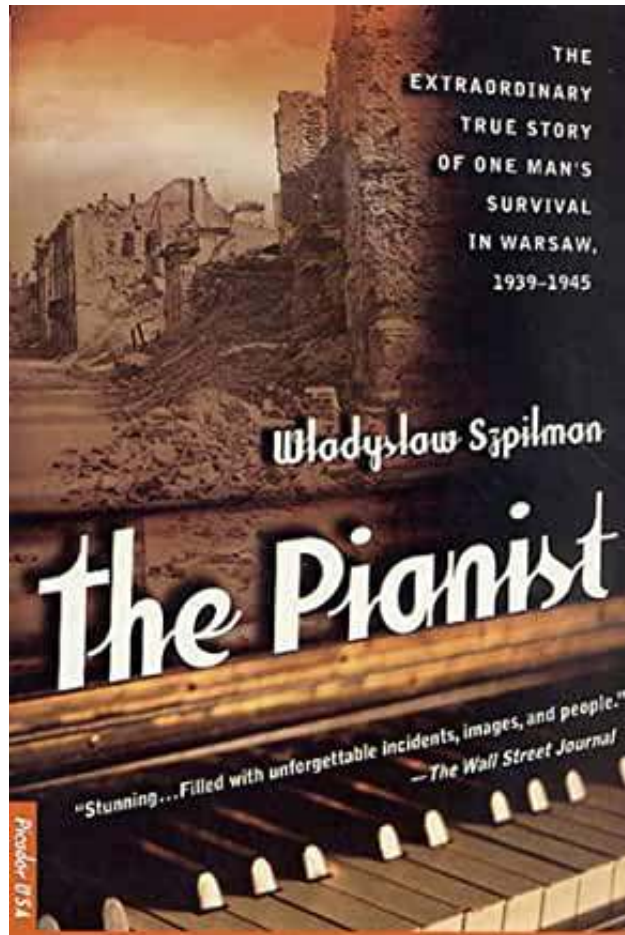
Published 1971 // 242 pages // Rated 4.4 over 288,200 reviews [on Goodreads](#)



3. [The Diary of a Young Girl](#) - [Anne Frank](#)

The accessible, precocious, heartwarming and deeply tragic memoir of the author's early teens and final years in hiding from Nazi occupation in Amsterdam during the second half of WW2 - by teenager and aspiring writer Anne Frank.

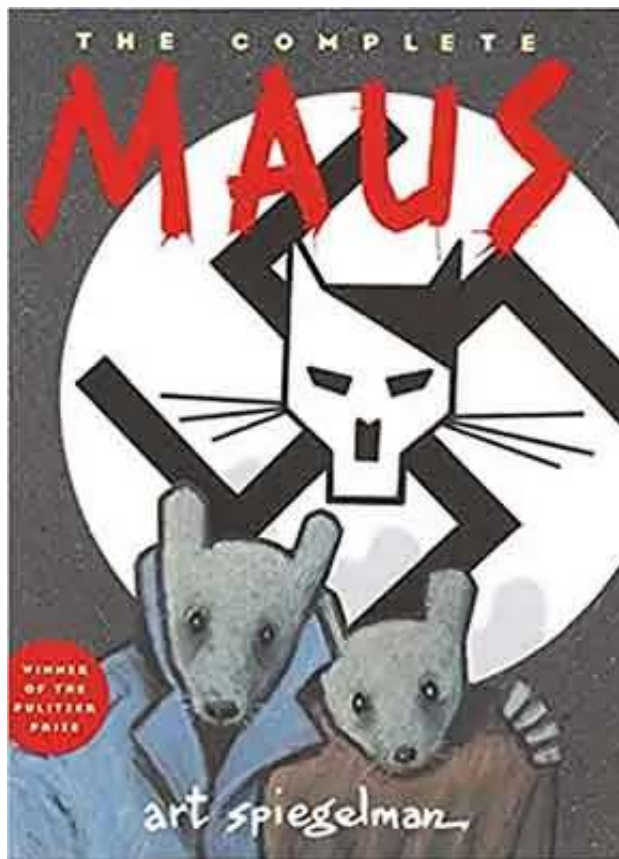
Published 1947 // 283 pages // Rated 4.2 over 3,183,700 reviews [on Goodreads](#)



4. [The Pianist](#) - [Władysław Szpilman](#)

The Extraordinary Story of One Man's Survival in Warsaw, 1939–45

Published 1946 // 222 pages // Rated 4.2 over 74,900 reviews [on Goodreads](#)



5. [The Complete Maus](#) - Art Spiegelman

A clever and haunting Pulitzer Prize winning graphic novel that uses zoomorphism (animals-as-humans) to tell the story of the author's father's survival of the holocaust - by cartoonist, Art Spiegelman.

Published 1994 // 296 pages // Rated 4.5 over 169,800 reviews [on Goodreads](#)

Wish There Was a Faster/Easier Way?

Whenever you're ready, here are four ways I can help you be more productive, find more balance and live life more on purpose...

1. **Curious? Discover how productive you really are...** Take this free, 2-minute assessment to unlock your PQ and discover the top 25 habits you need to get big things done. [Take the 2-minute quiz →](#)
2. **Overwhelmed? Get a free chapter of my book...** Let me show you how to beat procrastination, permanently, with this free sneak peek

inside **TAoL**'s ultimate productivity primer. [Download your free chapter →](#)

3. **Stuck? Grab a 90-Day TRACKTION Planner...** Get the tool thousands trust to help them take control of their time, master their habits and hit goals in every part of their lives. [Order your 90-day planner →](#)
4. **Burned out? Join the TRACKTION Community...** Take the 6-week masterclass, get weekly group coaching, find accountability partners and connect with like-minded self-starters. [Get started FREE →](#)

[Arthur Worsley](#)

I founded **TAoL** to discover and share the best wisdom on how to live long and prosper. Before that I studied Psychology, Philosophy & Physiology at Oxford and consulted at McKinsey. **Still curious?** [Learn more](#) or [take my FREE productivity quiz](#).