What Is Purpose?

To psychologists, purpose is an abiding intention to achieve a long-term goal that is both personally meaningful and makes a positive mark on the world. The goals that foster a sense of purpose are ones that can potentially change the lives of other people, like launching an organization, researching a disease, or teaching kids to read.

Our sense of purpose will change over the course of our lifetime. As we grapple with our identity as teens, settle into the responsibilities of adulthood, and make the shift to retirement, the research finds that our sense of purpose will naturally wax and wane.

Like happiness, purpose is not a destination, but a journey and a practice. That means it's accessible at any age, if we're willing to explore what matters to us and what kind of person we want to be—and act to become that person.

If we're able to revisit and renew our sense of purpose as we navigate milestones and transitions, suggests this research, then we can look forward to more satisfying, meaningful lives.