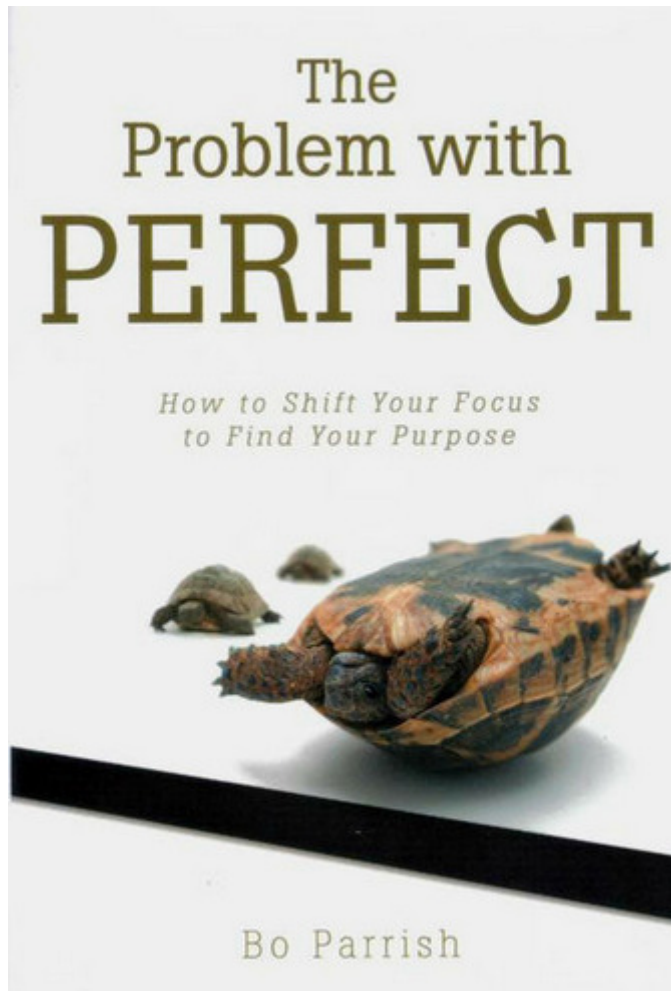


# An Enjoyable Read

## 'The Problem with Perfect' Packs a Punch

Posted: Sunday, December 13, 2015

*"The Problem with Perfect: How to Shift Your Focus to Find Your Purpose" by Bo Parrish. Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press (a Division of Thomas Nelson & Zondervan), 2015, 112 pages, \$11.95.*



"In a world that promotes perfection, it is difficult to see beyond ourselves," Bo Parrish explains near the beginning of "The Problem with Perfect: How to Shift Your Focus to Find Your Purpose," his recently released book on the virtues of a flawed existence. "We are bombarded with self-promotion messages that cause us to view perfection as possible. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram – there are no shortages of opportunities for us to project our manufactured perfection."

"The problem with social media is that we don't post reality," he writes. "Remember, we chase perfection as if it's possible. We strive, we grind, and for what? The approval of the world around us? Let me assure you that the end of that road will offer nothing more than frustration and disappointment. Perfection is a lonely path that leads to destruction. Life is too short to be focused on perfection! Unfortunately, you're the only one who doesn't see it."

I admit that when I initially received the book for review, I was more than a little skeptical of the insights that could be gleaned from this little paperback with such a pretentious title. The ground Parrish covers has been plowed

many times; what could possibly be gained from revisiting yet another volume from the ever-expanding "self-help" section of virtually any bookstore in this country.

Given my innate cynicism, you can imagine my astonishment as I began to delve into the mind of someone who has arguably overcome more in his relatively short life than most of us who are much older have had (or will ever have) to endure. I was reminded of one of my favorite lines from "Raiders of the Lost Ark," the 1981 film featuring Harrison Ford: "It ain't the years, it's the mileage." The assessment probably applies to Parrish's life as much as it did to that of world explorer Indiana Jones. Sure, he is reinventing the wheel to some degree, but it's the way he goes about it that's refreshing. Certainly many of the anecdotes and references to other works he includes (and there are several) will appeal to a diverse audience.

As an example, consider the following passage from “The Worth of the Wait,” the sixth chapter: “In her book ‘Mindset,’ Dr. Carol Dweck talks about two types of people in life – those with a closed mind-set and those with a growth mind-set. Closed-minded people are quick to defend themselves, believing that their abilities are fixed and have no potential to develop. These are the people with the greatest tendencies toward impatience and intolerance. On the other hand, those with the growth mind-set see adversity as advantageous, preferring to view setbacks and obstacles as opportunities. Every point of criticism becomes a classic case for growth.”

To reiterate, nothing about this book is new or even particularly distinctive. The person who thinks they have it made is suddenly faced with some seemingly insurmountable challenge, which ultimately proves to be the defining event in their life. What distinguishes the re-telling of this now-familiar story, however, is the way Parrish connects the dots between his personal trials and tribulations and the universal lessons he discovers hidden within them. It is his ability to use individual circumstance to uncover something compelling about what it means to be human that sets this testament to the power of perseverance apart from its contemporaries.

“Passion is something we are all born with but so few of us actually live,” Parrish explains in “Passion Pays,” the ninth chapter and one of my favorites. “It is much easier to see in the younger version of ourselves. Passion takes risks without worry of consequence. Passion speaks of possibility rather than reality.”

“The problem is that we have allowed the world to throttle that which makes us feel most alive,” he adds. “Rather than pursuing passion with fierce abandon, we opt for the socially acceptable versions of ourselves. This is no way to live, but sadly, most of us fall into it. Why are we so obsessed with the practical? Sadly, we value conformity over creativity. You are the only person on the face of the earth who can do what only you can do. Yet we insist on finding the path of least resistance, the one that allows us to blend in rather than be ourselves.”

I could not agree more.

Structurally, the book consists of an introduction followed by 10 relatively brief chapters arranged in a progression paralleling the author’s persuasive line of reasoning. Since the effort does not follow the usual parameters normally associated with a traditional research framework, there are only a few references listed at the conclusion of the main text, and all of these are Web-based. But this does not really constitute a weakness as “The Problem with Perfect” was never intended as a scholarly contribution. The literary style Parrish employs can best be described as a vibrant fusion of no-holds-barred autobiography and inspirational allegory. The reader is left with little doubt that the profound principles he lays bare are real and dynamic.

Parrish is an elite triathlete who is routinely sponsored by Timex, Powerbar, Newton Running, Trek Bicycles and similar companies. He is in demand as a keynote and motivational speaker. His professional accomplishments include setting up a marketing department for Dorsey Wright and Associates, an investment research company. A member of the Crohn’s and Colitis Foundation Association Speakers Bureau, he also serves as a personal coach to entrepreneurs and athletes. Although his life story has been featured in several national media outlets, this is his first foray into the publishing world. “I am a survivor of a near-death experience,” Parrish notes on his website/blog, [bo-parrish.com](http://bo-parrish.com). “In the spring of 2006, I nearly lost my life to a 15-year battle with Crohn’s disease. My body had shut down due to a ruptured colon and a miraculous surgery allowed me to survive.”

In the final analysis, I thoroughly enjoyed reading how Parrish overcame everything life threw at him to become who he is today. My guess is many others would, too.

— Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.