

“Purpose”

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“Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now, I’m found. ’twas blind, but now I see.”

It was the 1700s. John Newton was a nasty human being deeply involved in slave trade. He was a ruthless businessman, the master of a slave ship, and a heartless participant in the evils of slavery. One could step back and say that Newton was “lost”!

He was lost in a life that was contrary to God’s Will. But our story doesn’t end on this sad note. John Newton was also “found” by the life-changing grace of God! Claimed by a new purpose, his conversion led him to follow Christ by becoming an Anglican priest, and a witness to the horror of slave trade.

Newton would go on to write the loved hymn, “Amazing Grace,” speaking of the human struggle of being lost in the world, but being found by the all-encompassing grace of God!

A number of years ago, as a congregation, we read the book, *The Purpose Driven Life* by Pastor Rick Warren. It was a bestseller not only in religious circles, but across the country. And while some might argue some theological differences, we can’t argue the raw nerve it seemed to touch.

People Are Looking for a Sense of Purpose and Deeper Meaning to Life! Many people are feeling lost because they don’t have a clue, and are walking around aimlessly. There’s a lack of a felt or identified purpose. They’re lost!

No matter what one’s success or economic stature, emptiness and lack of purpose can haunt the busiest of people. The cry of our heart is often a cry for meaning! We just want to be wanted and needed! We want to fit in and be important to something!

We’re Looking for a Life Filled with Purpose!

Open to Luke 15. These “Outsiders”—were on the fringe of society and needed a sense of belonging. They were all drawing close to listen to the words Jesus spoke. Look at verses 1-2, “*Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”*

By the Pharisees and Scribes response to Jesus being with these people shows how they weren’t liked much at all! The hated Romans were the ones who set the tax, and they used Jews to collect the tax for them in the Jewish areas. These tax collectors many times were dishonest and were hated by the people!

As we look at these two verses we see a crowd hungry for God, thirsty for words that could soothe exposed nerves. The people were longing for God’s healing grace! Jesus clearly extends a heart full of compassion for those whose hearts feel lost. You see, Jesus came for people like these.

Michael Yaconelli shows this kind of love in his book, *Messy Spirituality—God’s*

Annoying Love for Imperfect People. During World War II, in an intense battle, one of the American soldiers was killed. His comrades didn't want to leave his body on the battlefield and decided to give him a Christian burial.

They remembered a church just behind the front lines whose grounds included a small cemetery surrounded by a white fence. They set out for the church arriving just before sunset.

"A priest, responded to their knocking. His face, deeply wrinkled and tan, was the home to fierce eyes that flashed wisdom and passion. *"Our friend was killed in battle,"* they blurted out, *'and we wanted to give him a church burial.'*

"I'm sorry," the priest said, *'but we can only bury those of the same faith here.'* Weary after many months of war, the soldiers simply turned to walk away. *'But,'* the old priest called after them, *'you can bury him outside the fence.'*

Exhausted, the soldiers dug a grave and buried their friend just outside the white fence. They finished after nightfall. They next morning, the group raced back to the little church for one final good-bye to their friend. When they arrived, they couldn't find the gravesite. Tired and confused, they knocked on the door of the church. They asked the old priest if he knew where they had buried their friend. *'It was dark last night and we were exhausted. We must have been disoriented.'*

A smile flashed across the old priest's face. *"After you left last night, I could not sleep, so I went outside early this morning and I moved the fence."* Yaconelli goes on to write: *"Jesus did more than move the fence; he tore it down! No wonder He made the Scribes and Pharisees nervous. Fence makers do not like their fences torn down".*

In some ways we're all outsiders just like the people in Luke 15! We're all outsiders drifting, lost, and looking for a life filled with purpose! **Jesus came for Outsiders. Like Us!** Jesus demonstrates His love by extending God's grace to outsiders—to the likes of the John Newtons of the world, to old priests and exhausted soldiers, to you, to me!

Just like the priest, **Jesus Moves Fences. Jesus Breaks Down Walls. Jesus Excludes No One!** The purpose of Jesus' earthly ministry was to bring all into the Kingdom of God. As His Commission from Matthew 28 says, *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* Our mission as His ambassadors is to share Him and bring others into His Kingdom! **Our Purpose is to Save the Lost.**

Open to Luke 19. What happened with the tax collectors and sinners in Luke 15 also happened with the tax collector, Zacchaeus. Verses 5-7, *"And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."*

As we follow God's purpose for our lives, we're not always going to be accepted by everyone! Some won't understand why we're spending time with certain people! But isn't that what Jesus did? We need to follow His example as we seek and save the lost! We need to **Care For Them**. They're important to Jesus Christ, and they need to be important to us! Instead of avoiding them, we need to be open and show compassion and care for them.

We need to **Fellowship With Them**. Jesus excluded no one, and we can't either! Just because they're not like us, or they're different, doesn't mean we shouldn't include them. By everything we say and do, we need to **Show Them Jesus Christ!** In everything we say and do, people need to see how we've changed because of His presence in our hearts and lives!

Everyone's welcome to be found, to find one's place with all others because of God's amazing love and grace! With that promise, we find new energy and purpose! We're **Saved by Grace and Created to Love**. That's what Jesus' love has called us to do! That's our purpose! That's what living Lent with purpose as people of the Resurrection is all about.