

FULL BLOWN PURPOSE

Everybody has heard of the book. When Rick Warren brought out the *Purpose Driven Life*, it hit such a chord that it became the book of the world when released.

His first line in the book ***“It’s not about you,”*** hit a deep chord with many generations who want to live bigger than themselves. In fact, over the last decade, Australians have become even more motivated around their spiritual lives. Most Australians want to have a strong spiritual life.

What they mean by that, however, is to figure out purpose and meaning from a series of different sources. A full-blown purpose in life is what we desire; it makes us happier and more fulfilled as people, and is central to a strong spiritual life.

However, this journey toward purpose is often easier said than done. Many who desire this purpose, and are actively seeking it out, are still not sure how it works. As

Ashley Brilliant put it in one of his cartoons, “It would be so much easier to play my part in life, if I simply had a copy of the script in advance.”

Our text today recounts the journey of the apostle Peter from a simple fisherman in Galilee to accepting his full blown purpose to become leader of the church in Jesus’ time. Let’s look at Luke 5:1-11 and see what it tells us about finding our purpose in this world:

1 One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, 2 he saw at the water’s edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. 3 He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.”

5 Simon answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”

6 When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. 7 So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

8 When Simon Peter saw this; he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” 9 For he and all his com-

panions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, 10 and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." 11 So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

The first thing I learn about finding purpose in our lives, is the reality that it involves small steps of faith before large ones. If faith can be defined from Hebrews 11:1 as belief in that which is not seen, or being certain of what is only hoped for, then building faith in God's purposes for our lives must happen in small steps at a time in order to learn how to trust God in our lives.

We see this right away in the encounter with Jesus. Peter is a fisherman by trade, and is an expert at fishing on the Sea of Galilee where he lived. What he knew, is when and where commercial fishing is best.

On the Sea of Galilee, fishing is best at night and along the shallow shelf near the shore. That is why Peter had been fishing all night the night before this event takes place, although he did not catch any fish.

It is predictable that he is exhausted, and I even wonder if he might have fallen asleep while Jesus was talking to the crowd.

After the sermon, Jesus tells Peter that they are going to go into the middle of the lake in the middle of the day to put down the nets. Peter, rightly so, is very sceptical of this idea, but takes a small risk of trust and lets down the nets to catch fish.

For most Christians, this is where finding purpose begins - with small steps of trust in what you think God is asking you to do. Small steps of trust begin to build faith in our lives, and, of course, for Peter, the boat was overflowing with fish.

These small steps, and God's faithfulness, begin to help us trust, but often times (like in Peter's case) it also exposes a deeper set of needs in our lives.

When Peter saw the miracle before him, he fell to his knees and said to Jesus, "*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man.*"

The grace of this moment had exposed Peter's deeper shame and guilt. He had not been a faithful follower of

God, and in the wake of this great move of God, he felt unworthy.

Notice that God does not move an inch. In fact, as Peter acknowledged his condition, Jesus told him to fear not, and then began to reveal his greater purpose in life - to be a fisher of men.

Which brings me to the second insight of this text.

In order to genuinely get us to prioritize the agendas and purposes God wants for our lives, many times we have to encounter the grace and love of God in a deeper way.

God is asking for total obedience, but as the Scripture puts it, ***“They, who have been forgiven much, love much.”***

Jesus many times has to expose deeper needs inside of us in order for us to experience in a deeper way the power of God to save and redeem us. We then begin to live for God as Peter did - all out - leaving everything else behind.

The third point I find wonderful in this text is the ability for the Holy Spirit to use our backgrounds, even when we were not faithful or following God, and redeem these gifts, talents, and passions for God.

Peter had built up a lot of instincts about being a good fisherman. Some of those instincts would transfer when he became a “fisher of men.”

As I help people identify their gifts and talents, I watch God redeem things from our backgrounds and use them for the kingdom of God.

I remember one phone call I received where a woman was inquiring about God’s plan for her life. She had become a Christian about a week earlier, and was now regretting all those years that she did not follow Jesus.

I reassured her of this point from Peter’s life—that God does not start completely over, but uses those developed gifts and talents for the kingdom of God.

Another great story is about a friend who for years was dealing drugs. He eventually got caught. It was after this that he became a Christian. When I met him, however, I

realized that he had tremendous organizational talent that he had been using for the wrong kingdom for a long time.

Over the years I knew him, I watched God take this same organizational talent and put it to use for His purposes.

So how do we begin the journey of finding purpose?

- 1.** First, begin to act on the small things for which God is asking you to trust.
- 2.** Second, be ready for God to deepen your need for God and the love and grace you receive as it motivates you to follow God wholeheartedly.
- 3.** And finally, expect God to redeem things you have done even outside of your life as a Christian in the purposes God has for you.

Thanks be to God for the love and grace given in his son Jesus, and for his Holy Spirit that empowers each and every one of us to live in union with his purpose...through the unique gifts that we have each been given.

Amen!