

DON'T BE TURNED FROM YOUR LIFE'S PURPOSE

Second in a series by Dr. Rick Perrin on *Lessons for Life* from Luke 4:16-30

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.” Luke 4:18-19

Today when you got up you turned on a light and didn't think much about it. You owe your electric lights to one man's grudge and determination. In 1876 Thomas Edison was enjoying his first commercial success—it had something to do with telegraph wires—and was plowing his initial profits into the world's first research facility in Menlo Park, New Jersey. The start-up costs were substantial and he was overextended, paying five dollars a day to keep his creditors at bay. It was at that inopportune time that the representative from the gas company arrived, toured the factory, and promptly announced that the company was turning off the gas that kept Edison's lights burning.

That made Edison mad. He wrote, *“I read up on gas technology and economics and decided I would [see] if electricity couldn't be made to replace gas and give them a run for their money.”* It would require being mad for a long time. First, Edison had to invent a long-burning incandescent light bulb. That process took four years of experimentation as he doggedly tried out one material after another in search of a workable filament. At last he secured a patent on January 27, 1880. Then he had to construct a delivery system by stringing wires around a section of New York City and lighting the buildings. He formed General Electric to market electric lights. But he wrote, *“I was so poor an economist that I didn't hurt [the gas companies] at all except lately—40 years.”* (*Forbes*, January 28 2008, 18) Think of it. A forty year revenge!

Last Sunday I began a series of studies I'm calling *Lessons for Life*, based on the teaching and example of Jesus. Today is lesson number two: *Don't be turned from your life's purpose*. Please open your Bible to Luke 4. According to verses 14-15, after Jesus had defeated Satan's temptations in the wilderness, he went to Galilee, set up a headquarters in the fishing town of Capernaum, and began to preach on Saturdays in the synagogues around the area. News about him spread and popular reaction was favorable. We are not told so directly, but verse 23 suggests that Jesus was also performing miracles of healing and perhaps casting out demons. Eventually, verse 16 tells us, Jesus arrived in his home town of Nazareth where they invited him to preach at the synagogue. Today if you go to Nazareth, you can see the foundation stones of the synagogue which are located under the Church of the Annunciation. As a boy Jesus had attended school there and learned the Scriptures. In verses 16-30 we'll observe what happened in Nazareth on the day he returned, and we'll discover **1. The purpose that drove Jesus' life, 2. The pressures that can turn a person from his life's purpose, and 3. The principles that can keep you on course.**

1. The purpose that drove Jesus' life. Verses 16-17 give us a small look at what worship in first century synagogues was like. In the congregation men sat on one side, women on the other. The preacher stood up to read from the Bible. The president of the synagogue or the scribe opened the ark where the parchment scrolls were kept, selected

the proper one, and unrolled it to the appointed passage. On this particular Sabbath the reading was from Isaiah 61. Jesus read the lesson and handed the scroll back to the official. According to custom, he then sat down to teach from the Word of God.

Luke gives us the Greek translation of the Hebrew, called the Septuagint. This accounts for the slightly different wording if you read the same verses from the book of Isaiah. The passage Jesus read was the first two verses, and he used them as a statement of his own life's purpose. *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord."* (v 18-19) The passage is speaking about what God would do for the people of Israel when they returned from exile in Babylon. More to the point, this is a description of what the Messiah would do when he came. And in particular, it is a description of heaven, for these words have not yet been fulfilled in their entirety.

Notice several things. First, the Messiah says, *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me."* Jesus had recently come from his baptism by John the Baptist. On that occasion, as he emerged from the Jordan River, the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove fluttered down and rested on his shoulder, and the voice of God spoke out of the sky, *"You are My beloved Son, in You I am well pleased."* (Luke 3:22) And then the Messiah states his life purpose. He is going to preach the gospel, which is literally good news, to the poor. The poor are not only those with few earthly possessions, but they are those who are spiritually impoverished. He is going to release those in captivity, not just those who are physically imprisoned, but those who are held captive by their sins. He was coming to set sinners like you and me free from the judgment that we deserve for our sins. Do you long to be forgiven? The Savior has come for you! On the cross Jesus died to pay for sin, receiving the wrath of God in our place. He is going to make the blind see. Jesus would heal those who were physically blind. But more than that, he came to bring alive those who are lost in spiritual darkness and enable them to see and know the true God. He is going to raise up those who are beaten down by life. If your life is full of unhappiness, if you face problems for which you have no solutions, he will pick you up. He has come to proclaim the blessing of God on those who do not deserve it. Jesus read all of this. Then he sat down and said to the people, *"Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."* (v 21) Jesus says this is why he came. It was the greatest purpose on earth--the salvation of the human race, the rescue of you and your family.

2. The pressures that can turn a person from his life's purpose. As soon as Jesus stated his life's purpose, he confronted three pressures to abandon his purpose. We face them too. The first is, **settle for the approval of others.** Notice what Luke tells us in verse 22 about the initial reaction of the people. *"And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips."* Each of us desires to be liked by other people. Some people reveal this in a strange way. They so fear being hurt by the disloyalty or rejection of other people, that they push others away. Some people want so badly to be liked that they will do anything to get it, act one way with one set of people and the opposite way with a different group of people. Years ago I tried to counsel a young woman who was very promiscuous. She professed to be a

Christian, and came to church on Sunday mornings. But no matter how great her remorse and resolve, the night before she always gave in to whatever fellow she was with. She wanted to be loved, to find approval. Politicians are like this. They've been crisscrossing our state, and each has been telling us what he thinks we want to hear. Some of them say, "It's time to change things." Others peddle their programs or their solutions to the problems real or imagined that we're facing as a nation. They want our approval, want us to vote for them. But when we send them to Washington or the State House or the Town Council, they have few core values. They flip flop from side to side. We can't count on them. In Nazareth the people's first response was to like Jesus. But if he gave in to them they'd turn him from his life's purpose.

There is a second pressure that can turn us from our life's purpose: **Sell yourself to the highest bidder.** Someone has written a book about how the people in churches relate to each other. The author says that there are lots of unspoken deals: You give me access to power, I'll give you my support. You give me entrance to a certain group within the church, I'll be your friend. You give me recognition and honor, and I'll sing in the choir or lead a church ministry. This is typical of many of our social relationships. For Jesus it went like this. He came to Nazareth having gained fame in the other cities of Galilee. As he sat before the congregation he could look out and see his old—what shall I call him?—his old Saturday school teacher. He could see friends of his mom and dad. He could see pals he'd hung around with when he was a boy. He could see members of his family. Verse 21 tells us that they said to each other. "*Is this not Joseph's son?*" Can you hear the pride in that expression? "He's one of us! He's making a name for himself! When he tells the newspapers where he's from he'll say, 'Nazareth!'" And that's us!" Home town boy makes good. The people of Nazareth would share the glory. So if Jesus brought fame to them, they'd give support to him. All he had to do to maintain their support was to keep doing good. To perform a few miracles would be especially good. They wanted to see the same amazing works he'd done in other places.

This sort of unspoken agreement is so common. An older man marries a young trophy wife. He gives her money and prestige. She makes him the envy of other men. An employee sucks up to the boss and gets a promotion. The boss gets a dedicated servant who does whatever he wants. A Christian worker desires things other believers have, so he postures himself as a victim. Immediately the people who need a victim to make them feel important shower him with gifts and special privileges. It used to be that stores would give discounts to ministers, presumably because they were so poorly paid. My first boss said he never accepted discounts because he didn't want anyone owning him. If Jesus wasn't careful, he could sell out to the people of Nazareth. Then he'd no longer be free to carry out his life purpose, unless they agreed.

A third pressure that can turn us from our life purpose is, **surrender to your enemies.** Jesus wasn't going to settle for the approval of others, and he wouldn't sell himself to the highest bidder. So now the congregation revealed who they really were. Verses 28-29 tell us, "*All in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; and they rose up and cast Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff.*" There is indeed

a high hill and a cliff at Nazareth. As a boy Jesus undoubtedly stood on that cliff and looked across to Mt. Carmel where Elijah had conducted his great contest with the prophets of Baal. In between was the Plain of Jezreel where so many battles had been fought and so much of Bible history had unfolded. Now the mob dragged Jesus to the brink of the cliff. In the crowd many old friends, people he had admired as a boy. Now they wanted, if not to kill him outright, at least to inflict grievous bodily injury.

When people don't get what they want, they often resort to naked threats. In the church elders or staff often wonder what will happen if we call someone to account for some sin or other. If he rebels, how many people will he take with him? In my church in Baltimore we had to deal with the associate pastor for what he was doing or not doing. In retaliation, he literally split the church. So there is always the unspoken threat, "I'll destroy you or your work if you don't do what I want." And sometimes that happens. It can be like that in a marriage. One partner threatens to destroy the family if the other does not give in to what he or she wants. Kids do this to their parents. You've seen two-year-olds throw a tantrum in a supermarket when the mother can't discipline him. So she bribes him with candy or whatever else he wants. Teachers face this kind of threat. Give a student the grade he deserves and you have parents coming down on you promising to destroy your career. There is only one way to keep your life's purpose—don't surrender to your enemies. Jesus stated his life purpose. The people of Nazareth pressured him to compromise it. They do that to us.

3. The principles that can keep you on course. We need to see how Jesus dealt with the pressures. Let me point out three principles we learn from him. First, **restate your mission.** In verses 24 he said to the people of Nazareth, "*Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his home town.*" The people in Nazareth were demanding that Jesus do for them what he was doing in other cities. But Jesus reminded them that he was a prophet. Prophets don't tell people what they want to hear. They tell them what they need to hear. Jesus had come to save the souls of men, not to perform for his former neighbors. So he restated his life purpose. What he preached was the means to fulfilling his role as Messiah. If we are going to maintain our life's purpose, we also must keep repeating what our purpose and goal in life is. The Rolls Royce company says its purpose is to build the world's finest automobile. There is a story in the hallowed history of the Rolls Royce organization. A man bought a new Rolls and was driving in the Alps when the car broke down. He found a telephone and called the company who promised to send a service representative immediately to fix it. The company rep arrived within twenty-four hours, replaced the malfunctioning part, and the man drove on. A few weeks later the man returned to England, but he did not receive a bill for the work. He called the company. The Rolls people searched their files and replied, "We're sorry sir. We have no record of any work being done on your car." "But that's impossible," said the man. "You sent a representative all the way to the Alps!" "Sir," came the reply. "You don't understand. Rolls Royces don't break down." Restate your mission.

Second, **revise your game plan.** Instead of staying in Nazareth and blessing his former friends and family, Jesus reminded the people in verses 25-27 how when the prophet Elijah was in danger, God sent him to stay with and be taken care of by a pagan

Canaanite woman in Zarephath. And of all the people suffering from leprosy in Israel, God sent only one to the prophet Elisha be healed-- the Syrian general Naaman, Israel's enemy. So Jesus would go to those who would believe in him, to those who would welcome salvation. Ultimately it was to the Gentiles, to people without God, that he would send the gospel. In 1943 a U. S. troop ship with 1500 American soldiers on board was steaming in a convoy across the north Atlantic. The ship was torpedoed by a German submarine, and it sank in about fifteen minutes. On the ship were four chaplains. One of them was Clark Poling, the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Schenectady, NY. Poling had intended to accompany these soldiers to Europe, to guide them, minister to them, and to lead as many as he could to know Jesus. Now he had to change his game plan. As the ship was sinking, the chaplains gave up their life preservers to men who had none, and Poling spoke to many in those final brief moments about eternal life, leading some to faith in Christ. Then the four chaplains linked arms and went down with the ship. Congress created a special medal to honor their sacrifice. Sometimes, to stay on course with your life's purpose you must change your game plan. That's what Jesus did.

Third, **retreat from danger**. Jesus didn't try to persuade the people from Nazareth. He didn't argue with them. He didn't get into a fist fight with them. Verse 30 sums up what he did. "*But passing through their midst, He went His way.*" He slipped out of the mob's grasp and left town. Sometimes that's what we also must do. Sometimes you must stand and fight to prevent the wicked from triumphing. But sometimes you retreat to fight another day. I've known people who love fighting. They persuade themselves they are carrying out their life's purpose by their battles. But if that's all you do, you never have time for God to use you. So, sometimes you go to the place where God will bless your work as you serve him. Jesus was wise enough to know when to fight and when to leave. We must learn that too if we keep to our life purpose.

We've considered the life purpose of Jesus. It was to save the lost. Have you been saved by him? He came for you. Will you respond to his call and receive by faith the payment he made on the cross for your sin, and begin to follow him? We've considered the pressures that can turn us away from our life's purpose. And we've watched Jesus as he stayed the course. But now I must ask, what is your life's purpose? Do you have one? Ultimately, the most important purpose in any person's life is to serve Jesus Christ. There are many ways to do that. This involves the Christian doctrine of vocation or calling. God calls you to serve Christ in your family, as a godly parent to your children. He calls you to serve your husband or wife and to help the other to become all that God intends. Husbands and wives may serve God together in work in the church, or in evangelism, or in service to the suffering people of the world. But your life's purpose can also be found in your occupation. It may be a humble job, perhaps in a service industry, for example. Your purpose is to give good service to others in the name of Christ. Or it may be in some noble cause. God calls us to have a life purpose, and then to follow that purpose through to the very end of life so that he receives the glory.

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