

“Prodigal vs. Purpose”

Have any of y'all seen the animated movie, “Cars”? At the beginning of the movie, “Cars,” a rookie race car called Lightning McQueen is trying to win this big race called the Piston Cup. Lightning McQueen is very arrogant and proud and acts like he doesn't need anybody. So in this big race he refuses to let his pit crew change his tires. The announcer calls what McQueen is doing “gas and goes.” If McQueen were listening he would hear the announcer go on to say, that's a recipe for, “**short term gain; long term loss.**” In the story of the Prodigal Son it is the same kind of thing. The younger son is fixated on a short term gain without a thought to the long term loss.

What is at odds here are the Prodigal Son's father's intended purpose for the inheritance, and the prodigal son's short sighted lust for immediate gratification. The father had worked hard all of his life to acquire land, and animals and crops. That land supported the Father and his family including the Prodigal son. Now the Prodigal son wanted his portion of the inheritance so he could go and do what he wanted with it. What did the Prodigal Son do with that money? (pause) He squandered it on loose living. Do y'all know what the word Prodigal means? The word prodigal doesn't mean to run away, or to be lost. The word Prodigal means “**one who wastes money.**”<sup>1</sup>

Can y'all think of some ways you waste money? (pause) We kinda fall into two categories. On the one hand there are those of us who are living on or just past what we make. There is no savings. We fall into that **50%** of Americans who have less than **\$25,000** dollars socked away for retirement. We have on average \$4000 dollars in credit card debt, and we are making the minimum payment on everything. We eat out more than we should and we are just hoping we don't have a major medical expense, or a car repair, or the refrigerator goes out. Many of us may have even fallen into that place where there is an emergency. There is no money left. There may even not be any credit left. What do we do? (pause) This is that place where people hear the preacher is gonna talk about money and they decide they are not showing up to church because who wants to be beaten up about giving to the church when we need help ourselves?

On the other hand there are those of us who are not hurting. We are living below our means. Maybe we have a little savings, but we find ourselves wasting money. Have you ever looked at your tax return and thought, “**Where did all of my money go?**” I think what happens is we either get comfortable or lazy and think I don't have to sweat this so I can buy the name brand Pop Tarts, or go to Starbucks, or eat out more frequently because I do not have to worry about every nickel, dime and quarter. In either situation we are just as Prodigal as the Prodigal son because we waste money.

Let's think about the difference a small change could make. By a show of hands how many of y'all eat out once a week? How many of y'all eat out twice a week? How many of y'all eat out three times a week or more? How much money do y'all think we would save if we ate out just one less time a week? (pause) Hmm... Let's find out. I looked up the menu for Rick's and I picked something I like to get there; the chopped BBQ plate. The BBQ plate at Rick's is \$7.75. If I add a Cheerwine for \$1.25 that brings my total to \$9.00 before tax. Now for the sake of argument let's say most of us are not going to eat out alone so we'll conservatively say we spend **\$18.00** on a meal for two at Rick's before tax and tip. If we do not eat out one time a week at Rick's we save \$18.00. \$18.00 times 52 weeks in a year comes to \$936 dollars a year. That number \$936 sounds familiar. (pause) Do y'all remember last week when we talked about the average annual income in Denton is

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Hamilton, “Enough: Discovering Joy Through Simplicity and Generosity”, (Abingdon Press: Nashville 2009) 38.

**\$47,997.70** , which breaks down to **\$923** a week? By eating out one less time a week we could save more than a full week's pay by the end of the year. (pause) That is what making a small change and thinking a little bit ahead can do.

Here's a question. What should a long term goal look like? Or perhaps a better question is, "What should our purpose be?" In the book of Genesis, chapter 12, verses 1-3, the Lord God, Almighty lays out God's purpose for a man named Abram. In Hebrew Abram means father which is ironic because Abram and his wife were in their 80's or 90's; well passed the years where they could have children, and they had no children. Abram was the father of no one. God comes to Abram and says;

"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth will bless themselves" (Gen 12:1-3 RSV).

God handed Abram a purpose. Through faithfulness to that purpose God changed Abram, and changed his name to Abraham – "**Father of Nations.**" Abraham begot Isaac. Isaac begot Jacob. God changed and renamed Jacob as well. Where Abram became the father of nations; Jacob; the "Grabber," became Israel, "he who wrestles with God and wins." When we live into our purpose we grow in our relationship with God. Through the challenging and the testing we are changed, and we become more like God.

Late in 1739 a group of people came to John Wesley and asked him to pray with them and to teach them how to flee the wrath to come. That's where that phrase comes from in our Methodist History. These people came to John Wesley, hungry and with a purpose. They wanted to grow closer to God. John Wesley gave them three rules to live by: Do Good. Do No Harm. Stay In Love with God. As Christians are we living into our purpose? Are we hungry for God? Do we want to grow closer to God? Or do want to continue satisfying ourselves? Shouldn't our purpose be to seek God with all of our heart, with all of our soul and with all of our might? I am pretty sure if we think about it our finances should be included in trying to draw closer to God. John Wesley said we should put our money to work this way. (pause) Are you ready? Okay. Here we go. **Make all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can. (repeat x3)**

This was Wesley's example. In 1731 Wesley began to limit his spending. That year Wesley made 30 pounds, and needed 28 pounds to cover his expenses. So Wesley saved 2 pounds to give to the poor. The next year Wesley made 60 pounds. Wesley decided to live on 28 pounds and to save 32 pounds to give to the poor. The next year Wesley's salary doubled again to 120 pounds. Wesley continued to live on 28 pounds; saving 92 pounds to give to the poor. Wesley continued this practice throughout his life. One year Wesley made 1400 pounds. He lived on 30 pounds and gave 1370 pounds to the poor. When Wesley died the only money mentioned in his will were the coins in his pockets and dresser drawers. Wesley did not die in poverty, and by the end of his life Wesley had given away close to 30,000 pounds. In addition to this Wesley left behind a legacy to all of us who call ourselves Methodists that there is a way to live our lives that puts God first. Are we living into that legacy? Are we drawn together by that same driving purpose to put God first in all we do – even in how we spend our money? If not, what is cutting the tie that binds?

In Jesus name,  
Amen