

# Source of Love

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, if you would take your Bibles out and turn to Luke chapter 7, which is on page 63, that would be a great help. Luke 7, we begin at verse 29. You may know that the best-selling non-fiction book in North America for the last six years was written by a Christian pastor who works a few hundred miles down the road. It's called The Purpose Driven Life.

It offers 40 days of readings by which you find God's purpose for you. It's sold over 20 million copies. I am not officially recommending it, but it has had an amazing impact. I was in Atlanta in March in 2005 when in the courtroom in Atlanta downtown that day, a fellow who was on trial overpowered a guard, got the gun, shot and killed a judge, shot and killed a deputy, shot and killed a court reporter and did the same to a federal agent outside. He escaped, took a woman hostage for seven hours and over those seven hours the woman gained the confidence of Brian Nichols by reading to him from the Bible and from The Purpose Driven Life. She also gave him some crystal meth, but that's a different sermon altogether.

When she was interviewed, she said it was really reading from The Purpose Driven Life that turned Nichols around. Her name is Ashley Smith. She said she read him this chapter and said to him that God has a purpose for you in prison. Even if you give yourself up, even if you go to prison for the rest of your life, which he has, she said to him, God has a purpose for you in prison. And so he gave himself up and he gave her up unharmed. Now I mention that because purpose, of course, is very, very important to us as human beings. No purpose, no hope, no purpose, no aim in life. It's purpose that gives coherence. Purpose tells us who we are. And if you look down with your eyes at page 63 at verses 29 to 30, Luke breaks into the story for the first time since he opened the gospel and speaks about the purpose of God, it's an astounding moment and the translators don't know what to do with it and so they put brackets around it. When you see brackets in the English translation, it's often something more important. You know in the old Greek dramas, when the author wanted to address the audience, he would have the chorus which was facing each other, take off their masks, turn and face the audience and speak directly to the audience. That's what Luke is doing here. He turns to us for the first time and he speaks about a contrast between those who accept God's purpose and those who reject God's purpose. He says on the one side are the tax collectors and all the people who justify God. They vindicate God because they were baptized by John. In other words, they repented for the forgiveness of their sins. That's how you accept God's purpose.

On the other side, he says in verse 30, are the Pharisees and lawyers who refuse John's baptism. They refuse to repent. They refuse to accept the forgiveness of sins and they reject God's purpose for them. And Luke is so keen that we don't miss this that he turns and faces us and he says to us, this is the purpose of God for you. That you turn from your sins in repentance and that you receive the forgiveness that he's come to bring. Release forgiveness. And that is deeper and more important than marriage, money or the marketplace. Even in prison, we can know the purpose of God.

[ 4 : 1 4 ] It is that we are healed from our spiritual slavery and our sickness, that we see in Jesus Christ, the one who's come and knocked down all the boxes and we go to him. Wasn't that a great moment?

Jesus did this. You may say, yes, that's all very fine, but life is about much more than repentance and forgiveness of sins. I've got to live in the marketplace. I've got very important decisions and things to consider and people are depending on me. I'm not sure how this purpose of God fits into the marketplace.

So in verses 31 and 32, Jesus steps in and gives us a theology of the marketplace. Actually, 31 to 35. To what then shall I compare the men and women of this generation? What are they like?

They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another. We piped to you and you did not dance. We wailed and you did not weep. Jesus says there are two features in life in the marketplace which have the power to deceive us about the purpose of God. The first is a shallow, superficial and surface way of looking at life.

It's all about striking up a tune and dancing or weeping and wailing at the agreed moment. The second thing about life in the marketplace is it works by obligation and debt.

[ 5 : 42 ] When we strike up our tune, you have to dance. When we wail, you have to weep or else you will be demonised. And if you live for a purpose that's different, like the purpose of God, you will dance to a different tune.

This is very important. Dancing to a different tune or living under the purpose of God doesn't mean doom and gloom and being solemn. It means laughing, but laughing at different things and at different times.

It means weeping, but weeping at different things than necessarily the marketplace does. It means having a different priority and a different horizon. It means going deep and not skimming along the surface of life, you see.

See, John the Baptist, he didn't eat, he didn't drink, he was ascetic, but that was because that was the purpose of God for him. But Jesus came eating and drinking and they said, well, he's a glutton, obviously, but that was God's purpose for him.

And the children in the marketplace were deeply offended by both John the Baptist and by Jesus because they did not dance to the same tune. The marketplace works on this obligation and debt.

[ 6 : 49 ] When we strike up a tune, you have to dance. And if you don't conform, the marketplace says to us, you do not, you did not, you did not.

And they measure you by whether you dance when they say dance and weep when everyone else does. But if you dance to a different tune, in some ways, in some places, you will be regarded to be a deviant.

You'll laugh at the wrong things, you'll weep at the wrong things, and you'll be misunderstood because the purpose of God is deeper. Now notice, please, that Jesus never encourages us to withdraw from the marketplace.

It's precisely because how deeply he and John the Baptist are engaged with people in the marketplace that they get into so much trouble. He's not advocating withdrawal, but he's encouraging us to engage in the marketplace, but with this deeper purpose, with the purpose of God at the centre of all we do, which means we go there and dance to a different tune.

Now if you're struggling with this, what we have next in Luke's Gospel is the most wonderful concrete illustration from verse 36 to the end of the chapter of two people who are confronted with the person of Jesus who dance to different tunes.

[ 8 : 08 ] Two people who play by different rules. One man, a Pharisee, who rejects the purpose of God, and one woman who accepts the purpose of God. One, it's wonderful really, you see in verse 36 and verse 37, Jesus is invited into the house of a Pharisee, Simon is his name, and his Pharisaicalness is very important, we're told three times about it.

He seems to have an open mind to Jesus, he's not afraid to have Jesus as a guest in his own home, and to invite guests to be there, his friends, to hear this new teacher. But no sooner does the meal start, when a woman comes in and does something which shows an absolute massive lack of good taste and good judgement.

It's almost as though she has not read the latest edition of the Pharisee Etiquette rule book. She's introduced in verse 37 as, quote, A woman of the city, a sinner, likely a prostitute, well-known prostitute.

Or should I say, an ex-prostitute. Because in verse 47 and 48, when Jesus says she's been forgiven, he says it in the past tense. He says, you have been forgiven in the past.

She's obviously had some prior contact with Jesus. But to everyone else in the room, she's both out of place and out of her mind, because there's something that's happened to her that's given her a shocking freedom.

[ 9 : 36 ] She's been released from something, and she's accepted the purpose of God. So she comes into this large room where they were reclining at table. Be thankful you live in the 21st century and don't recline at table.

It would have been very uncomfortable. They all lay in towards the middle with their feet sticking out the back. And she comes in, and she stands at Jesus' feet, and she weeps. She weeps, and she wets Jesus' feet with her tears.

And then she undoes her hair, which was quite a risky thing to do. And she wipes Jesus' feet with her hair, and then she kisses his feet. And then she takes a bottle of expensive ointment and anoints his feet.

It's beautiful. It's tactile. It's completely unselfconscious. It's courageous. And it is absolutely authentic.

It comes from a place that is too deep for anybody in the room possibly to understand. And it is a demonstration of love. And it makes Simon and his guests distinctly uncomfortable.

[10:40] And Simon's opinion of Jesus suddenly goes down. He says, this sort of display, it's obvious that we're having a quiet dinner conversation about the marketplace. Thank you very much.

Now how do we explain what's going on here? Well, at the heart of the meal, Jesus tells a little parable, which is just lovely. Verse 40. Jesus answering said to him, Simon, I have something to say to you.

And he answered, what is it, teacher? A certain creditor had two debtors. The one owed 500 denarii. The other 50. When they could not pay, he forgave them both.

Now which of them will love him more? And Simon answered, the one, I suppose, to whom he forgave more. To Jesus' point, real forgiveness leads to real love.

And great forgiveness leads to great love. And Jesus speaks the language of the marketplace. And he says there's two people in debt. One massively in debt and the other not deeply in debt.

[11:46] And it is a picture, of course, of our relation with God because we have failed to love him and to love our neighbor as we should.

And the thing about our debt, as Jesus points out, is that it is inescapable and we cannot repay it. There's nothing we can do to get out of this debt. But something happens to these two debtors that doesn't usually happen in the marketplace, although in the last couple of months it has started to happen.

And that is the debts are completely cancelled. Completely forgiven. And the word enforced, verse 42, for forgiven, has the little word grace in it.

In other words, this debtor, this creditor, he just forgives and cancels the debt for no reason except for his own graciousness. And Jesus says that's where love comes from.

Your true love cannot come out of the marketplace because the marketplace is based on an endless cycle of obligation and indebtedness and relationships are based on the ongoing calculation of what I owe you and what you owe me.

[12:58] And when I strike up the tune, if you don't dance, you're more deeply in my debt. But when our greatest debt is cancelled, our debt to God, not based on anything that I do, but based solely on his grace, it is completely and utterly transforming.

My identity is changed. I am an ex-debtor. I'm no longer a debtor. I'm utterly free. I'm liberated. And in that freedom and in that forgiveness is the birth of love.

And the greater your forgiveness, the greater your love. I think this is very important for those of us who've been Christian for some time.

The Christian growth is very rarely sudden and spectacular. It's gradual and it's very hard for you to see your own growth. You're the last person to see it usually.

Other people around you should see it and they should tell you. And if they're not telling you, come and see me afterwards. But the thing is, you don't feel like you're getting any better.

[14:06] Instead, as you grow closer to Christ and as you actually grow in love for him, you also grow more deeply in your consciousness of your own sinfulness. The two things happen at the same time.

I remember when I learnt this lesson. I was a teenager and I had a huge fight with one of my sisters, which I'd lost, like I usually did.

And we were feeling very ashamed and we came to the dinner table. And I asked my mum how she had grown so Christian and so godly in her life. My sister and I couldn't remember the last time she'd sinned.

Well, that was, yeah. And my mum was distinctly uncomfortable with the line of questioning, but I pressed her. And she began to weep. And she said to me, you have no idea how wicked my heart

is.

I was completely taken aback. And it took me time to think it through. But as I did, this is what I've learned and this is what I've seen since. That spiritual growth always goes in two directions.

[15:08] The greater you grow in actual godliness and love of the Lord Jesus, the deeper you grow in the appreciation of your own sinfulness. That is why we pray in this service, we are miserable sinners.

We're miserable because we've grown close to Christ. You know what I mean. If you are forgiven much, you will love much. If you think you are forgiven little, you will love little.

And what are we to make of Simon? Well, there are two things that the passage tells us about Simon. The first is that he is a man of shallow conviction, of surface conviction.

Yes, he's happy to have Jesus in his home. He's happy to bring out the fine china. He certainly thinks something of Jesus. He's not against Jesus. And I think Simon would say, I am an open-minded person.

He's polite. He entertains the popular idea that Jesus might be a prophet. But he's a shallow man with shallow convictions. And you can see how easily he is thrown in verse 39.

[16:12] And he gives up on the idea that Jesus might be a prophet. Because he completely misreads what the woman is doing and what Jesus is doing. Simon is the kind of person whose conviction costs him nothing.

He's never made up his mind about Jesus Christ. He can read, he's read a lot of books and he's read the religion columns in the newspapers. And he has certain opinions.

But he has no settled, life-changing conviction about Jesus Christ. And he will not be drawn into spiritual conversation. And he resents it when Jesus says at the end of the parable, Now, Simon, which one of these will love him more?

And Simon's answer is, well, I suppose the one who was forgiven more. I suppose. That is Simon's spiritual life. It's all I suppose. He's not willing to commit himself.

He wants to keep Jesus and Jesus' claims at arm's length. He does not want to be deeply involved. He wants to be private and polite and protect himself. He is the West Coast man and the West Coast woman.

[17:27] Guarded, polite, will not commit. He's embarrassed by his Christian friend at work who keeps talking about Jesus and keeps inviting him to church. And he comes to church once or twice occasionally.

And he's more embarrassed at lunch when his Christian friend raises the issue of Jesus and begins to probe and ask. And he changes the topic and conversation because he's an expert on the marketplace. He's a marketplace man with a shallow, surface way of life because he is rejecting the purpose of God.

And the second thing to say about Simon is that he is a man bound in the cycle of obligation and debt. He's a man of privilege. He's a man of status. And he knows what it is to entertain guests.

And he is appalled by the extravagance of this woman. And he can't imagine anything being important enough to let down your dignity like that in front of these, his friends.

And he completely misunderstands her actions and Jesus' actions because, you see, his world is not based on the freedom of forgiveness. It's based on debt.

[18:31] And the little parable that Jesus tells is deeply threatening to Simon's view of life because when you cancel debts, you destroy the complete infrastructure of the marketplace and all the relational obligations.

You undermine the rules. And if you've spent your life developing a network of debts and obligations and Jesus comes along and announces that he's come to bring freedom and forgiveness and cancellation of debt, it's clear that Jesus hasn't got a clue what makes the world go round.

And I think that goes some way to explaining his appalling lack of hospitality towards Jesus. You see verse 44. Therefore, turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, Do you see this woman?

I entered your house. You did not give me water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears. You did not give me a kiss, but from the time I came in, she has not ceased to kiss my feet.

You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with oil. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, were forgiven, for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.

[ 19 : 43 ] Simon thinks he's doing Jesus a favour by having him into his house. And his disregard of Jesus is astounding. He doesn't even do the basic honours for him, and it probably didn't even occur to him that he should.

Those in the marketplace say to this woman, we play this tune, do you remember back in verses 29 and 30? This is what the marketplace says to those who follow the purpose of God. You did not. You did not. And now Jesus turns to Simon and says, to Simon, you did not. You did not. You did not. I came to you, but you did not.

And on the day of judgment, there will be thousands who will hear Jesus say, you did not. You did not. You did not worship me, or serve me, or love me.

You did not. You did not. You did not take the time and energy to understand what I did for you on the cross. You did not give me your time. Your day timer is largely unaffected by the gospel.

[ 20 : 45 ] You did not. You did not bother to be openly and explicitly committed to me or to my people. You did not become a regular member of the church or of a Bible study group to serve others and grow in your discipleship.

You did not give generously to the work of the gospel. You did not let my teaching really affect you. Simon has no idea how deeply he is insulting Christ, or how much he needs the forgiveness of Christ, or that he is rejecting the purpose of God, but he is.

And what is the purpose of God for us? Verse 47, I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much.

But he who is forgiven little, loves little. It's a stunning contrast, isn't it? On the one side, the stuffy, confined, surface life of Simon, the marketplace man who rejects the purpose of God, and this extravagant, slightly embarrassing, wonderful freedom of this unnamed woman who's gone deep and understood her many sins, and grasped that she is freed, and it's begun to show in her love. She's coming to understand the purpose of God, as I said, is not sadness and solemnness and having long faces, it is laughing, but it's laughing at different stuff. It means the freedom and the joy of having no debts, of being released, of everything that I'm in bondage to, and it leads to giving ingeniously and generously, and expressing itself in spontaneous love.

[ 22 : 31 ] And I can't leave this, but just point out to you, look at the women around Jesus in chapter 8, 2 and 3. The 12 are with him, but look at the color, verse 2, also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities.

Mary called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chusa, Herod Stewart, and Susanna, and many others, and what were they doing? They provided for this group out of their means.

What a great group. Joanna is married to the chief financial officer of the province. She's a wealthy woman in her own right, a society woman, and here she is traipsing around the countryside, supporting Jesus and the crew financially, at risk to her own reputation.

She's been forgiven much, and so she loves much. How long is it since you've done something spontaneous out of love for Christ? Something extravagant. Those of us who had the privilege of going to synod last week heard the story from our brothers and sisters in the church that's just a few blocks from here, the Church of Good Shepherd, the Chinese church.

Over the last six weeks, they've raised a couple of million dollars for a new building by adding second mortgages to their homes. That's a silly thing to do in the marketplace.

[ 23 : 51 ] Right now, isn't it? It's a sign of their love. Our true spiritual state is revealed by our love for Jesus, our joyful gratitude, and what we do.

And Jesus, of course, he could have provided for himself, but in his humility, he receives this support in the same way that he joyfully receives the tears from the woman in Simon's house as the sign of love.

It would be a great tragedy, wouldn't it, to go through life skimming on the surface and missing the purpose of God, the forgiveness of our sins, missing the fact that he has come to be the divine doctor and to call us to repentance.

Here is God's purpose for each one of us, to go deep and to go high, not to skim along the top, but to commit ourselves to Jesus Christ, to find in him the freedom of forgiveness and to move from a life based on debt to a life based on love.

This is what the purpose of God is for us. So let us pray. Before Ben leads us, let me read again the words of the Collect this morning.

[ 25 : 15 ] Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people, that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of thee be plenteously rewarded through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. And we continue to pray. When I say, Lord, in your mercy, we respond with here our prayer. Almighty Father, we thank you for your word and its abiding power to transform our lives. Lord, we pray that you would ignite in us a hunger to be near to your Son.

Grant that we, like the woman at Christ's feet, would know our desperate need of your forgiveness. Fill us with that due sense of all your mercies, that our lives might be a living word of thanksgiving to you and a proclamation to the world.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Holy Father, we bless you for the synod of the previous week. We thank you for the fellowship of sister churches throughout North America.

[ 26 : 44 ] We pray that you would guide the network and its leaders as they discern the direction of this new ecclesial body. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord, we praise you for our Tinto. We thank you for those that support it sacrificially with their time and resources. We pray that you would continue to raise up faithful ministers to preach your gospel in Canada and the whole world.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Heavenly Father, we lift up to you our city, which is in desperate need of your word. Lord, we pray that we might participate in the work you've already begun here.

Give us eyes to see that work and courage to act when we are frightened or anxious. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. We pray for our friends, family, and neighbors that are suffering, whether of illness, emotional distress, financial ruin, death, divorce, or any other circumstance, that you would comfort them in times of trouble, surround them with friends, and your presence.

We particularly remember Rowena, Ben and Nancy, Paul, Mark, Lee. We pray for Mehran and for our favorable decision from the immigration panel.

[ 28 : 05 ] We pray for the Diocese of Malawi, that they would have wisdom in the choice of their new bishop. And we pray for Afghanistan, our troops there, and also for peace.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Finally, Lord, we pray for the world. We lift up to you the Congo and its war-ravaged landscape. We pray that you would bring peace there and allow its many refugees to return to their homes.

We pray for those that are suffering under the worldwide financial crisis. We ask that you help those that are out of work. We proclaim that you are the Lord of every circumstance and ask that you would teach us to trust you as our worldly security is taken from us.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. We pray all these things in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.