

The Misfit from 'A Good Man is Hard to Find' - Character Analysis

With his violent, wanton killing, the Misfit seems an unlikely source to look to for spiritual or moral guidance, but he demonstrates a deep conviction that the other characters lack. Unlike the grandmother, who simply assumes that she is morally superior to everyone else, the Misfit seriously questions the meaning of life and his role in it. He has carefully considered his actions in life and examined his experiences to find lessons within them. He has even renamed himself because of one of these lessons, believing that his punishment didn't fit his crime. Because the Misfit has questioned himself and his life so closely, he reveals a self-awareness that the grandmother lacks. He knows he isn't a great man, but he also knows that there are others worse than him. He forms rudimentary philosophies, such as "no pleasure but meanness" and "the crime don't matter."

The Misfit's philosophies may be depraved, but they are consistent. Unlike the grandmother, whose moral code falls apart the moment it's challenged, the Misfit has a steady view of life and acts according to what he believes is right. His beliefs and actions are not moral in the conventional sense, but they are strong and consistent and therefore give him a strength of conviction that the grandmother lacks. Twisted as it might be, he can rely on his moral code to guide his actions. The grandmother cannot, and in the last moments of her life, she recognizes his strength and her weaknesses. O'Connor called the Misfit a "prophet gone wrong," and indeed, if he had applied his moral integrity to a less depraved lifestyle, he could have been considered a true preacher, pillar, or teacher.