

ME AND MY INSECURITIES, part 3

I Can't Live Without It!

By Rev. Will Nelken

Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, DATE, 2006

Luke 15:8 Suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Won't she light a lamp and sweep the entire house and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ And when she finds it, she will call in her friends and neighbors and say, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost coin.' ¹⁰ In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents.

Ten drachmas was the equivalent of two weeks' or half a month's wages. But the monetary value of the missing coin was only part of her desperation.

When a Jewish girl married, she began to wear a headband of ten silver coins to signify that she was now a wife. It was the Jewish equivalent of our modern wedding ring, and it would be considered a calamity for her to lose one of those coins—like losing the diamond out of one's wedding ring—a monetary loss compounded by its sentimental value.

Insecurity

Feelings of insecurity may be triggered by many different circumstances, but, overall, insecurity is the result of harboring fear in our hearts.

Perhaps I addressed your primary brand of fear in a previous sermon. I have spoken about:

- Fear of lack ("What about me?")
- Fear of conflict ("Must we fight?")

Two others are among the most common four:

- Fear of loss ("I can't live without *that!*")
- Fear of punishment ("What's ahead for me?")

Inevitably, everybody deals with these fears. We develop various ways of dealing with them—some helpful, most ineffective. But God offers real answers to the fears you face. Let me illustrate His answer to your fear of loss.

Even things that are deemed necessary to give up can be difficult: addictions... bad habits... bad manners... bad hairdos.

But the most difficult times are those losses that seem unnecessary: loss of a loved one, loss of a job,
loss of property.

Shields

To offset this fear, people tend to develop levels of indifference (in a vain effort to hurt less), or worry, which stretches out the torment in advance of the possible event.

Just the worry about losing something precious to you can be debilitating.

In Money magazine (July, 1995), Gary Belsky wrote: "You've been given a free ticket to a football game. A snowstorm the night before makes the drive to the stadium risky. Would you go? Okay: same game, same snowstorm—except this time you paid \$100 for the ticket. Now would you go? According to University of Chicago economist Richard Thaler, people are more likely to take a risk if they paid for the ticket. But, as Thaler points out, "The fact that you spent \$100 shouldn't matter when you decide between the reward of seeing the game and the risk of getting killed." Two all-too-human tendencies come into play here. The first is the "sunk-cost fallacy"—the idea that having paid for something, you had better not waste it, no matter what the consequences. The second is "loss aversion"—the fact that people place about twice as much significance on a loss as on a gain. In other words, they are twice as unhappy about losing \$100 as they are pleased about making \$100."

There are material losses and there are also immaterial losses: the inward griefs (and their anticipatory fears) over emotional valuables, like popularity, prestige, power, friendship, and love.

Although we may dread the loss of material things, history shows that we may lose much (even what we call "everything") and still recover and move on. Inward wealth can offset material losses. But no amount of material wealth can offset the loss of inward treasures. For that, we require divine help.

The thing that rattles my cage is the irrational fear of losing my wife or children and having to face life without them. Occasionally, it wakes me at night. I have to deal with it.

Perhaps no one is exempt from such worries. The early followers of Jesus certainly had theirs.

Leaving All

In Luke 5 we encounter an unexpected transaction between Jesus and several men He met:

Luke 5:4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Now go out where it is deeper, and let down your nets to catch some fish."

⁵ "Master," Simon replied, "we worked hard all last night and didn't catch a thing. But if you say so, I'll let the nets down again."

*¹⁰ Jesus replied to Simon, "Don't be afraid! From now on you'll be fishing for people!"¹¹ And as soon as they landed, **they left everything** and followed Jesus.*

*Luke 5:27 Later, as Jesus left the town, he saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at his tax collector's booth. "Follow me and be my disciple," Jesus said to him.²⁸ So Levi got up, **left everything**, and followed him.*

They must have been captivated. Whatever they sensed in His invitation, their lives changed instantly when they responded. But over time, such impulses, however right they may have been, may suffer the ravages of second guessing.

Peter came straight to the point:

*Matthew 19:27 Then Peter said to him, "We've **given up everything** to follow you. What will we get?"*

Jesus was equally forthcoming:

Matthew 19:28 Jesus replied, "I assure you that when the world is made new and the Son of Man sits upon his glorious throne, you who have been my followers will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."²⁹ And everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or

mother or children or property, for my sake, will receive a hundred times as much in return and will inherit eternal life.

Jesus promised that they would be *"repaid many times over."* (Luke 18:30)

Sacrificial Witness

Evidently, they took Him at his word, for they continued to follow Him until their death. This is particularly notable because their deaths were not natural, but the result of persecution and torture. In fact, the enormous record of martyrs, both ancient and modern, who willingly offered themselves to death for their faith in Christ will make an astounding roll call in the day of their reward.

Perhaps more difficult than the ultimate sacrifice, are the multitude of intermediate sacrifices required of a servant of God. Many people (especially Americans) prefer to avoid the subject altogether. I say "especially Americans" because of our cultural aversion to sacrifice. Generally, we suffer from a supreme sense of entitlement. To break free from that requires the power of the Holy Spirit operating in our lives. Hear Paul's testimony:

Philippians 3:5 I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. ⁶ I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault.

⁷ I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. ⁸ Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ ⁹ and become one with him.

Philippians 1:20 For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die. ²¹ For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better.

Jim Elliott, young missionary to Ecuador, had a similar philosophy of life: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose."

Jim and the Apostle Paul both recognized that the promise of eternal life was real, and that it offered far more than the immediate value of anything in this life.

In A.D. 398, John Chrysostom was appointed patriarch of Constantinople, where his zeal for reform antagonized the Empress Eudoxia, who had him exiled. Allowed to return after a short time, Chrysostom again infuriated Eudoxia, who sent him away again. How did Chrysostom respond to such persecution? With these words:

"What can I fear? Will it be death? But you know that Christ is my life, and that I shall gain by death. Will it be exile? But the earth and all its fullness are the Lord's. Poverty I do not fear; riches I do not sigh for; and from death I do not shrink."

Because of Jesus Christ—because God raised Him from the dead—even death must yield to ultimate triumph and everlasting reward. This is a paradigm of perspective to be embraced.

God, grant us an eternal perspective of temporal affairs. Take our this-world-only blinders off. Help us to live our days in the light of eternity.

“Pie in the sky”? Well, in this case, you can have your pie and eat it, too!

Put your trust in God. Just when you sense the fear of loss beginning to paralyze you, turn to God and declare that you will trust Him to see your need and provide for you. Resist indifference and worry; both are counterproductive. Put your hope in God; though you may face many temporal disappointments along the way, He will come through with strong victory in the end.

The Worth of a Person

A lost coin is worthless. It's only in someone's hand that it becomes valuable. The same is true of people.

“Give me a coin,” Jesus said, when asked about paying taxes. “whose image is on this coin?”

“Caesar's,” was the reply.

“Then give it to Caesar,” Jesus instructed. “And in whose image have *you* been made?”

The answer, of course: God's image. But if a person is lost, without a Savior and salvation—if they don't know Jesus as Lord—although they still have value—gifts, personalities, and possibilities—they are worthless outside of His hand. Apart from Him we can do nothing to fulfill the purpose of God.

Therefore, the Holy Spirit sweeps the earth persistently in search of those who are lost. How does He do that? First, by illuminating our conscience with conviction. Then, by illuminating our mind with the revelation of Scripture. Finally, by illuminating our lives through spiritual transformation.

A great Jewish scholar has admitted that this is the one absolutely new thing which Jesus taught men about God—that he actually searched for men. The Jew might have agreed that if a man came crawling home to God in self-abasement and prayed for pity he might find it; but he would never have conceived of a God who went out to search for sinners. We believe in the seeking love of God, because we see that love incarnate in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came to seek and to save that which was lost.

Trust in His eternality (He knows the future, including yours). Trust in His goodness, His kindness toward you. Trust in His care, His promise to provide. Trust in His power, and His ability to act on your behalf.

Next week, we'll consider God's answer to the fear of punishment.