



Stepping On Dollars To Pick Up Pennies

Philippians 3:1-11

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The scripture today comes from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians. "But whatever were gains to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What's more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him."

I think what Paul is getting at in these verses is that we don't always assign things the correct value. That what I think is going to bring me joy, the things I spend so much time chasing after, maybe aren't as valuable as I think they are, and I think they're gains, but maybe in some way they're actually losses, because I don't value them correctly.

Two weeks ago, I mentioned my PhD dissertation and how you can buy dissertations, and someone actually tried to buy my dissertation, but it was \$40. None of which I would see, right? So, he didn't buy it, and I said, good, because it is so not worth it. And then he said, oh no, I'm going to try to buy it another way, maybe cheaper. I said, no, it's still not worth it. Like, maybe if it's 10 cents, maybe. But I'm not even sure about that.

And Paul's point in these verses is sort of metaphorically speaking, we're often trying to buy my dissertation, and it is so unsatisfying. And maybe we need to sacrifice some of the things we're chasing after so that we can experience the better things God wants to give us.

We're starting a new sermon series on sacrificial living and how even though sacrifice is difficult, it ultimately leads to a better, a bigger, a deeper, and a richer life. Now, that may sound like kind of an eat your broccoli and go to the dentist sermon series kind of thing, but only if we don't understand what the Bible means by sacrificial living.

Biblically, sacrificial living is not deprivation. Sacrificial living is letting go of something, often good things, so that we can experience God's better things.

Some of you know that every year, because we eat so much sugar during the holidays, my wife and I do sugar-free January. No sugar for the whole month. It's so stupid. I mean, as if January is not depressing enough. Here, let's take away more joy. Right? And especially, it's stupid especially because once it's over, right? Like once it's done, we just go back to eating a bunch of sugar. So sugar-free January always leads straight into full-on fat February. Sacrificial living is not like that. It's not difficult and pointless deprivation. With Jesus, there's always a so-that to sacrifice. I'm going to let go of this so that I can attain something better.

Plus, it's not a question of whether or not we're going to live sacrificially. We're all doing that. Many of us are exhausted because our entire lives feel like nothing but sacrifice, trying to do well at school or at work or raising kids or sports, right? Because we have all these things we think we need to be happy, and we all these things we think our kids need to be happy, good grades and lots of activities so they can go to a good college and get a good job and make lots of money and be happy. And we will make all kinds of sacrifices to get those things for ourselves and for our kids. And they're not bad things. Depending on how we use them, they can be very, very good things.

It's just what's the opportunity cost of pursuing all that stuff more than the things of God? What's the opportunity cost? What are we missing out on? Things like Sabbath rest that really restores us. Closeness as a family because we're all so busy, we don't connect. Closeness with Jesus that makes everything else pale by comparison. Our kids' self-worth coming not from their achievements but from a sense of knowing that they are loved by Jesus. The deep joy of being part of God's rescue mission to this world.

We're so focused on getting the good that we miss sometimes God's better. We're stepping on dollars to pick up pennies. Jesus calls us to a different kind of sacrificial living. And the key to living sacrificially is do you trust that God is good? Do you trust that God is good? That he loves you.

Because when we know that God loves us and wants the best for us, then we will do what he asks us to do because we know that it's gonna lead to a more abundant life because that's what he loves for us. And so often when we think about sacrificial living, we think about the sacrifice part. Oh great, now what does God want me to give up? Now what does God say I can't do? What is it now that's prohibited? But if we focus on the better things that God wants to give us, then we will willingly make whatever sacrifice we need to get some of those things. And it doesn't feel like so much of a sacrifice when we're focused on the good things.

So let's look at the verses I read in their larger context, some of the verses around them, to understand what sacrificial living is all about biblically speaking. So Paul says this, that whole passage begins like this. Paul says, finally my brothers and sisters, you know Paul's a preacher because he says finally, and then he talks for two more chapters. That's a preacher move right there, okay? Rejoice in the Lord.

So the end goal of this chapter on sacrificial living is rejoicing. It's joy. Watch out for those dogs, those mutilators of the flesh, for it is we who are the circumcision, who boast in Christ Jesus and who put no confidence in the flesh. He's referring to teachers who said that to be right with God, to be reconciled with God, you need Jesus, plus you gotta follow a bunch of religious rules and rituals, one of which was circumcision. Paul calls that putting confidence in the flesh, the things that we can see. But what makes us right with God is not all the religious rules and rituals, is that Jesus died on a cross to pay the price for our sins, and if he is our leader and forgiver, then we are cleansed, forgiven, and made right with God, period, end of sentence. We don't need anything else.

Paul goes on, and he says, If someone else thinks they have reason to put confidence in the flesh, I have more. So what's about to happen is, we are going to see some first-century trash talking. Paul is basically going, Oh yeah? You think you are something special? Check out my street cred. I was circumcised on the eighth day. In other words, I am not a convert to Judaism. I was a Jew from the start of the tribe of Benjamin. That's the tribe that produced Israel's first king. So Paul is part of the cool tribe. In regard to the law, a pharisee. That was a religious role, which means he would have been well educated, he had a prestigious job, and he would have had a lot of money. As for zeal, persecuting the church. I had all the right political opinions, and I was mad at all the right people that my political tribe told me to be mad about.

As for righteousness, based on the law, faultless. I am a good person. Okay, this is a drop-dead resume. Paul is basically saying I have a Ph.D. from Harvard. I'm CEO of a Fortune 500 company. I know all the right people. I'm invited to all the A-list parties, and I love kids and puppies and cats and sunsets. I'm awesome. Check me out. All the things his culture, and frankly, our cultures, tell us that we gotta have. That's what the good life is, man. That's the good life. And again, they're not bad things. Depending on how we use them, they can be very good things. But he was pursuing those things so much that he wasn't experiencing Jesus. It's not bad things that kept Paul from Jesus. It was good things. Our cultures, whatever culture we come from, they all lie to us and tell us that in order to be happy, we have to be good-looking and successful at school or work or have a lot of money or be popular. I mean, how many of you have seen *Wicked*? Every time I say, "be popular," I mean, "be popular," right? So just from the musical there. Not in the notes. I will go back.

In my former career as a scholar, there was this thing called the vanity index, where you could look yourself up and find out how many times you had been cited by other scholars in their publications. And it's called the vanity index because you needed to be really vain and insecure to look yourself up in it, which is why I was glad that when I did, I have been cited. That was really good to discover. That's how scholars find their worth. How do you find yours? How do you find yours? What do you think you've got to have to be accepted, loved, happy, the good life? And all those things our culture tells us we need, they may be good, but they are not the most valuable things. Because no matter how much money we have, it's never enough, is it? We never reach the point where we go, "You know what, I don't want anything else in life." That never happens, those words

don't get said. Good looks, they may get you some attention, but not the kind of deep connection that maybe you're longing for. Success at school or at work, those can be really good things, but they also produce sometimes a lot of stress and a lot of burnout. And our cultures convince us to seek those things more than anything else. And we do, and we so rarely stop and ask the question, but what's the opportunity cost of chasing all of these things? What am I missing out on? What are my kids missing out on? Because I'm chasing these things so hard. It might be missing out on a non-frantic pace of life, or time for the kinds of relationships that really satisfy. Or as I said earlier, our kids' sense of self-worth is not coming from their achievements, but from being loved by Jesus.

And that's why Paul says, "Whatever were gains to me, I now consider loss. I consider everything a loss because of their surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost, aka sacrificed, everything. I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ." And that word "garbage," as you may know, is a scaredy cat, wimpy translation of the original, of the actual word in the original Greek, right? Which is a word that I can't say in church because I'll get angry emails even though the word is in the Bible. Like honestly, how did we become more uptight than God? Seriously, like how did that happen? I can't say the word, but the Greek word means excrement, except it's even more vulgar than that. Okay, so you get what I'm talking about there, right? Paul says all those good things are like, you know what, compared to knowing Jesus. And he uses the language of accounting, profit and loss. And he's going, I need to look at my balance sheet again. And I need to move some of the stuff in the profit section column over to the loss stuff. Because the more I sought these things, the less I experienced Jesus. So I let go of them so that I could experience what he says, the surpassing worth. Not just a little bit better worth, the surpassing exceedingly abundantly, more than you can ask or imagine, surpassing great worth of knowing Jesus. Which is so much more valuable than all those other things.

He says, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings." Not know about Jesus, but know Jesus. Know even his suffering so that we can experience the power that comes from his resurrection. The power that breaks the chains of addiction and sets us free from worry and heals this world. Do you know Jesus like that? Do you know Jesus like that? And what is Paul focused on in these verses? What, he had to give up? What, he sacrificed? No, he's focusing on the so much better that sacrificial living brought him. Things like freedom. Freedom from the stress of trying to get all the things that our culture tells us that we got to have to be happy. Freedom from worrying about what other people think of us. Because your worth, your worth, is not what other people think of you. Your worth is that you are a child of God, redeemed in Jesus Christ, freed by his grace to walk in his power, live in his integrity, rise in his victory, and shine with his joy.

And when we get that, we can start to think, I don't care if you don't think I'm thin enough. I don't care if you don't think I'm good-looking enough. I don't care if you don't think that I'm smart enough, or that my job isn't impressive enough. I don't care. I am a child of the most high king. That's who I am. I ain't talking to you anyway. I'm living for him. And that's freedom. That's freedom. Which gives us the second thing, and that's

courage, because we're all afraid of something. One of my greatest fears, as I've shared with you a lot, is that I'm afraid that people, I don't want to have people mad at me, or not like something I said, or did, or be upset with me. That's one of my greatest fears. It's interesting to me, over the years, I've been on a number of short-term mission trips, and some of those have taken me to some pretty dangerous countries and put me in some pretty dangerous situations. And I remember one time coming back from one of those trips, and I told a friend about it, and he asked me, "Well, weren't you scared?" And I said, "No, I have selective cowardice, right? Dangerous countries, no problem, but mean emails, ah! I'm afraid!"

But when I am willing to live sacrificially and do the things Jesus calls me to do, even if it upsets other people, the closeness I feel to Jesus and the ways I see His power released are surpassingly more valuable than trying to get everyone to like me, which ain't gonna ever happen anyway. What freedom and courage are you missing out on because you're playing it safe? What things don't you do? Because of some kind of fear. Jesus wants to set you free from that. But you may need to let go of some stuff that you're hanging on to in order to get that freedom and to get that courage.

And then finally, indestructible joy. The book of Philippians talks about joy over and over and over again. Paul begins this chapter saying, "Rejoice in the Lord." A few verses later, he says, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, rejoice." All this joy coming from Paul, even though he's writing this, from prison. That's indestructible joy that cannot be canceled by any circumstances. And when we experience, because when we experience the joy of Jesus' presence, then we can say, if my love life or my career or school or my health or whatever isn't going the way I want, that'll be hard, it will hurt, I will grieve. But if it creates a closer connection to Jesus, then I'm going to count it as joy.

Paul let go of some good things so that he could experience Jesus' freedom, courage, and joy. He gave up money. As a Pharisee, he would have had a lot of it, but not as an apostle of Jesus. He sacrificed money, and what he gained was never worrying about money again. Because a few verses after these, he says, "I've learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether living in plenty or in want, I can do all of this through him who gives me strength." He gave up money and gained never worrying about money again. That's freedom. He gave up, he sacrificed his popularity. As a follower of Jesus, people would have judged him as a heretic and a traitor, but he gained the glorious freedom of not caring what others think of him. He sacrificed his worldview, his political view, from being a Pharisee who was persecuting Christians to being a Christian himself. But he gained a bigger community of people who embraced him, even though he had persecuted them.

And one of the things we can do as followers of Jesus in our very divided culture right now, where just as four years ago when we had a new president, now, same thing, some folks are happy about that, others are angry about that, and some, like immigrants and refugees who are part of our church here, are scared right now, and are just trying to figure out what is and isn't true. And one of the things we can sacrifice is holding too tightly to our opinions and get curious and try to understand each other so that we do

what the world can't do, which is to be a community of people loving each other across our differences. Because our ultimate hope is in no politician, it's in Jesus and his kingdom.

And what Paul and millions and millions of Christians like him have learned, is that if our fists are clenched tightly, holding on to what we think is going to make us happy, they aren't open to receive so much more that Jesus wants to give us. And the more we trust that he loves us, the easier it is to let go, because we know that he wants our best.

So, the action step for this week is different than what you might think it's going to be. Okay, the action step this week is not go out there and sacrifice something so you can get God's better thing. I mean, if the Holy Spirit is nudging you to let go of something because he wants to give you something better, by all means, do that. But for this sermon series, we're going to take this one step at a time. So, the action step is not go out there and sacrifice something, because that's looking at the wrong thing. That's looking at the sacrifice.

So, the action step this week is to pray, "Jesus, help me see the better things you want to give me and the deep down I long for." Maybe, that's the less frantic pace of life, or you want to see more of his power in your life. Maybe, even though you've got a lot of people around, you still feel lonely and you want deeper and more meaningful connections. Maybe, you just don't want your kids to be so anxious all the time. What are the better things Jesus wants to give me and that I long for? Ask Jesus to show you that, help you see that, because the more we see the better thing he's trying to give us, the easier it is to let go of what we need to let go of to get it, and it doesn't feel like sacrifice.

I read a social media post by a man named Robert McQuilkin, who was president of a university until his wife got Alzheimer's, and then he resigned as president so that he could care for her at home. Everyone thought he was crazy. Why would you give up such a great career to do that? Why did you do that? Here's what he wrote. He said, because she's such a delight. I don't have to care for her. I get to. She teaches me so much about love. For example, a while back, somebody gave us an Easter lily with two stems and four or five buds on each stem, and my wife broke off one of the stems. She meant no harm. Nevertheless, I did the irrational. I told her how disappointed I was, and now the lilies were going to die, and I said, please don't break off the other stem. Well, the next day, our son was visiting, and I told him about my rebuke to his mother and how badly I felt about it, and as we were talking, she came into the room with the gift of love for me. She carefully laid out the other stem, which she had just broken off of the lily. I simply said, thank you, and my son said, "You're doing better, dad."

She can't speak much anymore, and when she does, it often doesn't make any sense. But there's one phrase she still says over and over, "I love you." She not only says it, she acts it. I came across an article the other day that reflects our culture where the writer left a relationship because it wasn't meeting his needs anymore. I was struck by how irrelevant that idea is to me. Yes, there is deep grief in me, and yes, there is sorrow, but I had

promised in sickness and in health for better or for worse. And I've been startled by the response to my story. Husbands and wives renew marriage vows when they hear it. Pastors tell the story to their congregations. Somehow, people have been helped by a simple choice that I considered my only option. But it is no grim duty to which I stoically resigned. It is no grim duty. On the contrary, she's the joy of my life. Daily, I see the kind of person she is and the wife that I have always loved. I also see new evidence of God's love, the God I long to know and love more fully, the God whose love I experience more and more of every single day.

So in a world where career is everything, where sticking with someone when they no longer meet our needs is out of fashion, he went counter-culture. Let go of his career and other good things so that he could experience God's better thing. There's a depth in his life that a lot of people don't have. He's finding joy in simple things like broken lily stems. He's making a difference, inspiring others in their marriage, giving people hope. And some of you are doing what he's doing, caring for loved ones. Well done, well done.

And others of us might hear that story and think, oh my, that just sounds terrible. How can there be any joy in that? Well, we could start by believing him, believe what he's saying, as well as the Apostle Paul in Jesus, not to name drop, that our culture lies to us about what really gives us joy and what the good life is. Paul says, "I want to know Christ and his power." I do too. And I think you do as well, or you wouldn't be here. And I know that one of the things that holds me back is I am clinging too tightly to the things I think are going to give me joy. And Jesus is there, sort of like when my kids were little, and I'd be in a swimming pool trying to get them to jump to me, because I knew that if they did, they were going to love it. Jesus is there saying, "Come on man, jump. You're going to love it." And whatever you lose for my sake, is cheap at twice the price for what you're going to experience in return. And when we do that, then we will be able to say, with our whole hearts, along with the Apostle Paul, "Rejoice in the Lord always." He doesn't say rejoice in your GPA, or rejoice in your job, rejoice in your 401K. No, he says rejoice in the Lord. When? Always. I'm going to say it again. Rejoice.

So Jesus, this week as we pray, help us to see with clarity the better things you want to give us. Lord, help us to see them, help us to experience them, help us to know them and want them more and more and more every single day. So that, Lord, when the time comes, we're willing to let go of whatever it is we need to let go of. Jesus, you are good and we trust you, and we will be willing to do whatever it takes to follow you in whatever way that looks like. Because we know on the other side of that is indescribable joy. We pray in your name. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Pastor Scott describes living sacrificially as letting go of good things so we can experience God's better things. Have you experienced this in your life? How might God be prompting you to do that in this season?
- What is one small sacrifice you might practice this week so that you can experience more of Jesus' freedom, courage, and joy in your life?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.