

THE KINGDOM BUILDER



STEWARDSHIP MINISTRIES

The Robber

Do you lock your doors to keep unwanted intruders from entering your home and stealing your belongings? I remember summertime as a child; my family would go to bed at night with the front door open to allow more cool air to flow through the house. Not anymore. Times have changed. Far too many of us today are much more careful about protecting our physical possessions than we are about protecting our spiritual and emotional ones. Let me explain.

In my opinion, there has never been a time that seemed more uncertain in so many ways – moral redefining, economic collapse and social upheaval, you name it. Multiple things seem to be unraveling at the same time and doing so quite rapidly. We, as a nation, seem to have our feet firmly planted on shifting sand. Nothing seems secure and nothing seems certain.

This sense of uncertainty about the future can breed anxiety and anxiety breeds worry. When we worry we unlock the door for the Robber to break in and steal our most valuable possessions – our peace of mind and our joy in life. Simply stated, worrying about tomorrow robs us of our ability to enjoy today. We all seem to have an uncanny ability to extrapolate any given life scenario into a worst case scenario.

I personally experienced this recently. My associate and I were leaving town for a meeting when my wife called to inform me that one of my daughter's coworkers called to tell us that she never showed up for work that morning or called to let anyone know why. That was entirely uncharacteristic of my ultra-responsible daughter. I became concerned. My wife also called our daughter's cell phone and there was no answer. It

was already late morning and I felt my concern growing into anxiety. Had she been in a car accident on her way to work? Was she in intensive care in some hospital and no one even knew it? Our daughter had been with her boyfriend the night before so I called the church where he worked but I could not reach him.

My anxiety was growing into full blown panic and I was still traveling away from the crisis. I finally told my associate to turn the car around and head to my daughter's apartment. I tried to fight my growing panic and tried to remind myself I didn't know for sure that anything was wrong, but my emotions had already taken over. Fifteen minutes later my wife called and said that our daughter had become ill during the night and decided to take a sick day from work. She had called her boss to tell her she wasn't coming in, but her boss never told her coworker. My daughter was fine. She had turned off her phone so she could sleep uninterrupted and I had needlessly burned up enough emotional energy to fuel a small nuclear power plant!

Why do we do that? Why do we take some routine ingredients of life, mix in some of the unknown, slide it in the oven of our unfettered

imaginations and minutes later, out pops a hypothetical “crisis cake” that looks, smells and tastes just like the real thing?

I have come to realize that playing the “what if” game unlocks the door for the Robber to break in and steal our peace and joy. I am reminded of what Jesus said about the Robber in Matthew 12:29, *“Or how can anyone enter the strong man’s house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.”* Worry is what the Robber uses to bind us so he can break in and plunder our emotional and spiritual “house.”

At the center of a tornado is its eye. Even as the destructive winds spin at deadly speeds, the very center of the storm is completely calm. Likewise, in the midst of the destructive high speed winds of change that are encircling us, we must remain in the eye of the storm – at peace – fearless in spite of what is going on around us.

Here are four suggestions on how we can lock our spiritual and emotional doors to keep the Robber from coming in and stealing our peace of mind and our joy of life.

Focus on What You Can Control

We cannot control the war in Iraq. We cannot control America’s trillions of dollars in deficit spending. We cannot control what is going to happen with our new health care system. We cannot control the financial markets or the global economy. We cannot control what happens to the tax rates. Do you see the point? Almost all of what is going on in our world right now, we cannot control.

We do need, however, to take care of what we can control. We need to make sure we have our personal financial house in order. We need to do all we can to stay healthy so we do not need to use our new health care system. Most importantly, we need to make sure we are putting on the full armor of God. Ephesians 6:10-13 tells us, *“Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil (the Robber). For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but*

against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

We need to do what we can. As Americans, we have the privilege of voting and we should. As Christians, we can pray and we should. We can try to influence those who are within our very limited sphere of influence and we should. But beyond that – it is beyond us. There is nothing to be gained by worrying about what is totally beyond our control.

Focus primarily on fixing what is broken in your own world and leave the rest alone. If not, you may find you are inadvertently unlocking your doors and allowing the Robber to come in and steal your precious possessions of peace and joy.

Limit Your Exposure to the “Prophets of Doom”

The voices that proclaim “gloom and doom” are everywhere – on TV, on the radio, on the news, etc. These commentators continually spew forth an endless litany of what is wrong with America, our government leaders and the world at large. I am not suggesting in the least that anything they point out is not true or accurate or indeed wrong, but what I am suggesting is that a continual diet of “gloom and doom” can unlock the doors of your emotional and spiritual life and allow the Robber to break in and steal your peace and joy – affecting even areas of your life where there is currently no trouble at all.

We do not need to listen and watch hours of gloom and doom to understand we are in trouble and heading for even worse trouble. It doesn’t take hours of listening and watching to get that message. In fact, all the talk when you boil it all down is nothing more than “different verses of the same sad song.”

The Robber does not want you to, *“Set your mind on the things above.”* He wants you to set your mind *“on the things that are on earth”* (Colossians 3:2). He does not want you to heed Paul’s directive: *“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if*

anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things” (Philippians 4:8). To the contrary, the “gloom and doomers” will continually fill our minds with what is wrong, impure, ugly, immoral and shameful.

As believers we already know that this world is doomed and things will continue to get progressively worst until God finally says, “Enough is enough. It is over!” If we do dwell on what is right and good in our own personal world, we will quickly come to see that, in spite of all that may be wrong, we still have much to be grateful for and much good to enjoy.

Control the amount of time you give to the prophets of doom or you may find you are inadvertently unlocking your doors and allowing the Robber to come in and steal your precious possessions of peace and joy.

Rest in the Sovereignty and Provision of God

We dare not forget that even though things seem to be unraveling here on earth, God is not sitting in heaven wringing His hands and saying, “Oh my, things are quite a mess down there. What am I going to do about all these troubles and how am I going to take care of my people? I wonder what else is going to go wrong?”

We serve a God who is never at a loss, who is never caught off guard, who is never without a plan and a successful solution. For God, there is no yesterday, today and tomorrow. For Him, it is all today. This single truth is enough to blow one of our mental “gaskets” just trying to grasp the concept of life outside a time continuum.

Jesus assures us that He has it all under control; *“For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single cubit to his life’s*

span? And why are you anxious about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these. But if God so arrays the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more do so for you, O men of little faith? Do not be anxious then, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘With what shall we clothe ourselves?’ For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matthew 6:25-30). In this passage Jesus encourages us not to fret over how long we are going to live or how well we are going to live. How profoundly applicable this is for us today. He is directing us to deal with tomorrow’s troubles tomorrow and not allow the Robber to steal our peace and joy today because of hypothetical worries about tomorrow.

Concentrate on Living in the Present

Do not allow yourself to miss the joy, the fun, the happiness, the love, the blessings, the laughter and the peace of today because of what may or may not happen tomorrow. Remember, there are some tomorrows ahead that you will not even be here to see.

You may have heard the old proverb, “Worry doesn’t help tomorrow’s troubles, but it does ruin today’s happiness.” We need to joyfully embrace all the freedom, all the peace and all the happiness that this present day provides. Tomorrow things may not be so great, but that is not until tomorrow. In the meantime, there is more living to be enjoyed and savored this day.

Jesus encourages us with these words, *“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you.... Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful”* (John 14:27). Paul adds, *“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:7). Keep your emotional and spiritual doors locked and

allow the peace of God to guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Then no matter what the “tornados of life” may bring, we can dwell in the eye of the storm and for this present day we can savor every drop of happiness it provides.



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