The Woman of Christ Faces Daily Living

How Can We Be Content During Economic Crisis?

Matthew 6:26-34; Luke 12:22-31; 1 Peter 5:6 & 7

Lesson #4

In his famous poem "Maud Muller," John Greenleaf Whittier wrote, "For all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these, 'It might have been.'"

Maude uttered, "It might have been," as she watched an elegant carriage pass the wretched cottage where she struggled with poverty. Seated inside the horse drawn carriage were a lovely lady and her handsome husband, a prominent official. As a young woman, Maud's brief encounter with him had left her with a longing for life with him.

Maude's circumstances required settling for a whole lot less than she had dreamed. Her sad words reflect her disappointment.

Many women realize that adapting to life often requires a change of earlier desires. (Proverbs 16:9 and 19:21).

Ambitious graduates of an Ivy League college for women were reminded that when the stories of their lives are written, those things that will have really mattered won't be from their intellectual and business accomplishments. On the contrary, the effect of their natural abilities to produce, nurture and influence succeeding generations will be their lasting contribution to mankind.

Whether we live in a castle or direct the affairs of men will have little meaning over the long haul. The important concern of those who look back is frequently, "What have I done for my fellow man?"

Nevertheless, we wanted a little bit of this world's goods. We had planned to take early retirement at 62; at worst 65 and take life easy. Now the current job situation might cause our retirement to be just a period of fixed income.

Along with the Social Security Act of 1935 came the idea that individuals who have reached retirement age should no longer be a part of the nation's workforce. Florida's population rises every winter with retired people who would be much happier employed.

Numerous passages from the Bible teach the principle of industry. Men and women are more content when they are busy. Perhaps retirement needs to be rethought. (Romans 12: 11; Ephesians 4:28; 1 Thessalonians 4:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12).

If we live as if there is no tomorrow by maxing out the credit cards and telling ourselves that we deserve this, that and the other, we could find ourselves poorly prepared for sudden income loss,

whether through job loss or sudden death of the family breadwinner. Is your life going well today? I hope so, but you are on a training ground so roll up your sleeves. No life is without crises. Please learn and teach your family the practice of wise stewardship. Our dreams for "the good life" are sometimes shattered by challenges of daily living. Sudden loss of income imposes severe stress on the worker as well as his or her family. (Philippians 4:6 & 7).

People respond to life's bumps in various ways, but if the problem is an individual's loss of job. It's as if the rug has suddenly been pulled from beneath that person. Our identity is often tied to our work. When we cannot access that work because of downsizing, workforce reduction, layoffs or whatever terminology is used to define job loss, we are left only with memories of productive times when we moved among people of action. It's as if we are groping our way through a fog, looking for someone who knows that forgotten but vital person who has now been "turned out to pasture." Truly, with job loss, a person's self-identity takes a beating. A woman's loss of income is rough, but she may find it even tougher to support her husband through his loss. While she struggles with the checkbook and its decreasing bank balance, she is also watching him endure his feelings of failure as the primary provider and his sadness over being robbed of his "glory days."

For those who have received the dreaded pink slip, many were unprepared for such unsettling news. A man's evaluation of himself suffers. His God-given responsibility is to attend to his family's physical needs. The challenge for him seems daunting, and his wife must consider his frustration as she tries to come to grips with overdue bills and daily living expenses. With lost income, usually comes lost medical insurance.

Contentment is the state of mind we are seeking as we confront economic crisis. What is contentment? The Tyndale commentary states that it "… is a detachment from anxious concern about the outward features of this life." The pulpit commentary states that it "… is quiet restfulness in the midst of all kinds of changing events." Hebrews 13:5 says, "… and be content with such things as you have …" The verse begins with a discussion of covetousness. Contentment will prevent our wanting what is not ours to have. The apostle Paul said, "I have learned the secret (or the instruction) of being filled and going hungry." Through instruction that comes from experience, our learning comes -- from the school of hard knocks.

Most of us can look back over periods of financial ups and downs. Whatever the tribulations and trials that came on us during the down times, it is quite possible that they led to a strengthening of character.

We speak of older women training younger women. It would be profitable if older ladies would extend encouragement to younger women in times of poor economy and lost income. Younger ladies, please allow us to do that.

Those of us who are in our retirement years have come through numerous recessions. One of those lasted only a short while. Though others dragged on for long periods, many of us were

rearing families and insuring with high-premium, high-deductible health policies. The expenses of an appendectomy, during those days, could set off alarming budget upheavals. Yes, it's true that those premiums were less than today's premiums, but salaries of that time were also much less than current salaries.

In the current economic climate, retirees are implementing various ways to recover or just to stay afloat. Many of their nest eggs were eroded during economic downturns, making it necessary for some seniors to modify their retirement plan. Their retirement is being spent differently from the promises of long-term investment advertisements. To ensure income security, retirees are returning to the workforce; mortgages are being refinanced; one of the vehicles is being advertised for sale as well as the house. These steps, while offering some relief, can be quite disruptive.

When job loss rears its ugly head, it is so tempting to nurse a negative attitude and lash out at the employer. As difficult as it may be to react in a quiet manner, that departure conduct may, in future days, serve the former employee well. Brad Lewis, who writes for *Focus on the Family* says, “Be professional, even if you parted ways negatively. In most fields, it's just not smart to burn bridges. Inevitably, you'll have to cross that river again.”

Political biases and positions frequently creep into conversations about economy and job losses, and it may be that one political party is more responsible for our woes than the others. Political and fiscal analysts will debate that for years to come. Our national and global financial systems are so complex and far reaching. Let's be careful when expressing our negative thoughts that we don't fall into the trap of dishonoring our rulers. (1Peter 2:17; Titus 3:1 & 2).

There are many families suffering from corporate downsizing. Yet there are others who continue to enjoy “the good life,” and those current big spenders may be our neighbors. Each time we see new furniture and new vehicles arrive next door, we and our families must work on our hearts if we are struggling with financial deficiencies. Our Lord reminds us that envy and covetousness come from an evil heart (Galatians 5. 19 through 21. Mark 7. 21 through 23). Our anxieties and worries can lead us to discontentment when we can't provide large screen televisions or even a theater room in our house. We may overlook that God wants us to prosper physically (3 John 1:2). He supplies our real needs (Matthew 6:26-34; Luke 12:25-30).

While we are waiting for adequate income and doing interim work, let's be content with the pay. Luke 3:14 says, “… and be content with your wages.” If we agree to work for the minimum wage, and if our employer pays us that rate, we need to get busy and refrain from complaining about our wages.

Job downtime should not be given over to isolating ourselves and allowing a spirit of despondency to overtake our lives. Make it a point to be with others. Regardless of what's going on in our lives, Christians must be actively involved. In offering the gospel to others, friendliness and positive personalities enhance our successes in reaching others for the Lord.

Yes, we older women have endured at least 13 recessions and numerous wars, and while today's economy isn't the best, I believe we can assure you younger ladies that there will be better days ahead. Just know that the Lord will take care of His own (Psalm 9:9 & 10; 12:5; 22:24; 34:6; 37:23- 26; 102:17; 1 Peter 5:6 & 7).

When those happier days return, let's be careful to remember our earlier times. And seek to meet the urgent needs of others (Romans 5:3 & 4; James 1:2-4; 1 Timothy 6:18; Hebrews 13:16; 2 Corinthians 9:7).

True, Maud Muller's life was difficult, but thinking, "It might have been," prevented her from realizing that happiness isn't equated with luxuries and possessions. Ecclesiastes 5:10 states, "He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver, nor he who love abundance, with increase. This also is vanity." In Luke 12:15 Jesus admonishes, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

When we feel we are settling for less than we had dreamed, and there's not much money, we have only to observe the daily newscasts of the rich and famous. Many of them have more than they want: drugs, alcohol, broken homes, AIDS, and on and on (1 Timothy 6:17).

In difficult times, we may find peace and contentment in small things. This writer remembers an ice storm in Maine that shut down electrical power for weeks, but it offered an unexpected bonus of peace and contentment and family time. Families huddled together around small stoves and lamps and played games. Children remarked later that they wished for times like that again.

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