

“Life’s Missing Ingredients—Security”

Today we’re finishing up the series we’ve been in for a few weeks called, *Life’s Missing Ingredients*. What we’ve been doing is taste-testing our lives, to see if some key elements might be missing, so we can do something about it. Because, like with any recipe, if one ingredient is missing it affects the outcome completely. So far, we’ve looked at the ingredients: intimacy and optimism. Today we’ll look at security.

This is actually the most important ingredient of all three. All along, through this series, we’ve NOT been assuming that all of these things, or any of them, are missing from our life. But if they are, and you know it, there’s something you can do about it. Or, if someone you know is missing one of these ingredients, maybe you can help them get that ingredient set in place. So today we talk about security.

The most famous sermon ever preached was Jesus’ often called, “The Sermon on the Mount”. It’s called that because he goes up onto a low mountain to teach and people follow him there. In fact, chapters 5-7 in Matthew are the very heart and soul of Jesus’ entire message. Almost every element of living the life of a Christ-follower is addressed there and we did a series on that earlier this year. He gives his followers all he’s got. Then at the end of his sermons he would say these words. **“Everybody who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise builder who built a house on bedrock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It didn’t fall because it was firmly set on bedrock. But everybody who hears these words of mine and doesn’t put them into practice will be like a fool who built a house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It fell and was completely destroyed.” (Matthew 7:24-25).**

Around here, we know about building on something solid, because this whole area is riddled with mine tunnels. And every once in a while, a sink hole will open up and swallow a road or a building. A few years ago in Galena, a sink hole opened and swallowed up a local legend, the Green Parrot bar and grill. One of our older schools in Joplin is going to be replaced because its foundations are shifting due to the mines underneath collapsing. Houses, buildings built on something pretty shaky don’t stand for long. And Jesus is trying to teach us that lives built on shaky ground won’t last long either. But houses and lives built on the rock have strength, stability and security.

Maybe, just the mention of having a rock-solid place to stand in life has some of you saying to yourself, “Oh man, this one’s missing in my life. It feels like everything is shifting around my life. I don’t have a solid place to stand. I don’t have any security in my life. But I want some. I really do.”

You see, security is one thing we all desperately want. The renowned psychologist Abraham Maslow said that security was one of the most fundamental needs that all human beings have. And we’ll go to almost any extreme to find it. But we’ve got to be careful here, because sometimes when we think we’re secure, when we think we’re standing on solid ground, it’s actually an illusion, we’re actually building over a mine shaft.

Think about it: Before 2001, a lot of Americans would kind of puff out their chests and say, “I’m secure. I live in America. We’ve got power. I’m untouchable. I’m secure.” Then, 9/11 happened. That sense of security was an illusion.

We live in a gun culture because we think if we’re armed, we’re secure. I’m not anti-gun. I’m anti-idolatry! It’s putting your ultimate sense of hope and security in a thing. A thing called Shifting Sand.

There are those times and season when investors are like, “I’m solid financially, bulging portfolio, stock market going up and to the right, two years until my finish line. Man, I’m solid and secure financially.” Then the bubble bursts. The tech bubble, real estate bubble, there’s always a bubble! Or a trade-war starts, or a recession begins, or a pandemic hits, all of a sudden we realize that it’s shifting sand.

A lot of times people say, “Well, at least I have my job. I might not have a big portfolio anymore, but I have my job—that’s secure.” We’ve had around 50 people from our church lose their jobs recently, some of them had been working decades at their companies.

We might say, “Well, I still have my health. I might not have all that other stuff, but at least I have my health.” I’ve heard people say, “If you have your health, you have everything.” Again, I hate to have to point out the illusion, but I deal with this almost on a daily basis. I get the phone calls and the prayer concerns, and

visit hospitals. One day you're the picture of health, then there's an alarming medical report, then that health is gone. It's shifting sand.

Then people say, "Well, I'll always have my family and friends. *That* I can count on. I'll always have my family and friends." But the truth is, every day you have your family, your spouse, your kids and your friends, every day you have them, thank God for them, because you don't have them permanently—at least not on this earth. We only have each other for a time. Your spouse, your best friend, your kids, your parents, it's shifting sand. We love them deeply, but hold them lightly.

When these things are all in place and going strong, it's a blessing, it really is, and we're to enjoy these blessings! And be grateful for them! Share them! But one of the hardest things I'm called to do as your pastor is to point out illusions. And putting your security in the power of our country, or your job, or health, or guns, or people you love, it's building over a mine shaft.

I don't want to grim you out, but it's important that you know this. If these are just the illusion of security, then where does real security come from? Well, that's what Jesus was trying to teach. He's saying, "Build your life on a relationship with me and my way of life. I'm the only secure thing."

I believe the only ultimate source of security in this life is a rock-solid relationship with Jesus Christ. All other ground is sinking sand—it's an illusion. Try to find your security any other place and at some point, you'll find yourself looking up from the bottom of a sinkhole. So, let's talk about this. What do you get when you come into a relationship with Jesus Christ? What do you get that's so rock solid?

What do you get when you build your life on Christ? One of the most important things is a *rock-solid love*. Once again, Abraham Maslow stated that *love* was one of the foundational needs human beings must have met in order to function in life. Without it we will never live to our potential. Love. You all know that babies can die without enough of it. Young people get their hearts wrecked for lack of it. Adults wander around feeling empty and restless until they get adequate amounts of it. When you stand in a rock-solid relationship with Jesus Christ nothing can move that love. It will never be taken away from you. The Apostle Paul put it in these powerful words, "**Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through God who loves us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**" (Romans 8:35-39). Can love be any more rock-solid than that!

You get a rock-solid love when you come into a relationship with Christ. At the same time, in a relationship with Christ, you get a *rock-solid forgiveness* from the things you've done in thought, word or deed that cut across the heart of God. This is a washing away of the dirt, the sin, the stains. Again, Paul wrote about this, "**There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.**" (Romans 8:1-2). No condemnation in Christ Jesus! Why does God want us to know that we are free from condemnation? Why does God want us to know that we are forgiven?

The Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco was built around 1937. During the construction of the first part of the bridge no safety equipment was used and 23 workers fell to their deaths. So in the construction of the second part, the biggest safety net in the world was installed. That safety net saved the lives of at least ten workers who fell. But check this out. In addition to saving those lives, work on the bridge went 25% faster because the workers no longer had the fear of falling. The knowledge that they were secure gave them the confidence to put more energy into building and less energy into their fear of falling. They could move with confidence.

Because we're forgiven, we don't have to put energy into worrying if we're in God's good graces. And we can channel that energy into serving, sharing, loving, creating, innovating, renewing, becoming, and purifying. Forgiveness is powerful, generative stuff! Think about it! **What could you do with your one and only life if you weren't afraid of failing?** Because of this rock-solid forgiveness there is no failure in Christ Jesus!

When you come into a relationship with Christ, you also find *rock solid power*. A power beyond your own. God wants you to be powerful with his power. God wants you to have the power to overcome temptations that you couldn't before you got his power. Power to forgive those who have wronged you. Power to love instead of hate, and power to build bridges instead of walls. Dig wells instead of fences. Power to control your impulses, your temper, your greed, your lust. Power to get through hard times. Power to create and innovate.

You walk with more confidence through the valleys, through the troubles, through the trials of life when you have this power. I like how William Barclay put this: "Still to this day Jesus Christ can make the coward spirit brave and nerve the feeble arm for fight. He can release the sleeping hero in the soul of every man. He can turn the shame of failure into the joy of triumphant service." (William Barclay on 2 Timothy 4:9-15).

And then this, when you come into a relationship with Christ you get a *rock-solid eternity*. Assurance of where you're going when you die. I have visited with a lot of people as they were preparing to die. And there seems to be two main ways that people face death. Some face it with anxiety and agony about what happens next. Death terrifies them.

Then there are others that face it in a completely different way. Like one of my very closest friends, Dave Ward. He goes to another church here in town. We meet every week for coffee and conversation. And we share some of the deepest parts of our lives. He has ongoing health issues that are very serious. He has congestive heart failure and severe COPD among other things. Over the last few years there were a few times when he was so sick, I was pretty sure I wasn't going to see him again. We talk about death and he's taught me how to face it. Dave often quotes a passage from Paul, where Paul was facing his own death and wrote: "**For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.**" (Philippians 1:21). If we have breath in us, we have the life of Jesus here and now, and death is inevitable. But it's not a loss. To die is gain, because death is not the end. Death is swallowed up in victory! My friend has faced death more than anyone I know personally. He's taught me that we do not have to face death grimly. In fact, Dave is the most alive person I know!

There are a lot of rock-solid things that happen when you start a relationship with Jesus. The question is, how do I get there from here if this is missing in my life? First, let me tell you how you *don't* get there. You don't get to this rock-solid security by trying harder to be good. Just being good is not enough. You don't get rock-solid security by doing good—by volunteering here at the church, working at Crosslines, or building a Habitat house. You don't get rock-solid security by trying to be more religious or spiritual—by reading more of the Bible or praying harder. All these things are important but they come later.

Because, you see, no one has ever made it from shifting sands to the solid place to stand without being lifted and transported by a third party. You can't get from the sandbox to the solid place through human effort, through finesse, through serving more, by flying a little straighter. You can't get from there to here!

The only way you get from the shifting sands to this rock-solid place of a relationship with Jesus Christ, is to humbly receive it as a gift. To say, "I need to be lifted from the unsure place to the steady place. I accept the gift of forgiveness. I humbly accept the gift of power. I humbly ask what you would have me do, Lord. I trust in life beyond this life."

The Bible says you get from here to there through a humble sincere prayer for help. One of the simplest Bible verses of all is one that says, "**Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.**" (Rom 10:13). Everyone—even you—who calls on the name of the Lord can be lifted out of the shifting sands, and put on the solid rock of a relationship with Christ. But you've got to call.

One of my favorite scriptures is Psalm 40. The writer has found himself on sinking sand. He's in a slimy pit and sinking fast. I'm not sure what that pit was for him—under attack, abandoned by friends, facing a pandemic, I don't know! He says, "**I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.**" (Psalm 40:1-3).

You've got to give up trying to work your way to the solid place, finesse your way, buy your way, impress your way. You've got to give all that up and just ask and receive it as a gift of grace. And listen, if you've been around Christians or churches for a while you may have heard the challenge to invite Jesus into

your life. What I've come to realize is that Jesus doesn't want to be in *your* life. Your life's a mess! Your life's a wreck! Instead, Jesus is inviting you into *his* life. It's the place of stability and security.

But here's another thing you've got to know. **The missing ingredient of security doesn't mean "safe" and "predictable."** Because following Jesus is neither safe nor predictable! It's wild, and exhilarating, and unpredictable! Following Jesus, really following, will make you uncomfortable, because he will call you out to serve in ways that you're like, "Who me?!" Yes you! He'll ask you to give stuff and money away! Following Jesus will put you in risky territory when you stand up and speak up against injustice. Following Jesus is challenging, transforming, dangerous, *but secure*. It's the only secure place to build your life.

I know that a tragedy or natural disaster could happen any time, any place. I know that something could happen to the people I love, or to me. I know all this stuff, but I also know that I can stand in a steady place. I'm standing there now! Not because I deserve it, not because I earned it, but because Christ gave it to me as a gift. I know who loves me. I'm standing in a steady place, and you can too.

I want to lead us in a time of prayer. A prayer where you make the call. Where you say, "No more illusions about security. I know Lord, that it doesn't come from the power of my country, or the economy, or my job, or my family, or my health. They're not the source of my security. My security is in you. Everything else can be gone in the blink of an eye, but you'll be there. You will be the rock, when everything else is shifting sand." If that's what you want to pray, then say it to the God who created you. He's waiting...

Build your life on the rock, everything else is sinking sand. And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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