

Fran and Jesus on the Job - Fear of Layoff

Presented by Mary Lowman

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Day One

I examine the story of Fran and Jesus on the Job. For those who've been following for a while, you know that we've been following the life of a fictitious woman named Fran, who works as an account representative for an advertising agency. I tell this story to help us learn to practice the reality of Jesus' presence in our everyday lives. He is with us when we are born from above; we just often forget he's there.

Walking into her office today, Fran says to Jesus, "You know, Lord, things have been going really well lately. I sure appreciate your patience with me and your goodness to me."

As Fran settles into her office, Louise, a coworker who is also a believer, rushes in and shuts the door. "Fran, sit down. You're not going to believe what I just heard. We just lost two key accounts, our largest. That's about 30% of this company's business, Fran. Do you realize what that means?"

Fran sits down; she does indeed realize what it means. "You're kidding, Louise. We lost both those accounts? Why?"

"Money. Simpson and Elliott came in with incredibly low bids, and the clients went for it. Fran, there will be some drastic cuts around here, you can be sure of that. And you know who gets cut first—those of us who've been here the shortest. That's me and you. Fran, we could be out of a job in a week."

Louise's words hit Fran like a ton of bricks. "They wouldn't do that. We have good records; we bring in business; we do our jobs well."

"Don't kid yourself," Louise replies. "When it comes to laying off people, it's first in, first out, regardless of your contribution to the company. I gotta go to a meeting; let's have lunch and talk more."

"Yeah, sure," Fran replies as Louise rushes out of her office.

"Lord, did you hear that? If Louise is right, I'd have to collect unemployment, but unemployment won't pay all my bills. Plus, I have very little money put back. I mean with two kids to feed and clothe, it just takes a lot. And jobs are hard to find; Lord, what am I going to do?" Fran feels panic starting to rise.

Then Jesus brings to her mind the Psalm she read just this morning before leaving for work. As she reaches for her Bible, she says, "What Psalm was that? Here it is—Psalm 56. Verses 3 and 4 say *When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?* Well, quite honestly, Lord, right now it feels like mortal man—my employer—has the power to do something pretty dreadful to me—take my job away."

But the quiet inner voice of God's Spirit reminds her again if that happens, nothing can separate her from the love of God.

"No, of course not," Fran says. And Fran is reassured by Jesus' gentle words.

Day Two

Fran faces a troubling predicament—she may be laid off from her job. As she talked about it with Jesus, he assured her nothing could separate her from him, so she could trust him.

Of course, the nagging fears keep nibbling around her mind, but Jesus speaks to her again in that inner voice, reminding her he always keeps his promises. Fran begins to think about that.

“That’s right, Lord, and you’ve promised never to leave me or forsake me. And you’ve promised to supply all of my needs according to your riches,” Fran says.

“It’s really a question of whether or not I think you have the riches and resources to meet my needs and those of my children, even if I lose my job, isn’t it, Lord?”

Fran thinks this through very carefully. Trite answers won’t do here. “Yes, I believe you can meet my needs,” she responds, a little shaky.

She can hear that inner voice saying to her: “Well, believing I can meet your needs is one thing; but do you believe I will meet your needs, Fran?” As she thinks about this question, Fran realizes this is a real test of her faith, because faith is believing what you can’t see.

It’s not too hard to say you believe God can take care of you, but when you’re facing possible financial hardships, lack of income, or loss of a job, it causes you to search your heart and see who you trust. Fran asks herself: “Do you trust your employer more than Jesus?”

“Oh, no, Lord, of course not. I trust you more than anyone. You know that,” Fran quickly asserts. “So that means there is no need to panic. I can relax. The company does not hold my future in their hands; you do, Lord.”

As this thought fills her mind, the tears start down her face. “It’s so easy to forget that, Lord. Thanks for reminding me. You’re a whole lot more reliable than any company I could ever work for, and I can trust you with my future. But I have a feeling you’re going to have to remind me of that quite often as this all starts to play out. I’m sure the fear and panic will raise its ugly head again.”

Thinking about that, Fran decides it would be a good idea to type those two verses from Psalm 56 on a card and prop it up right there on her desk, even on her screensaver, so she can see it all the time. “That will help me remember that when I am afraid, you are here for me and no earthly person or organization can get to me except through you. Lord,” she continues, “I am your responsibility, and you are capable of taking care of me quite well.”

“I will keep trusting you, Lord,” Fran replies. “I’m okay now; I’m fine. I better get to work. Got lots to do today.” And with that, Fran’s mind is at rest, and she begins her day’s work.

Day Three

We follow the on-going story of Fran and Jesus on the job. Fran has just learned there’s a good possibility she may be laid off. Jesus has comforted her with the knowledge he will never leave her and will take care of her, so she managed to have a productive morning.

Lunch time rolls around, and Louise sticks her head in Fran’s office. “Hey, it’s time for lunch; let’s go.”

“Okay, I’ll meet you in the cafeteria in five minutes,” Fran answers. Just as she’s starting to leave for lunch, Ben, her manager, walks into her office.

“Fran, we need to find some time to talk this afternoon. How about 3 o'clock?” Ben asks in a rather subdued manner.

Fran can feel her heart beating faster. “Fine, Ben. What's up?”

“Oh, I'll give you all the details later,” he replies.

“Sure, okay—see you at three, Ben.” Fran begins to pray as he leaves. “Well, Lord, looks like Louise was right. This will probably be it—the big news.”

As she feels the anxiety begin to rise, she can hear Jesus saying she should not borrow trouble from tomorrow. Tomorrow has enough trouble of its own.

“Okay, Lord, I'll just wait and see what he says. Now, I better go meet Louise.”

As they settle down at a secluded table, Louise starts in right away. “So, have you heard anything else, Fran?”

“Well, I haven't talked with anyone else, but Ben did ask me to see him this afternoon at three, and he seemed kinda somber,” Fran reports to Louise.

“See—see what I told you. I bet you anything, he'll drop the shoe on you then. He'll probably see me today, too,” Louise laments, while picking at her food. “If I lose my job, what will I do?” She puts her head in her hands.

“Louise, I went through a panic attack after you left my office this morning, but I remembered a verse I read in Psalm 56 just this morning. It says whenever we are afraid, we must trust in the Lord, and it asks, 'What can mortal man do to me?' All this company can do to you is let you go. That's all, Louise, and that's not the end of the world. Jesus has promised to take care of you.”

“I knew you would say something like that, Fran, but I'm sorry. I just can't dismiss it so easily.” Louise turns her head so Fran can't see the tears.

“Louise, I'm not dismissing it. But Jesus is totally trustworthy, and I'm just going to keep trusting him to take care of me and my kids. He'll take care of you, too. You belong to him.”

Fran's words seem to have little effect on Louise. “Lord,” Fran says quietly to Jesus, “She's not listening to me. She needs to hear it from you, I think.”

Fran turns to Louise, “You know, Louise, why don't you take the rest of the lunch hour and go out to your car to get alone and just spend some time in prayer. Did you bring your Bible today? You can borrow mine. I think that will help you a great deal.” Fran puts her arm around Louise.

“Okay, Fran. I think you're right. I've got my Bible in my desk. I'll see you later,” Louise says as she walks off with her tray, her food untouched.

Not an easy day for Fran or Louise, but with Jesus there, they'll get through it.

Day Four

Fran has just learned there is likely to be a large lay-off in her company, and Ben, her manager has asked to meet with her at 3 o'clock. She returns to her office after lunch and completes her project, with unexplainable peace which only Jesus can give.

Time passes quickly and Fran looks at her watch. "Wow, it's three o'clock. I need your presence with me through this, Lord." And she heads down the hall.

Ben shuts the door behind Fran as she sits down. "Well, you've probably been hearing some rumors today, Fran. Let me try to tell you what's happening. It's been very sudden, but as you've probably heard, we lost two huge accounts."

"Yeah, that's what I heard," Fran responds. "And I heard that a bunch of us would have to be laid off."

"Well," Ben nods her head, "unfortunately, that's the case. They are telling me I have to let five of my fifteen account reps go. And the rules are that the newest employees go first. I've been looking at the records, Fran, and you're number five."

"So, that means I'm out of here I guess," Fran looks at Ben.

"Well, I don't know for sure yet," Ben responds. "You see, John, who is number six, has been here only six months longer than you, and he has had an unsatisfactory performance rating for almost a year now. I'm hoping I can let John go and keep you. You're one of my best performers; I respect you and I want to keep you if I can."

Fran smiles at Ben. "Well, I appreciate those words of confidence more than I can say. That means a lot to me, regardless of what happens. And I feel sorry for John."

"Well, I do, too. He's been going through a nasty divorce, and it has affected his work. I've tried to hang in there with him, but it just drags on and his performance gets worse. At any rate, I have to do what's right for the company," Ben shares with Fran.

"Wow, Ben, you're in a tough spot. I don't envy you," Fran says. "You know, I need a job, too; I have two kids to support. But if you decide to keep John, it'll be okay because it might be harder for him to find a job than me, and with this divorce, he might break under it," Fran explains.

"I have to tell you the truth, Fran, if I didn't know you as well as I do, I wouldn't believe you could be so calm and say what you did. I never thought I'd like you 'Jesus freaks,' but you're different. Someday let's talk about it more," Ben suggests.

"Love to, Ben. I guess I am a 'Jesus freak,' as you put it, and I'd love to tell you why. Let's have lunch soon," Fran replies with a smile.

"Okay, soon as I get this terrible ordeal over with. Well, there's not much more I can tell you now. I'm meeting with Human Resources people tonight, so maybe I'll have an answer for you tomorrow."

Fran gets up to leave. "Oh, by the way, how about Louise?"

"I'm afraid she'll have to go, too. She's number 3," Ben advises Fran.

Day Five

Fran has just learned from her manager, Ben, she may be laid off. Driving home that evening, Fran says to Jesus, "That was pretty incredible what Ben said to me today, Lord. He wants to keep me!"

"And it looks like he wants to ask some questions and I know I have to be ready to give answers for the hope that is within me," Fran smiles as she pulls in her driveway.

After her evening with the kids and putting them to bed, she sits quietly and talks to Jesus: “You know, I really worry about John. If he gets laid off instead of me, it could be devastating for him. And with all his expenses now—he's got it worse than me, Lord. Should I suggest to Ben that he keep him and not me?” Fran needs some wisdom, and she has learned to ask for it when she needs it, because the Bible promises to give us wisdom if we ask for it.

That still small voice impresses on her it would be better to let this work itself out and just keep her hands off. As long as she's willing to accept it either way and she knows the Lord will take care of her either way, she's in a win-win situation. However, her concern for John continues, and she prays for him.

“And Louise, too, Lord. If I stay and she goes, that would be hard for her and me, too,” Fran reminds Jesus. But, of course, he never forgot.

Did Fran lose her job? No. The next day Ben told her he had decided to fight the decision to lay off five people and convinced them to cut that to four. So, Fran stayed and so did John. But Louise was laid off.

But, you see, for Fran the outcome was decided when she gave the situation over to the Lord and looked to him for her support and trusted him to take care of her. Once she did that—and continued to do that—she was in a win-win situation. Regardless of the circumstances, her peace remained.

Obviously, Fran is very thankful. She is, however, very concerned about Louise and has been spending lots of time with her in the evenings, encouraging her and praying with her.

She did have lunch with Ben, and they talked about what it means to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It's all new to Ben and he finds it a little scary. But Fran is sowing seeds and praying they will take root in good soil in his heart.

Whatever circumstances you're facing today, remember with Jesus at your side, you have a resource of strength and wisdom that will not fail you. Be sure you practice his presence in your everyday life. Just like Fran, you need to realize Jesus is there beside you all the time.