

Lesson for a Lifetime

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"If they steal it, they steal it," Tim, my trusting husband said as he went off to the shower and get ready for dinner.

Our moving van was locked tight under a security light in the motel parking lot. I attributed my anxiety to exhaustion after hours of driving, punctuated with children's questions and my tears. We were leaving Cincinnati, where we'd had lots of friends and a church that meant much to our family. Bittersweet emotions accompanied us as Tim drove the van and we followed in the car.

When we stopped in Corbin, Kentucky, for gas, Tim and the girls decided we should celebrate our anniversary, an occasion we had barely noticed. We had fourteen years of marriage to celebrate, plus we were moving home to Georgia, to our family and an exciting ministry on the campus of the university.

The next morning Tim dressed early and went to check on the truck. As I was braiding J.J.'s hair, he burst back in the room, saying he couldn't find the van.

"What do you mean, you can't find it?" I said. "How can you lose a twenty-four-foot moving van?" The word tumbled out of my mouth, and I wanted to recall them immediately as I saw the color drain from his face. Missy began to cry. She knew from his tone that Daddy wasn't teasing. The seriousness of the situation began to sink in.

The hours followed in a blur. The police came and asked a lot of questions. We telephoned the van company, our family, and various insurance companies. We returned to our room after a valiant effort to eat breakfast and make a list of the moving

truck's contents. All the while, a giant cold fist grew larger and larger in the pit of my stomach. Reality was settling in. When my brain began functioning, the panic started. What would we do? How could we survive? We had no savings – so how could we replace anything?

Tim suggested that we pray. I didn't feel like praying, and I suspect he really didn't, either. Nevertheless, we joined hands and prayed humbly and simply. Amid sniffles and sobs, we asked for our things to be returned. We praised God that no one was injured and that we had each other – our real treasure. Only the passing traffic broke the morning silence as we waited.

That afternoon, we received a call from the police; they had recovered our truck on a back road. Our hopes soared! When we arrived at the abandoned van, we found only Tim's desk and a few cartons of books. Only later did we realize that Tim had just what he needed to get started in his new ministry. More resources would follow.

I couldn't contain my tears as I picked up love letters strewn over the truck bed. This violation of my privacy was more than I could bear. I searched through the boxes of books and papers for our daughters' baby books and my wedding album, but they weren't there. Who would do something like this? Who would want to take things that had no real value other than sentiment?

It's been fifteen years, and each time I recount this story, I marvel at the response of friends, acquaintances, family, and strangers. In an outpouring of love, we received more than \$16,000 in cash, plus clothes, household goods, pantry items, toys, bicycles, appliances, and tons of cards and letters.

The theft of our moving van is a benchmark for us. We speak of events as “before the theft” or “after the theft”. It is and will always be a significant event in our family’s history, but it isn’t a negative one. In many ways, it was a “blessed theft,” for in the removal of the weight of worldly possessions, we learned the lesson of a lifetime – forgiveness.