

Sermon for Sunday, May 2, 1976, by Andrew A. Jumper, Senior Pastor, D.D.  
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

"HOW TO WIN BY LOSING"

St. Mark 8:34-38

Text: "For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it." --Mark 8:34-38

Our text for this morning describes either directly or by implication three types of personalities. A person may not fall totally into any one of the categories. As a matter of fact, few persons are "pure" types. However, as we talk about these three categories perhaps it will help each of us to see ourselves a little better and help us in making some basic decisions about ourselves in terms of who and what we want to be, simply as human beings.

The first type of personality we see represented in our text this morning is described this way: "For whoever would save his life will lose it." Here we are introduced to the personality that the psychologists call the introvert. The introvert is one whose thoughts, in the main, are inner directed--they are directed toward himself and he finds his satisfactions largely within.

To his credit we may list some of the following attributes or characteristics that are typical of the introvert. First, he is conscientious. He takes himself seriously. He does not belittle his failures, nor does he lightly excuse himself for his sins. He is keenly aware of his shortcomings. Second, he is honest. He hates the idea of debt and he is not the generous type. As a matter of fact, he is often quite stingy, but he always pays his bills and somehow manages to live within his income. Third, he is painstaking and accurate. The man who polishes diamonds, the surgeon who likes to perform delicate operations, the accountant who relishes an intricate mathematical problem, the woman who enjoys needlework, poets, musicians, architects, designers, toolworkers--these all have introvert tendencies. Introverts enjoy working alone and prefer tasks that call for precision and care. Fourth, the introvert is idealistic. That is, they are not easily satisfied. They dream of a better world, a better job, a better home, a better self. However, the introvert does not do enough about making his dreams come true, for he is more of an architect than a builder.

However, on the other side of the ledger, there are some items to the discredit of the introvert. First, he does not care enough about the feelings of others. He is not tactful and sometimes he is downright discourteous and will excuse himself by saying, "It does not matter to me what people think." Second, he cares too much about his own feelings. He craves praise and is hurt if he doesn't get it. He often fishes for compliments. He is easily offended and given to nourishing grudges. He sulks a good deal, never forgets an injury, and seems to enjoy carrying a chip on his shoulder. He is the fellow who gets his feelings hurt and a year and a half later has almost quit coming to church because of some imagined offense that didn't matter much to begin with. Thirdly, he is timid. Our word "timid" comes from the Latin "timor" which means "fear". The introvert is seldom free from fear of one kind or another. He hesitates to dance or to speak in public for fear he will make a fool of himself and someone will laugh at him. He blushes easily and never enjoys a joke on himself. He does not put himself out to make friends, and does not enjoy social affairs very much. He is ill at ease in the company of strangers and prefers to be alone most of the time. Fourth, he has a hard time throwing off disappointments. He is not a very good loser, he worries easily and magnifies trifles. Almost any kind of failure or imagined slight gets him down and he becomes sullen and cynical. He looks on the dark side of things and stays mopey most of the time.

I am sure all of us felt that we belonged at least in part to this personality type. The Bible says, "For whoever would save his life will lose it." And that's the introvert's problem. He lives too much for himself and in himself.

During World War II, the people of London anticipated the German air blitz and prepared for it. They expected not only physical injuries, but a great increase in mental patients. They anticipated that hundreds of people would crack under the strain of war. To their amazement the number of mental patients actually declined. Why? Because the blitz made people forget themselves. They turned to think about the neighbor whose home was destroyed, whose child was killed, or whose store was damaged, and in pouring out their hearts in sympathy and helpfulness, they actually became stronger and more healthy mentally and emotionally.

Let every introvert remember that and profit from it. The first step in finding and developing the real you is to get self out of the center of the picture. As long as self is in the center, you will be a poor husband or wife, a poor father or mother, a poor sport, a poor companion, a poor church officer, and certainly a poor Christian. That is the meaning of the saying, "Whosoever would save his life shall lose it"--words which describe the extreme introvert perfectly and which therefore warn him sharply.

But our text this morning describes a second personality type. He is called the extrovert. Whereas the introvert is self-centered and his thoughts concerned mostly with his own satisfactions, the extrovert is just the opposite. The extrovert finds his satisfactions in the main outside himself. To the credit of the extrovert, we can list the following characteristics that are typical of him. First, he is pleasant. He likes a joke and doesn't mind when it is on him. He may lose his temper, but it doesn't last very long. Unlike the introvert, he does not nurse grudges and hoard hurt feelings. He is optimistic about life, has personality plus, has numerous friends, and is the hail-fellow-well-met type who is a lot to get on with. Secondly, he is generous. He will treat you at the drug store and make a generous pledge to the church or some other good cause. Unlike the introvert, he is not stingy. Thirdly, he is a man of action. The extrovert gets things done. He likes responsibility and will stick at a job until he finishes it. The typical extrovert is an ideal salesman, a good promoter. He does not procrastinate and makes an excellent executive, chairman, or foreman. He is a man of decisiveness and force, a natural leader.

In the New Testament, the Apostle John would be classed as an introvert, Peter an extrovert. Peter was the kind of man who would have been strikingly successful as the pastor of a big city church; John would have been ideal as a seminary professor. Peter was the type you would choose to conduct your revival, but you would prefer for John to administer Communion or lead in prayer. You would rather read John's book than Peter's--that is, if Peter ever got around to writing one. And then, fourthly, the extrovert is a man of courage. The extrovert will not run away from either criticism or danger and he hates both compromise and cowardice. He will stand by his principles or his guns and would rather die than surrender either. Instead of becoming unduly discouraged when confronted by failure, he will ask for another chance. He has the stuff of which heroes are made.

But like the introvert, the extrovert has dangerous tendencies, too, and it is possible for him to be as tragic a failure as the introvert. You see, the peculiar temptation of the extrovert is to waste his energies upon things which are not

really worthwhile. In the parable of the prodigal son, the prodigal was an extrovert. Farm life was too quiet for him and he craved the excitement of city life and the opportunity to meet new people, new situations. He wanted to spend his money and have a good time. On the other hands, the elder brother was an introvert, a stay-at-home who was self-righteous and harbored his grudges. You remember how hurt and critical he was because the father threw a party for the prodigal when he returned home. "He never did this for me!" he said. The elder brother lost his life by selfishness; the prodigal son lost his by scattering. The elder brother took himself too seriously and the prodigal did not take himself seriously enough. Now this is characteristic of the extrovert, for he leaps before he looks and makes decisions without giving them due consideration. He is not careful to count the cost.

Now, this brings us to the second part of our text which applies to the extrovert, "whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's shall save it." You see, the extrovert does not need to be urged to see to it that he loses his life in something outside himself. By nature he will do that. But he does need to be urged to see to it that the thing for which he loses his life is worth it!

The rich fool is a case in point, for he was an extreme extrovert. "What shall I do," he asked, "for I have not where to bestow my fruits?" And he said, "This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my grains and my goods." Here is a man of action, a man of achievement. One success spurs him on to another and he is continually planning and building bigger enterprises. The point is, in so doing he completely ignores humanity, God and eternity. This is the temptation to which the extrovert is liable--to so lose himself in pursuit of unworthy goals that he forgets that "what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

We have been talking this morning about two English words that end with the word "vert"--the introvert and the extrovert. The word "vert" comes from the Latin, "verto" which means "to turn." So, an introvert is one who is turned inward, toward self. An extrovert is one who is turned outward, away from self. One is inner directed and the other is outer directed. But there is a third personality type that Jesus talks about and he is the convert. The convert is turned to Jesus. Jesus says, "whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it." An introvert is inner directed, an extrovert is outer directed, but a convert is Christ directed. Jesus said it is that man who will save his life in the end.

I suppose the apostle Paul would be classified as an extrovert, a man of action, force, and courage. Yet, for all of that, his life was misdirected as he violently tried to stamp out Christianity. This wild-eyed man on his way to Damascus was outer-directed, but he traveled with a blood-thirsty heart. Then, on that Damascus road, he experienced a revolutionary change. Forever after he was to still be forceful, positive, active, and courageous. But now there was a dramatic difference. Now he was a convert and he was centered on Jesus --so much so that he could write, "for me to live is Christ..."

James Irwin rode Apollo 15 to the moon. There on the moon's surface something happened to him. He said, "As I viewed planet Earth from space, I began to see it from God's perspective. Despite its insignificant appearance I realized that God loves its people so much that He once sent His Son to earth to give us a fuller life. I saw more vividly the needs of people back home and determined to spread that love." Yes, James Irwin in that moment became Jesus directed, and he came back home to give his life in full-time Christian service.

Let me ask you, to what or to whom is your life directed? Are you inner directed-- or outer directed? Are you directed to your family, or your job; are you directed to making a successful career, a lot of money; are you directed towards status or social standing? You see, if you gain the whole world and lose your life you have gained nothing. Jesus says, "Whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it." And that is how you win by losing.