



## **Matthew 6:25-34** **Seek First the Kingdom**

What do people think about me? Do I look good? Do I earn enough money? How will I pay the bills? What if I don't get enough respect? Is my marriage ok? Will the kids be alright? What if I'm alone? Am I known?

What worries you? For every season, there is a host of worries. When we graduate from one set, another is waiting. When we finish school, we get to worry about employment. If we don't have money, we worry about getting it; if we have it, we worry about getting more, and managing it. If we're single, we may worry about getting married; we get married and worry about marriage; you have kids, you worry about them. Life is an endless succession of worries. There is no end to what we are capable of worrying about.

So it's no surprise that our culture has a host of techniques and strategies for coping with worry. Worry is such a universal experience that we have a vast range of tools at our disposal. Consider what the world tells you to do with your worry.

First, obey your worry. Let your worries drive you. Worries, in this view, are a helpful indicator of what's most pressing in life. Listen to your worries; let them set the agenda. This is the technique of the workaholic, the insomniac, the overachiever, the hyperactive exerciser, the idolater of productivity. Obey your worries and you may end up successful, but you will also end up burnt out, bitter, and alone in your achievements.

Second, fight your worry. Train yourself for mental toughness. Meditate. Calm yourself. Compartmentalize your thoughts. Engage in the endless succession of mental tips and tricks on tap from an avalanche of self-help pop psychology books. Breathe in, breathe out. Wax on, wax off. Fight your worries and you may find success for a season, but you'll find yourself ironically worrying about whether your doing the technique right, anxious about the decreasing effectiveness of what amounts to an elaborate game of self-deception that never addresses the true heart of your worries.

Third, ignore it. This is the advice of Buddha, of all kinds of modern-day mystics. The world is a dream, they say, desire is suffering, pain is an illusion. Detach yourself from this world and its worries, find enlightenment, and you will find peace and freedom from anxiety. And Buddha gets at least this right: this world is less important than you think it is. But, carried to its logical conclusion, what kind of peace does this path lead to? It is the peace of a desert, empty, desolate, and dead—devoid of human relationships, human contact, or purposeful work.

Fourth, medicate it. You might drive worries away with alcohol, or food, or worse. TV, video games, and pornography can be very effective—and very addictive—drugs for driving away anxiety—until the show is over, and they come creeping back. Or perhaps go to a doctor with legitimate needs but use the relief medication affords to avoid the roots of anxiety. Medication can be helpful for extreme cases of anxiety and depression, but using it to avoid rather than confront, the real issue beneath our anxiety.

Finally, if you were raised in the church and speak Christian lingo, you may be tempted to deal with anxiety by Bible slapping it. You may have a few key verses ready at hand to pull out and thwack at life's hardships and worries. Romans 8:28—all things work for the good of those who love God. But when you Bible slap a problem and the problem persists, it can tempt you to doubt the power of God's word.

### **Jesus' Answer**

So I think these techniques for coping with anxiety are insufficient. Jesus has a better answer, one that addresses the heart and does not lead to burnout, disillusionment, detachment, or addiction. His answer is found in the Sermon on the Mount, which we have been studying in recent weeks and months. The Sermon on the Mount is probably the most famous collection of Jesus' teaching. Even people who don't call themselves Christians and don't read the Bible are probably familiar with some of Jesus' famous sayings here—like “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” or his saying about a “city set on a hill cannot be hidden,” his command to “love your enemies,” his warning “Judge not, that you not be judged,” (7:1), and, of course, the Golden Rule, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you (7:12). All of these are right here in the Sermon on the Mount.

Right near the middle of his most famous sermon, Jesus directly addresses anxiety. He says this.

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to

you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

His answer is to trust in God, because our Father in heaven desires to give us what we truly need. Note that Jesus starts off by saying “therefore.” His comments on worry flow naturally from his previous saying about laying up treasure in heaven: if we invest our treasure in heaven, we have little to worry about in this life. I know this sounds like an escape, pie in the sky, so how does God promises to provide what we need?.

### **Jesus’ Argument**

Let’s look closely at Jesus’ argument. First, what is worry? The word Jesus uses here means “to care for, be anxious about, think earnestly upon, scan minutely.” I think the heart attitude Jesus warns against here is a gnawing and fearful attitude towards the future.

Note that Jesus commands us three time not to worry. “Do not be anxious about your life,” in verse 25; “therefore do not be anxious,” in verse 31; and again, “therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow” in verse 34. Now I realize that some of you hearing this might feel anxious about Jesus’ command not to be anxious. If I struggle with anxiety, I’m disobeying one of Jesus’ direct commands! Now, not only am I stressed about life; I’m also stressed about sinning. And if I’m anxious about the possibility of the sin of anxiety, that’s another sin! You can work yourself into a never-ending loop of anxiety and second-guessing. By repeating his command three times Jesus is not trying to add to our worries by commanding us not to worry; rather, **he is emphasizing the trustworthiness of the Father who desires to provide all we truly need.**

To do this, Jesus argues that worry is worry is pointless; degrading to ourselves; and worry is mistrustful.

#### *Worry is Pointless*

Why shouldn’t we worry? First, worry is pointless. Note in verse 27, “And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?” Some translations have “can add a single cubit to his stature.” The word Jesus uses here says “Which of you by being anxious *has power* to add a single hour...” Worry *has no power* to accomplish anything. Jesus is contrasting the powerlessness of worry with the power that comes from trusting in God. Think of what the Apostle Paul says in Philippians 4. Paul repeats command not to worry, but affirms that trusting God brings peace and “I can do all things through him who gives me strength.” Worry gives no strength.

This is an interesting pragmatic argument. Jesus isn't just saying worry is wrong just for some high sounding theological reason. He is down in the trenches of actual human life and, from there, points out the obvious truth that worry is a waste. We can spend an enormous amount of time and energy simply turning over bad things in our head. I recall reading a novel in which a character goes through something like this: "Whatever he started thinking about, he came back to the same questions, which he could not resolve and could not stop asking himself. It was as if the main screw in his head, which held his whole life together, had become stripped. The screw would not go in, would not come out, but turned in the same groove without catching hold, and it was impossible to stop turning it." (Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, p 347). Worry is ceaseless motion that gets you nowhere.

This is a truth so widely recognized that there are scores of aphorisms that echo Jesus. "Worry never robs tomorrow of its sorrow, it only saps today of its joy." "The greatest mistake you can make in life is to be continually fearing you will make one." "Worrying is like a rocking chair, it gives you something to do, but it gets you nowhere." And, of course, "Don't worry. Be happy." Worry is pointless.

### *Worry is Degrading*

But these aphorisms miss the point that sometimes we lack the power to escape anxiety. Jesus goes deeper. He argues, second, worry is degrading. It rests on a low view of human beings. Notice in verse 26. "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

Anxiety is unworthy of you. You are the pinnacle of God's creation. Jesus is implicitly evoking the creation order of Genesis 1, in which God creates all things and then, on the sixth and final day, creates mankind in his own image, breathing life into Adam in a special and unique act of creation. God, who took such care to create us, desires to care for us. Jesus compares us to birds; affirms that even birds are good and that God cares for them; and then argues, as from the lesser to the greater, that if God cares for relatively unimportant things like birds, so much more will he care for the crown and glory of his creation—you. When we worry, we lie to ourselves about ourselves. We lie that we are unworthy of God's care, that we are unimportant; that we are beneath his attention. Some of us may struggle to receive God's tender kindness because he seems too aloof, too distant, too transcendent for us. Christian, recognize that isn't the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible personally made you and cares for you.

Now, this doesn't mean Jesus is teaching us to be apathetic. The birds still have to fly about finding their food. God provides food by putting birds in a world where there are things they can eat, but they have work to do gathering it together. Similarly, Jesus' command for us not to worry is not a permission slip authorizing sloth. We have a responsibility to work. "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat," 2

Thessalonians 3:10.

*Worry is Mistrustful*

Third, and similarly, Jesus argues that worry is mistrustful of God. Just as worry rests on a low view of humanity, it also rests on a low view of God. Look again at verses 28-30: “And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?”

Solomon was the king of Israel during a time of peace and prosperity—he would have worn especially luxurious robes. Jesus compares Solomon to the flowers of the field and asserts that God made the flowers *even more beautiful* than Israel’s richest king in his royal regalia. And if he cares for something as seemingly insignificant as grass to clothe it so splendidly, it would require a low view of God’s character to believe that he would not also care for us. Being anxious rests on the lie that no one cares about you; that you’re on your own; and that if you don’t look out for yourself, no one will. But God made you. He cherishes you. He is passionately devoted to his people.

Consider Isaiah 42:13-14:

The LORD goes out like a mighty man, like a man of war he stirs up his zeal; he cries out, he shouts aloud, he shows himself mighty against his foes. [Then God speaks in the first person.] For a long time I have held my peace; I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labor; I will gasp and pant.”

I love this passage because it gives us two visceral images, a man in war and a woman in labor, one stereotypically masculine and one archetypically feminine. They connote a person at the utmost of their striving, straining to employ every ounce of strength to protect, or to give new life. Both are images for how much God passionately cares for, guards, protects, and fights for his people. That’s why Jesus ends verse 30 with a rebuke, “o you of little faith.” God is trustworthy; he will provide what we truly need; anxiety is a sign that we do not trust that God will provide. Anxiety is the fruit of mistrust in God’s character.

Two short footnotes. Did you notice that Jesus affirms the goodness of creation? He doesn’t dismiss birds, grass, or flowers, and he doesn’t deny that we actually need food and clothing. Jesus is the opposite of Buddha. You sometimes hear it said that all roads lead up the same mountain, and all religions teach the same. Of course, all religions teach similar ethical maxims—like don’t lie, murder, or steal. But they also teach opposite things about the nature of God and his creation. Jesus teaches that creation is real and good, that our bodies are real and we should care for them. God

cared so much for his creation that became part of it in the Incarnation of his Son as a human being.

Second, did you note, as well, Jesus' use of the Old Testament. He references Solomon, whose story is told in 1 Kings 1-11 and 2 Chronicles 1-9. Jesus knew the Old Testament, affirmed its historicity, presumed his listeners were familiar with it, and used it to illustrate his teaching. If you want to the wisdom of Jesus, it often emerges from the Old Testament. Read it!

### **Jesus' Alternative**

So what is the alternative to a life of anxiety? Jesus gives us his alternative in the conclusion to his message. "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness." He doesn't tell us to obey our anxiety, fight our anxiety, ignore our anxiety, or anything else. He tells us to overwhelm our concern for ordinary things with concern for ultimate things.

Jesus is contrasting a life characterized by seeking God's kingdom against a life characterized by pursuit of ordinary things. Remember his rebuke in verse 30: "O you of little faith." What is "little faith" and who are those who have "little faith"? I don't think Jesus is talking about the volume or magnitude of the faith we have in ourselves, as if we had a faith-ometer and could measure how much inner strength we have. Rather, faith is measured by the object in which we place our faith. Faith is just a religious-sounding word for "trust." Who do you trust? Do you trust your paycheck? That is little faith. Do you trust your discipline? Your retirement plan? Yourself? That is little faith, because the object you are placing your trust in is little. The opposite of "little faith" is what Jesus is talking about in verse 33: we have great faith if we pursue first the kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God a central concept in Gospel of Matthew. It is the place of God's rule. The Kingdom has come in the arrival of King Jesus. Wherever there's the king, there's the kingdom. Worry drives us away from the king, and from enjoying the kingdom. Jesus reigns now in heaven; and he consummates the full triumph of his Kingdom when he comes again. Sin is our rebellion against the King; we enter this kingdom by laying down our arms, by ending our rebellion, by surrendering to the King, asking for his mercy—what the Bible calls repentance. We become citizens of this Kingdom when we celebrate the reign of King Jesus; acknowledge his sovereignty in our lives. Then we can enjoy and show this kingdom to others.

How is seeking this Kingdom a better solution to our anxieties than all the techniques and tricks we talked about earlier? When we seek God's Kingdom first, we are putting ourselves in the hands of a good and loving Father who desires to care for us. We are resting in the trustworthiness of his character. We also put our cares and concerns in proper perspective; we see that the reality of God and his glory is so much more important than the things we worry about. And it becomes easier to trust that God takes care of us—even when it doesn't seem like we are

getting what we need. Because sometimes it seems like we don't—like God is *not* providing what we think we need.

Jesus promises that if we do this, “all these things will be added to you.” What does this mean? Does it mean that if we go to church, read the Bible, and live good lives, that God promises to give us food and clothes? Even more, does it mean that if we are good people, God will give us whatever we need—even whatever we desire? There are teachers and books out there who will tell you this is what the Bible promises.

And, indeed, in the normal course of things, God does seem to provide the necessities of life to most of us. I see he provided clothing to all of you this morning. And he's provided you enough food to sustain your life and enable you to be here and hear his word preached this morning. He's provided even more: most of you drove here in cars, live in air conditioned houses, and enjoy literacy. This is more than most people in the world—and most people in history—ever enjoyed.

On the other hand, I know that some of you have struggled with real deprivation. Some of us have gone through bouts of unemployment and poverty. You don't know how you're going to pay your bills or even if you'll have enough for groceries this month. Some of you maybe feel embarrassed at having to wear the same outfit day after day, hoping no one notices the fraying at the edge, or the stains that won't come out. Some of you have been through painful sickness and have wondered where God's tender provision is when your body no longer works, or when you watch friends and loved one die. Death feels like the ultimate rebuke of God's provision.

Please hear this: deprivation is not a sign of God's disfavor. Prosperity and riches are not a sign that God is especially pleased with you. If you are going through a period of hardship, the last thing I want you to hear is that your poverty or sickness is a punishment from God, a sign that you've displeased him somehow. In John 9 the disciples ask Jesus about a blind man “who sinned that this man was born blind?” and Jesus rebukes them, telling them the man was born blind to glorify God. There is no correlation between our level of righteousness and our level of material comfort. If there were, we'd all starve to death.

Often God takes care of us by providing what we need or want, physically—but sometimes God takes care of us through deprivation and trial. Peter says “let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.” (1 Peter 4:19). James says “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.” (James 1:2). Paul speaks of God's judgment as a “fire [that] will test what sort of work each one has done.” (1 Corinthians 3:13). Suffering can actually be good for you. Suffering can actually be God's gift to you because it can help refine you, sanctify you, make you into a better person. God loves you enough to want to make you better than you are—and that can be a painful and difficult thing.

So what is Jesus promising here in verse 33 when he says “all these things will be added to you?” I think God is promising to provide us *with what we most truly need*. Just two chapters previously, the devil tempted Jesus with all the food he could ever want—seemingly meeting every need Jesus would ever have—and Jesus replied “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” (Matthew 4:4). The word of God is what we most truly need. John 1 tells us that Jesus is *the* Word of God. Later in John 6 Jesus tells the crowd about the bread of life. “My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” (John 6:32-35). Jesus himself is what we most truly need. Seek first the Kingdom of God, and God will give us the “unfathomable riches of Christ.”

### **Application**

What does this mean? As we conclude, how do we translate this airy concept to our day to day lives? It means that doing what Jesus tells us to do, and trusting that it will work for our blessing.

Do you worry about money? Then seek the Kingdom of God with your money. Do what Jesus tells you to do about money. Recognize God’s sovereignty over your budget. We could preach a whole sermon on financial stewardship, but briefly it means providing for your family; giving to the church; and helping the poor; and not spending more than you earn. If you struggle with this, be transparent about your finances. Sit down with your city group leader, your fight club, or with an elder, show them your budget and your bills, ask how you can do a better job glorifying God with your money. That sort of transparency is weird and unusual—and it can be awkward and uncomfortable—but this is exactly the sort of countercultural thing that makes Christians stand out. This is what it looks like to place your money under the sovereignty of King Jesus. Jesus promises that if you do, he will bless you—not with more money, but with peace about money.

Do you worry about your marriage? Seek first the Kingdom of God in your marriage. Put your marriage under the sovereignty of King Jesus. Love your spouse the way Jesus tells you to. Read Ephesians 5 and 1 Corinthians 7 together. Husbands, be selfless and sacrificial, take initiative and lead by showing concern for the state of your marriage. If you struggle with this, be transparent about it. Sit down with your city group, your fight club, or with an elder, talk about your marriage, confess what tempts you to frustration, impatience or anger. Ask how you can do a better job glorifying God in your marriage—and be prepared for some painful realizations. If you do, Jesus promises to bless you—not with a better, more attractive, or more stimulating spouse, but with more peace about your marriage.



Do you worry about work? I think you can fill in the rest by now. Glorify God, be transparent, and invite outside scrutiny in your life. I've stressed inviting others to examine your life. If you don't have relationships in which you can be transparent, that should be your first priority. Join a city group, form a fight club, get to know the people sitting near you in church and seek to make these deliberate, Gospel-centered relationships. They are the means through which God can and will do tremendous work in your life—growing your affection for him, your love for others, and your maturity in your relationships and your life.

I want to conclude by recounting one episode in Jesus' life. He didn't just teach about anxiety; he encountered it personally. We are, in a few moments, going to celebrate the Lord's Supper, which is a ceremony Christians do to commemorate Jesus' death and resurrection. The night before his crucifixion, Jesus went to pray. "And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.'" (Matthew 26:37-39).

Jesus knew the temptation to anxiety. He faced a trial far greater than our daily worries over food and clothes, work and relationships. Jesus faced the reality of separation from his Father in Heaven. Faced with this, Jesus modeled what it looks like to seek first the Kingdom of God. He made known his desire to God—"Let this cup pass from me," but then put the Father's priorities above his own. "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." And the Father blessed him—not by sparing him from death, but by rewarding him with resurrection and new life—a life we are invited to share in. [This new life puts us in the kingdom, right next to the King, who brings true peace and relieves anxiety.](#)