

Why Do You Worry?

Bible Background • MATTHEW 6:19–34

Printed Text • MATTHEW 6:25–34 | Devotional Reading • EZEKIEL 34:11–16

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will CONTRAST Jesus' teachings about worry with our own anxieties, APPRECIATE God's care for everything in nature, and EMBRACE the opportunity to trust God in everyday life.

In Focus

Pastor Ricky closed out his sermon about worry. "Job worries, financial problems, health concerns, family issues ... each one of these problems is out of our control to some degree. The only thing that is under our control is our response to these difficult issues when they come into our lives."

Then, he passed out blank envelopes and sheets of paper to his congregation. Each person in the church that morning was instructed to list all the things that were troubling them, no matter how big or small. They were then instructed to place the list in the envelopes and to address the envelopes to themselves.

"During the final song, I encourage each one of you to bring those worries you just wrote down to the altar and lay them down. We'll let Jesus take care of them for a while and then we'll see how we feel about those same issues."

One month later, the pastor mailed the envelopes out to his congregation. With few exceptions, most of the congregation saw their month-old concerns in a whole new light. Though some troubles were ongoing in the people's lives, the majority of the worries that seemed so enormous at the time had diminished drastically in urgency and intensity. Bills had gotten paid, arguments had been resolved, problems at work had changed, and health problems had been healed. This simple experiment taught the congregation a lesson about the nature of worry that none of them would soon forget.

What has helped you keep God's eternal perspective on worry in mind? What has helped you keep God's eternal perspective on worry in mind?

Keep in Mind

"These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need" (Matthew 6:32-33, NLT)

Words You Should Know

A. Consider (Matthew 6:28) katamanthano (Gk.) — To examine or note carefully

B. Ye of little faith (v. 30) oligopistos (Gk.) — Lacking trust or trusting too little

Say It Correctly

Rhetorical. Ruh-TOR-ih-cul.

KJV

Matthew 6:25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

NLT

Matthew 6:25 "That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing?

26 Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are?

27 Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?

28 And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing,

29 yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are.

30 And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?

31 So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?'

32 These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs.

33 Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

34 So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today."

The People, Places, and Times

Grass. During biblical times, fuel was scarce. Withered plants of all kinds were used for fuel. The term in verse 30 that is translated "grass" actually includes all sorts of vegetation not classified as trees, including the beautiful lilies mentioned in verses 28-29. Even the magnificent plants that displayed God's care in creation ended up as fuel to be used by the people that He valued and loved.

Wealth. Wealth is a blessing from God. Deuteronomy is full of promises of the Promised Land bringing with it fields, vineyards, cattle, and good harvests that meant economic prosperity to the Israelites. Paul speaks of monetary donations from the Corinthian church to the poor in Jerusalem as a "grace" or "mercy" (Gk. *charis*, 2 Corinthians 8-9). However, the Bible also recognizes that material wealth brings with it great dangers. For example, there is the danger of failing to acknowledge that God is the source of the blessing (Deuteronomy 8:17-18; Hosea 2:8). Another spiritual danger associated with riches is materialism; that is, envying and greedily hoarding the things money can buy.

Background

Jesus always used illustrations in His sermon that His listeners could understand. For instance, those who heard this message knew of the wealth of Solomon and could probably visualize how beautifully he was clothed in the richest cloth with elaborate ornamentation. Jesus also used objects that were right in front of Him. As He sat upon the mountain, He spoke of the lilies of the field (Matthew 6:29) and the birds that flew overhead (v. 26) and told the people that they were much more important to God than these creatures. Therefore, to fully understand God's Word, we have to dig a little to discover the setting and ideas of the people of the time in which the Scripture was written. We can also look for contemporary illustrations to help listeners understand what God is saying today.

How does the setting of today's passage on a hillside in Galilee affect our understanding of the text? What would be a similar setting in modern-day?

At-A-Glance

1. Earthly Examples (Matthew 6:25-30)
2. Anxiety's Antidote (vv. 31-34)

In Depth

1. Earthly Examples (Matthew 6:25-30) Don't worry about the necessities of food and clothes, Jesus counsels because your heavenly Father knows you have these needs. To have excessive concern reflects a lack of trust in an all-wise and loving heavenly Father. What can you change by worrying, Jesus asks. If you cannot add a single hour to your life span, something only God controls, why worry about food and clothes? He will supply these needs just as He supplies life itself.

Jesus provides several reasons and illustrations to support His counsel. First, we must trust God because we cannot do these things ourselves (v. 27). Going into specifics, Jesus secondly reminds us of God's past and present performances. If you doubt God's ability to take care of His creatures, you need only look at what He has done, is doing, and promises to continue doing (v. 26). Third, Jesus reminds us that God can provide better than we can. The flowers do not work or weave their own garments, yet they are more beautifully gowned than the wealthiest king that Israel had ever known (v. 29). Finally, we are reminded that we are worth a lot to God (v. 26, 30). We need only turn to Calvary and see the expression of His love and concern there (Romans 8:32). Christ assures His audience that God cares for all His children. Our faith in Him is well-placed, giving us confidence in our future.

Why do we worry so often about things we cannot alter?

2. Anxiety's Antidote (vv. 31-34) The phrase "Take no thought" (vv. 31, 34) does not mean that believers are to wait passively on God's provision. It also does not mean that we should not carefully and prayerfully plan for our futures. It means that all of our efforts and planning should be made in confidence. Believers should be assured that God knows exactly what we need and that He will provide for those needs.

In verse 31, Jesus delivers the punch line: If God takes such good care of His simplest creations, then He can be trusted to take care of our needs. Anxiety robs us of our ability to trust God's care for us. Worry leaves us hopeless and fearful. Confidence in God to meet our day-to-day needs, however, frees us to concentrate on those things which are pleasing to Him: God's kingdom and righteousness. The idea is a constant mental preeminence of God's kingdom. We are to always be putting God's kingdom first and other things in proper perspective. When we do this, we have the assurance that the things necessary for survival and comfort will be given to us.

He promises that if we give the Kingdom first place, all our other needs will be met. Our problem is that we do not believe that. Our lack of confident trust in our heavenly Father causes us to hesitate. Only when we begin to take Christ's promise seriously will we begin to experience the joy that comes from confident trust in Him.

What is one area of your life that you worry about? How would seeking God's Kingdom first help alleviate that worry?

Search the Scriptures

1. What do we learn from nature about the goodness of God? (Matthew 6:26-29)
2. In what way should we not be like unbelievers? (v. 32)
3. What is Jesus' instruction about tomorrow? (v. 34)

Discuss the Meaning

1. What makes you more valuable than the flowers or the birds?
2. Should someone trust Christ just so their physical needs will be met?
3. What does it mean and look like, in practical terms, to seek God first? (v. 33)

Liberating Lesson

We live in a very materialistic culture. It is very easy to get locked into the lie that who you are equals the pile of stuff you can accumulate. Those who do not have the ability to contribute financially (the elderly, the ill, the disabled, the unwanted unborn) are assigned a lesser value than those who have big earning power. God, on the other hand, values every person and is not at all impressed by our material possessions.

By learning to seek His kingdom first, you declare to the world around you that you serve a radically different King. Desiring Him above all else will help set everything else in proper, eternal perspective. It has the added bonus of subduing worry, which can also be a powerful statement to the world around you that your King is completely trustworthy.

Application for Activation

In this passage, Christ does not condemn material possessions. He simply warns us of the peril we face when our search for things gets ahead of Him (cf. 1 Timothy 6:17). He reminds us that His Father is available to provide all our needs when we learn to trust Him. May each of us take a hard look at ourselves and our lifestyle. Are we really placing the interests of Christ and His kingdom first? Are we developing that confident trust in our Father that was so characteristic of Christ? There's no better time to start than now!

You might want to try the experiment discussed in the In Focus section, either as individuals or as a group. Make a list of everything that is worrying you today, date it, and place it in an envelope not to be opened for a month. While you are listing your concerns, pray about each one. When you open your envelope a month from now, you will have a fresh perspective (and answered prayer) about today's problems. You can trust God—You are of great value to Him!

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Matthew 6:25-34 25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? The preposition, “therefore,” that begins this section serves as a transition from the previous verses (vv. 22-24), which emphasizes the need for total focus and undivided loyalty to the Lord God. Therefore, setting our affection and desire on earthly possessions or occupying ourselves with amassing and hoarding earthly wealth will influence our affection, love, service, and loyalty toward God. It will mean making wealth our master rather than God or having two masters, which Jesus says is impossible. If we love money or riches, it follows then that we cannot love God; and if we love God, then our love for riches will be eliminated.

What would cause someone to love money or have money as their master? Needs! These include primarily the necessities of life— food, clothing, and sustenance. Lack of these necessities can lead one into worry and anxiety or doing all sorts of things that might lead to evil. Aware of this, Jesus advises His audience against anxiety and worry. He does this by using two negative imperatives (vv. 25, 31) and develops His arguments by offering positive alternatives. Then He concludes with another negative imperative and positive advice (v. 34).

The phrase “I say unto you” underscores the importance of both what He has already said and what He is about to say, and the truthfulness and certainty of what He is talking about. The prohibition “Take no thought” translates a Greek verb that can be rendered “do not worry, fret, or be anxious.” Neither your life nor what to eat or what to wear should concern you. Jesus then follows this statement with two rhetorical questions, “Is not life more than meat and the body than raiment?” Of course, the answer is “yes”—life is more than meat (food) and the body is more than raiment (clothing). The word translated as “life” here is psyche (Gk. puh-SOO-khay), which also means “soul.” These worries might affect our life in our day-to-day activities, but they should never trouble our souls. The importance and implication of these rhetorical questions are not realized until verse 33. In support of His argument against an anxious approach to life,

Jesus illustrates His point about food by urging His audience to think about the birds and how they get their food.

26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? 27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? Christ points the people's attention to the birds. When one considers how birds eat they would realize that birds do not sow or cultivate their food, reap or harvest what they planted, nor do they worry about storing their food in barns. God provides for them. Therefore, we should learn from how the Lord cares for the birds. He will, in the same way, and even more than that, care for our needs. Stating His providential authority and care over His creation, the Lord made a similar point to Job (Job 38:39-41; cf. Matthew 10:29-31).

Jesus strengthens this truth again with another rhetorical question: "Are ye not much better than they?" Of course, the answer is in the affirmative; human beings are worth more than birds since we are created in the image of God.

It is noteworthy to understand clearly that Jesus is not encouraging laziness or that the disciples do not need to work and expect "manna to fall from heaven" as the saying goes. Adult birds do not wait for their food to be dropped into their beaks. The point here is that they go about their daily search for food without fretting. God in His providential plan and care provides for them daily. In the same way, we need to trust the Lord for our daily food (see the Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6:11).

In case the audience did not get His point, Jesus poses another rhetorical question (v. 27) to drive home the truth about God's care for them. The point is that worrying is useless and profitless since it cannot "add one cubit" to one's stature. "Cubit" is the Greek word *pechus* (PAY-khoos), a measure of length equal to the distance from the joint of the elbow to the tip of the middle finger (approximately 18 inches), so its precise length fluctuates. Many interpreters believe that cubit is used figuratively here to refer to any short length. Hence, the NLT translates verse 27: "Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?" Indeed, it has been medically proven that anxiety causes stress, which is detrimental to health and can cause stroke, heart failure, and in some cases death. Instead of adding to life, worry shortens life.

28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: 29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Christ's second argument against the futility of worries focuses on clothing. He questions the rationale of worrying about clothes— what we should wear—and then directs our attention to the lilies or flowers of the field. He uses the verb, *katamanthano* (Gk. ka-taman-THA-no) translated "consider," and means "to consider well, to examine" or "note carefully," and implying the same level of focus and concentration as "behold" (v. 26). Here Jesus calls on the listeners to thoroughly consider the flowers of the field and "how they grow." They do nothing of themselves to grow, neither "toiling" in the fields to earn money to buy clothes nor "spinning" to make clothing themselves. The lilies or flowers of the field refer to wild plants in general (Psalm 103:15) rather than flowers planted in the garden (see v. 30

where they are described as grass of the field). He then describes the beauty of these grasses by comparing them with the splendor of King Solomon. Their splendor surpasses that of Solomon (the most decorated king of all Israel) with no effort of their own. Who gives them their beauty? The answer is obvious—God.

30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Then the argument follows, just as in verse 26, from the lesser to the greater. If God could clothe the “grass of the field,” which has no lasting value, but is destined for the oven to be burned for fuel, “shall he not much more clothe you?” Again, Jesus is not advocating laziness, although the thought here differs slightly from that of the birds. The flowers are as useful as they can be; they grow and they are flammable. Such simple tasks do not require beautiful petals, but God gives it to them anyway. The kind of God who is willing to trouble Himself with making even such a temporary thing beautiful will do so much more for those whom He loves and calls to an everlasting life.

Jesus then rebukes the disciples by calling them oligopistos (Gk. oh-lee-GO-pees-toce), which means people of “little faith,” a term Jesus uses often in the Book of Matthew (8:26; 14:31; 16:8, etc.). Oligopistos could mean “lack of trust” or “trusting too little.” Nothing affects our faith and trust in the Lord more than anxiety and worry. Most of the people who were listening to Jesus likely had a correct understanding of godly doctrine. Their faith in that sense was strong. But if they allow themselves to worry, that shows a lack of faith. Likewise today, we can give the right answers to theological questions, but that knowledge must inform our actions and thought patterns or our faith is actually weak.

31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? 32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. Jesus summarizes His thoughts and reemphasizes the command “do not worry.” He gathers the previous statements together with the preposition, “so” or “therefore” (Gk. oun, OON). That is, in light of God’s providential care, there is no need to fret or worry about food, drink, or clothing. Jesus lists the common questions that go through the minds of those who worry. Such questions are useless and unprofitable because they cannot accomplish anything (v. 27). He continues by saying that worrying too much about all the earthly needs is the mark of the Gentiles. Gentiles here are those who have no relationship with the Lord—those who do not trust in the providential power of God to provide for His people.

It is also useless and indeed foolhardy to fret about food, drink, and clothes since the Lord is always aware of our circumstances and knows what our needs are, including the above-mentioned necessities. A hardy faith will remind us that God is in control of His entire creation and that He loves us dearly. As any father would (Matthew 7:9-11), He will take care of His children without their having to fret about the things He will provide. Christ’s disciples should, therefore, lead lives different from those of the pagans, who have no trust in God’s fatherly care for them and whose fundamental goals are materialistic.

33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Rather than fretting and worrying about all our needs, and pursuing earthly materials and possessions as the pagans do, we are to seek first the kingdom of God, and God's righteousness. The Lord who knows all our needs (vv. 8, 32) will also give us "all these things." We have the assurance that if we will earnestly pursue His kingdom and hunger and thirst for His righteousness (5:6), God will meet our needs because of who He is and because He cares for us (cf. Philippians 4:6; 1 Peter 5:7). To "seek" (Gk. zeteo, dzay-TEH-oh) means "to desire, to strive for," or "seek after" or "to clamor for"—the same word is used in reference to the Gentiles seeking earthly things. Therefore, to seek "first" the kingdom of God and His righteousness is to put God and our desire for His kingdom first in our lives. It is to make God our priority in service and worship above everything else. It means to strive to live in a right relationship with God our Father and to allow Him to govern our lives—in all activities of life and in all our relationships with other people. It is to give our absolute allegiance to God, submitting wholeheartedly to His will always.

34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Jesus concludes this section with another negative imperative: "Do not worry." In view of the assurance that God will meet the needs of those who commit themselves to His kingdom and righteousness, our (Gk. "therefore" or "these things being so"), "take ... no thought for the morrow." This is a way of saying, "Leave tomorrow's problems for that day" or "allow nature to take its course," as people would say. Focus on today's issues; they are enough for today. Don't add tomorrow's "evil" (Gk. kakia, kah-KEE-ah), or trouble, to today's. God's grace for today is just enough for today and should not be wasted on tomorrow's worries. There will be new grace to meet whatever trouble tomorrow may bring (Lamentations 3:23).

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Worried? Seek God's Counsel
(1 Samuel 9:5-10)

TUESDAY

God Cares for His People
(Ezekiel 34:11-16)

WEDNESDAY

Rich? Set Your Hope on God
(1 Timothy 6:17-19)

THURSDAY

Enlarge Your Faith Practices
(Matthew 17:14-20)

FRIDAY

Overcome Worry through Faith
(Luke 12:22-34)

SATURDAY

Serve God with Your Whole Heart
(Matthew 6:19-24)

SUNDAY

Live Worry-Free Every Day
(Matthew 6:25-34)