

## THE CURE FOR WORRY MATTHEW 6:25-34

The message this morning, from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, is entitled, "The Cure for Worry." You probably know that worry is an epidemic in our culture. 38% of Americans say they worry *every* day. Surely, some of us are among them. And so I'm going to begin by giving you a quiz that might help you determine if you are a worrier.

- Do you lay in bed at night and obsess over the events of the day that did not go well, or the events of tomorrow that you *fear* might not go well?
- Even when things are going well, do you find yourself feeling apprehensive, wondering what could or will go wrong?
- Do distressing thoughts suddenly pop into your mind and hijack your pleasant thoughts and calm moods?
- Do friends and loved ones comment on how much you worry?
- Do you dwell on the "what ifs" that could happen to you or your loved ones? A health crisis? A financial crisis? A job crisis?
- Do you often feel that something bad is about to happen?
- Do you ever feel *compelled* to worry thinking that if you don't worry the bad thing *will* happen, while if you do worry, your worrying might actually prevent the negative outcome?

So...are *you* a worrier? If you are, the passage we are going to look at this morning is of great relevance to you, for it provides some very practical help for this problem. It begins in **verse 25** of Matthew 6. <sup>25</sup> *"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?"*

The command in this passage is "Do not be anxious about your life..." or "do not be worried..." It's a command that comes on the heels of Jesus' admonition to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, and not on earth—to set our minds and hearts on things above, not on things here on earth. And then Jesus went on to say that what you are focused on, what you are preoccupied with, *is* your treasure. So if you are focused on earthly things, your treasure is ultimately going to amount to nothing, even if it seems impressive right now. If you are focused on heavenly things—God and spiritual realities—your treasure will pay rich dividends for all eternity, even if you cannot see it right now.

That raises a question. If we spend our time and energy and efforts on heavenly things, then who is going to take care of our earthly needs? Jesus anticipates that question and says, "Don't worry about that. Don't worry about the daily necessities of life that you need in order to live in this world. Specifically food and clothing—what you will eat and drink or what you will wear. Then He builds a case as to why worry is unnecessary. And He begins that argument with a question of His own.

"Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" The answer is obvious. Of course our lives and bodies are more important than food or clothing. We all know that. But somehow knowing it up here (in our heads) doesn't necessarily mean we believe it in our hearts. Because we still think about those daily necessities a lot. Sometimes we can't help it, because we get hungry and thirsty; because we have a growing family with more mouths to feed; because our clothes wear out; because we have kids that outgrow their clothing.

But it's one thing to think about them, and it's another thing to be anxious or worried about them. That word translated "anxious" in my version doesn't always have negative connotations. Sometimes it is used in the New Testament to describe an appropriate feeling of concern or care for something, like the church (1 Cor. 7:32) or someone's welfare (Phil. 2:20). In those passages it is translated "concern." But the word is also used to describe an intense "feeling of apprehension or distress in view of possible danger or misfortune" (Louw-Nida).

By the way, there *is* an appropriate level of *concern* that one *must* have even about food and clothing. It's the *concern* that compels you to get out of bed in the morning and go to work so that you can provide for your family. It's the *concern* that compels you to look diligently for a job if you are unemployed and don't have an income. It's the *concern* that compels my Kenyan friends who grow their own food to work diligently in their gardens each day. Not to have *this* kind of concern is a sign of irresponsibility or laziness.

But in verse 25 Jesus is talking about more than concern. He's talking about fearfulness and fretfulness, and He says these feelings are inappropriate for children of God. Even during times of drought, or crop failure, or illness, or financial hardship.

Incidentally, most of those listening to Jesus lived a hand-to-mouth existence. Most scratched out a living off the land or the sea, and they were used to dealing with such things as drought, pestilence, prolonged illnesses, and other unpredictable and unpleasant phenomena. They made enough to make ends meet, but the idea of having a savings account or a pension or an insurance policy or welfare in case they got sick or disabled or too old to work was foreign to them. So when Jesus talked about food and clothing He was addressing two of their greatest concerns. But Jesus reminds them that as important as food and clothing are, they are not nearly as important as they themselves.

He explains this in **verse 26**. ***26 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?***

As a loving and attentive Creator, God has assumed the responsibility of taking care of His creatures—all of His creatures, including birds. God made the world so that birds have an ample supply of food each and every day. He gave birds wings and eyes and instincts to gather food for themselves and their young. And this happens so naturally and seamlessly that most of us never think about the food supply of birds. We expect them to sustain themselves.

But Jesus says that the One who created them is actually the One who sustains them. And that is Jesus' first theological premise in this passage. God takes care of His creatures. Why? Because His creatures are valuable to Him. However, not all His creatures have the same value. Birds are not nearly as valuable as human beings. So if God feeds birds, will He not also feed His children, since they are so much more valuable to Him than birds? The answer is, "Of course!"

Human beings are so important to God that He made them in His image; He knit each one together in their mother's womb; He sent His Son into world to die in their place so they could be His friends; He adopted those who put their faith in His Son so they could be His very own sons and daughters; He made them co-heirs with Jesus and gave them an inheritance in heaven that can never perish, spoil, or fade; He has prepared a place for them in heaven so they can live in His presence forever.

And if God has done all this for us because we are that important to Him, then doesn't

it stand to reason that He will take care of our basic needs on this earth, just like He does for creatures that are not nearly as valuable?

So the cure for worry is to *know* that God cares for all His creation, to *believe* that you are the most valuable of all His creatures, and to *trust* that He cares about you enough that He will provide what you need. Essentially, worry is a theological issue, because it has to do with our understanding of God. The antidote for worry is to know Him as He really is, and to personalize that knowledge.

You've heard the saying, "I've got friends in high places." Someone who makes that statement is saying, "I don't need to worry, because I know people who have enough power, authority, resources, and connections to help me if I get in trouble.

Our heavenly Father possesses all power and all authority. He has unlimited resources. And talk about connections? Talk about creativity? He made water come out of a rock in the wilderness to satisfy the Israelites' thirst! He sent bread from heaven—manna—every morning so that their hunger could be satisfied, and He did it for forty years! He can do anything! And, according to Jesus, He *will* do whatever is needed to ensure our needs are met.

But Jesus gives another reason why worry is unnecessary, and He makes His case with another rhetorical question. **Verse 27.** *27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?*

The answer, of course, is "No one!" Worry doesn't accomplish one thing. It is an absolute waste of time and energy. By the way, there is some question in the original language as to the meaning of this phrase. Does it mean, "a single hour to his span of life," or "a single cubit to his height?" Believe it or not, in Greek it can mean either. But the meaning is the same either way.

Worry cannot do anything except accentuate the problem and add to your trouble. It takes you on an emotional roller coaster ride that usually ends up in a debilitating downward spiral. It causes ulcers and heart disease and depression and all kinds of other physical and emotional maladies that do a number on your health. It's interesting that the English word "worry" comes from a word that means "to strangle" or "to choke." Isn't that exactly what worry does? It strangles our joy and chokes our peace and drains the vitality right out of us.

Jesus continues in **verses 28-30.** *28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 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?*

Remember, Jesus is preaching this sermon on a grassy hillside where wild flowers were plentiful. Even today red and purple anemones with crowning ten inch stalks, along with blue irises, grow wild on the hillside above the Sea of Galilee. All of these were referred to as "lilies" in Jesus' day, and He probably just pointed to them as He spoke to illustrate His point.

If a person took a few minutes to study these flowers, they would undoubtedly be impressed by their intricate beauty and texture and color. But for most people living in the region these features went unnoticed. Their interest in these flowers was more utilitarian. Along with the grass, these flowers were collected and dried and used for fuel in their ovens.

But Jesus says that even though wild flowers are really not that important, they are important enough to God that He creates them with exquisite beauty. They are so beautiful,

in fact, that the clothes we make and wear cannot rival their beauty. Not even Solomon, in all His splendor, was dressed as beautifully as the wild flowers.

God did that. God made wildflowers beautiful even though they are short-lived. God made them beautiful even though for most people in Jesus' day wildflowers served no real purpose other than to heat an oven.

And if God did such a superb job of clothing them, as insignificant as they are, just think what He will do for you. Because you are a creature that is infinitely more significant than a flower. You are permanent. You have a soul. You are made in God's image. You are the pinnacle of God's creation—the glory of His gallery. You're worth so much more than flowers! Therefore, if God clothes flowers, He will clothe you as well.

So don't worry. *Know* that God takes care of all His creation, *believe* that you are the most valuable of all His creatures, and *trust* that He cares about you enough that He will provide what you need. If you don't, you have "little faith," according to Jesus. "Little faith" is a favorite expression of Jesus, and here it reminds us that worry is a theological issue. To have "little faith" is to believe in a little god, and that is a serious theological deficiency.

Jesus goes on in **verses 31-32**. *<sup>31</sup> Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' <sup>32</sup> *For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.**

Jesus tells us that this God who created and cares for the world is our *heavenly Father*. So another reason why worry is inappropriate is because it is incompatible with our status as children of God. Worry is an activity fit for pagans, not those who have a generous and attentive heavenly Father.

Gentiles were considered pagans because they believed in lesser gods or no gods at all (Robinson). It was natural for them to worry because their make-believe gods were temperamental and impersonal and unreliable. They couldn't count on them in times of trouble because they couldn't be sure they were capable of helping or even interested in helping.

And so pagans, naturally, are anxious and fretful. Jesus says, "They seek (or run) after these things..." because their so-called "gods" cannot take care of them, and they have to fend for themselves.

Christians who worry are like pagans. Their worry reveals that they have not really grasped who God is, how they are related to Him, and how much He loves them. Their worry reveals that they don't really believe God is in control, or that God is all powerful, or that God will take care of them just as a father takes care of his children. Their worry reveals that, like orphans, they think they need to take matters into their own hands to survive.

The cure for worry is to know God well enough to trust Him. And Jesus says that all the evidence you need to know God well enough to trust Him is right under your nose. Look at creation. Look at the birds. Look at the wildflowers. Who takes care of them? Who makes them beautiful? God does! And since you are so much more valuable than anything in creation, God *will* take care of you, too. You can count on it!

So instead of worrying, Jesus tell us to direct our attention to something truly beneficial. **Verse 33**. *<sup>33</sup> But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

This statement is nearly identical in its meaning to the admonition we studied last week in verses 19-21, *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven...for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* Seeking first

the kingdom of God and His righteousness is the same as laying up for ourselves treasures in heaven. It is the way we lay up treasures in heaven, and it is also the antidote to worry. Because when we turn our eyes upon Jesus and look full in His wonderful face, the things of earth grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.

I would submit to you that we cannot worry and be fixated on Jesus at the same time. It is impossible. Because to fix our eyes on Him, to set our hearts on Him is to be conscious of how incredibly good and kind and generous and loving He is, and it is to believe that He will exercise that goodness and kindness and generosity and love toward us. Therefore, we have no need to worry. Worry is silly.

So verse 33 is a very practical admonition, and it's for our benefit. We don't have to look at this command with a sense of dread, as though seeking first the kingdom and righteousness is going to rob us of earthly pleasure and joy. It's not a sacrifice to pursue the kingdom and righteousness as our *first* priority. It's actually the way we get the most out of life. It's the way we experience deep, abiding joy and satisfaction. It's how we live in sync with our heavenly Father. It's how we live with a continual awareness of His presence, so that we can commune with Him freely and spontaneously throughout each day. It's how we sail true north, fulfilling the purpose for which He created us. It's how the character of Christ is formed more completely and more perfectly in us. And it's how we obey the command at the end of chapter 5 where Jesus said, *"Be perfect, therefore, as your Father in heaven is perfect" (5:48)*.

But it's also the way we get our needs met. Jesus said, <sup>33</sup> *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you*. What things? The things He has been talking about that people tend to worry about—food, drink, clothing—the daily necessities.

When we give our attention to the kingdom of God, when we go after His righteousness, God *will* provide. This is a promise. God has obliged Himself to provide for the daily necessities of those who seek first His kingdom and righteousness. If we pursue the big things, God will take care of the little things.

**Verse 34.** <sup>34</sup> *"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of this verse provides a beautiful commentary. *"Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes"* (Message). In other words, let's live in the present, one day at a time. Someone said, "God divided life into bite-sized chunks called days, and trying to chew more than one at a time can choke us" (Robinson).

I want to conclude by getting very practical. How *do* we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and, thus, not be anxious about the temporal things of this world?

I have learned from my own experience that if I do not take this literally, I probably won't do it. I could easily wake up in the morning and immediately become preoccupied with the temporal things of this world. All I have to do is turn on the news, pick up the newspaper, browse social media, look at my emails, start making to-do lists, etc. If I was not careful I could be inundated with stuff that would prevent me from thinking about the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and compel me to think about earthly things. And I could go through the whole day continuing to be preoccupied with earthly things as though that was all there is.

For me, the way to seek first the kingdom and His righteousness is to, literally, direct my attention and my energy to heavenly things before I do anything else. So I start a fire, grab a cup of coffee, sit in my favorite chair next the fireplace, and spend ample, uninterrupted time with the Lord in prayer and in His Word. Mindy is sitting in another chair across the room, and she is doing the same thing. Occasionally we might discuss something we are reading in Scripture, or we might pray together, but during that time we don't have conversations about the mundane, practical issues of life, even if we have to give attention to them that day. Seeking the Lord, communing with Him, being fed from His Word, is our highest priority, and we protect that time from intrusions. It is also our favorite time of the day.

Now, we both happen to have jobs where most of our time and energy is devoted to eternal things. But I've also worked in construction, building homes that will one day be burned. We've also had kids who were young once, and we know what happens when they get out of bed. We've had this practice even in those days—rising long before the kids get up, or before I had to be on the construction site at 7.

It's a priority. But for me it's also a necessity. It's the way I renew my mind, the way I am able to have an eternal perspective, the way I am able to orient my life to heavenly things. If I don't do that first thing in the morning, my mind will be preoccupied by the things of this world. Somehow God and His kingdom and His righteousness become obscure and distant.

As I said, I take the command to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness literally. And when I start the day doing this, I am much more inclined to be in communion with God and pursue heavenly things throughout the day.

## **The Cure for Worry” Matthew 6:25-34**

**Main Idea:** Our relationship with an attentive and generous Father means there is no cause for worry

**The Command: “Do not be worried” (25-32)**

The focus of our worry (25)

Food

Clothing

The reasons worry is unnecessary (26-32)

God takes care of all His creatures (26a)

God’s children are His most precious creatures (26b)

Worry cannot accomplish anything (27)

God is an exquisite designer of clothing (28-30)

Flowers do not clothe themselves (28)

Flowers are better-dressed than humans (29)

If Father magnificently “clothes” temporal flowers, He will most certainly clothe His eternal sons and daughters (30)

Worry is a pagan activity (31-32)

**The Command: “Seek first the God’s kingdom and His righteousness” (33)**

The priority of the kingdom and righteousness

“All these things...”

**The Command (restated): “Do not be worried” (34)**

# Family Life Groups

## Sermon Discussion Questions

### Matthew 6:25-34

1. Are you a worrier? If so, *what* do you worry about? *Why* do you worry about it? Has anything good resulted from your worry?

Peter says, “Cast your anxieties on [God], for He cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:7). Will you relinquish that worry to God? How can you do that?

2. There are some followers of Jesus who admit to stockpiling food and provisions for an impending time of tribulation on the earth? Does Matthew 6:25-34 speak to this (not their view of the tribulation but their stockpiling of food and provisions)? How?