Facing Life without Worry

Bible Background • MATTHEW 6:25-34
Printed Text • MATTHEW 6:25-34 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 37:1-8

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: REVIEW Jesus’ teaching about God as the great provider; REFLECT on what can and cannot relieve worry and stress; and DECIDE to express reliance on God to meet needs.

In Focus

At the conclusion of a sermon about worry, a pastor 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 him or her, no matter how big or small. They were then instructed to place the list in the envelopes and address the envelopes to themselves.

A 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 lives of the people, the majority of the worries that seemed so enormous at the time the lists were penned 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 worries that none of them would soon forget.

Job worries, financial problems, health concerns, family issues—every 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. Today's lesson is about gaining God's eternal perspective on worry.
Keep in Mind

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. 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” (Matthew 6:33-34).
Focal Verses

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 “So I tell you, don't worry about everyday life— whether you have enough food, drink, and clothes. Doesn't life consist of more than food and clothing?

26 Look at the birds. They don't need to plant or harvest or put food in barns because your heavenly Father feeds them. And you are far more valuable to him than they are.

27 Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? Of course not.

28 “And why worry about your clothes? Look at the lilies and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing,
Yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are.

And if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, won't he more surely care for you? You have so little faith!

“So don't worry about having enough food or drink or clothing.

Why be like the pagans who are so deeply concerned about these things? Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs,

and he will give you all you need from day to day if you live for him and make the Kingdom of God your primary concern.

“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 (KJV) that is translated “grass” actually includes all sorts of vegetation not classified as trees, including the beautiful lilies mentioned in verses 28 and 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.

Solomon. He reigned from approximately 960-922 B.C. and was known as Israel's richest king. When he asked God for wisdom, God also granted him long life, fame, and great riches (1 Kings 3:6-14).

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 may even have picked one of the wildflowers right beside Him as He spoke of the lilies of the field as “one of these” (Matthew 6:29) and gestured toward the birds that flew overhead (v. 26) as He 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.

At-A-Glance

1. Examples of God's Care (Matthew 6:25-31)

2. Anxiety's Antidote (vv. 32-34)
In Depth

1. Examples of God's Care (Matthew 6:25-31)

The promise of God's kingdom resides in our hearts if we are Christians (see 1 Peter 1:3-5). This hope is not like the wistful wishing that accomplishes nothing (“Oh, how I wish I could have a vacation”). It is a “favourable and confident expectation . . . a purifying power” (Vine's Expository Dictionary). The kingdom of God resides in us! Heaven is not just a future element; it also has a present-tense impact on our lives as believers.

In this section of today's text, Jesus gives us a simple instruction, followed by three examples that every hearer could easily understand. In Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of Scripture entitled The Message, he interprets Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:25 thusly: “If you decide for God, living a life of God-worship, it follows that you don't fuss about what's on the table at mealtimes or whether the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body.”

First, Jesus uses birds to support His argument. They don't plant seeds, harvest, or store crops, yet they are well cared for. It is important to note that the birds are not self-sufficient creatures. Their care comes from the Father. Jesus then simply, pointedly asks, “Are you not of more value than they?” (v. 26, NKJV).

Next, He asks a rhetorical question: “Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?” (v. 27). We can't make ourselves grow any taller, no matter how hard we wish to! Some commentators have interpreted this verse to mean a continuance of life (adding days to our lives) rather than an increase in height. Either way, our most intensive worrying will not add a centimeter to our height or a second to our lives. Those things are out of our control.

Jesus' third examples (vv. 28-30) were the common field lilies and the grass of the field. The common field lilies were simple prolific wildflowers. It is as though He pointed to the dandelions that pepper our landscapes and asked us to consider their growth. (Well, lilies are prettier!) These flowers did not work or weave their own garments, yet they were more beautifully adorned than the wealthiest king that Israel had ever known.

In verse 31, Jesus delivers the punch line: If God takes such good care of some of the simplest of His creation, then He can be trusted to take care of our needs. Food and clothing are some of our most basic necessities. He doesn't promise designer clothing or gourmet cuisine. He promises that He will care for us. We are of much greater value to Him than a flower or bird.

Anxiety robs us of our ability to trust God's care for us. Worry causes us to try to figure out a way to obtain for ourselves that which God has already promised to supply. Worry leaves us hopeless and fearful. Jesus diagnoses the problem for us in this section. The next section of today's study provides His cure for our worries.
2. Anxiety's Antidote (vv. 32-34)

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (v. 33). Carl Henry wrote, “The sons of the Kingdom should therefore live in complete trust that God will supply the necessary provisions for the physical life; they are not to be pressed by anxiety and worry for these things. Ambition is to be directed toward the Kingdom of God and God's righteousness, rather than the acquisition of wealth” (The Biblical Expositor, 31).

Jesus gently reminded His hearers that the Father knew their needs (v. 32). Too many people spend their lives chasing after ways to get their needs (and, too often, their wants) met. By focusing on this, they have put the cart before the horse. However, our “ambition” for the things of God as Carl Henry described it, causes temporal things to take their proper position in our hearts. Jesus ends this passage by giving a practical application of how a God-seeking life should function. Trusting God with each day and leaving tomorrow in His hands further limits the possibility for anxiety to rule our lives.

Search the Scriptures

1. What three examples did Jesus give to illustrate the Father's care (Matthew 6:26-30)?

2. What is Jesus' instruction about “tomorrow” (v. 34)?

Discuss the Meaning

What does it mean, in practical terms, to seek God first (Matthew 6:33)?

Lesson in Our Society

We live in an extremely materialistic culture. It is so easy to get locked in to 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, and 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 to 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.

Make It Happen

You might want to try the experiment described in the In Focus story, either as individuals or as a group. Make a list of everything that is worrying you today, date it, place it in an envelope, and do not open it 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?

“Therefore” that begins this section serves as transition from the previous verses (vv. 22-24), which reemphasize 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. For if we love money or riches, we cannot love God; and if we love God, then our love for riches will be eliminated.

What will cause someone to love money or have money as his or her “master”? Need! 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 in verse 25, “I say unto you,” underscores the importance of what Jesus 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 mee merimnáo (may me-rim-NAH-o), which can be rendered either “do not worry or fret” or “do not be anxious” for your life or about what to eat, drink, or wear. Jesus then follows this statement with a rhetorical question: “Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?” Of course, the answer is yes—life is more than meat (food) and the body more than raiment (clothing). However, the importance and implication of these 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 next 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?
The word “behold” in Greek emblepo (em- BLEP-o), which means “to gaze up or look upon,” is used metaphorically here. It means “to look with the mind or to consider,” or “to observe closely.” What should we consider concerning fowl or birds of the air? When one considers how birds eat, one realizes 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. “Yet,” says Jesus, “your heavenly father feeds them” (v. 26, NAS). Therefore, we should learn from how the Lord cares for the birds. He will in the same way, or even more than that, care for our needs. Stating His providential authority and care over His creation, the Lord rhetorically questions Job, “Wilt thou hunt the prey for the lion? or fill the appetite of the young lions, When they couch in their dens, and abide in the covert to lie in wait? Who provideth for the raven his food? when his young ones cry unto God, they wander for lack of meat” (Job 38:39-41).

Jesus strengthens this truth again with another rhetorical question: “Are ye not much better than they?” (Matthew 6:26). Of course, the answer is in the affirmative; since man is created in the image of God, humankind is worth more than birds. It is noteworthy to understand clearly that Jesus is neither encouraging laziness nor that the disciples do not need to work and expect “manna to fall from heaven,” as the saying goes. 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. In His providential plan and care, God provides for birds daily. In the same way, we need to trust the Lord for our daily food (see the Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6:11).

As though the disciples 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), but its precise length is uncertain. It is used figuratively here, and many interpreters believe that “cubit” refers to a short span of time. Hence, the NIV translates verse 27 as, “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?” Indeed, it has been medically proven that anxiety causes stress, which is detrimental to health and can cause stroke, heart failure, and even 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 “consider” (Gk. katamanthano, kat-am-an-THAN-o), which literally means “to consider well, to examine” or “note carefully,” and carries the same idea as “behold” (v. 26), though with a stronger emphasis in this verse. Here Jesus calls on the listeners to thoroughly consider the flowers of the field and “how they grow.” They do nothing (“toil” or “spin”) of themselves to grow. The lilies or flowers of the field refer to wild plants in general (Psalm 104:14-16) rather than flowers planted in the garden (see Matthew 6:30 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's robes. Their magnificence surpasses that
of Solomon (the most decorated king of all time) 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 to be burned for fuel, “shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?” Again, Jesus is not advocating laziness, although the thought here differs slightly from that of the birds. The birds work without fretting, the flowers do nothing—but become destined for the oven—and yet they are adorned with beauty that is unparalleled and greater than Solomon’s. Jesus then rebukes the disciples by calling them oligopistoi (plural) from the noun singular oligopistos (ol-ig-OP-is-tos), which means people of little faith—a term Jesus uses often in the book of Matthew (see 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). Oligopistos could mean “lack of trust or trusting too little.” Very little affects our faith and trust in the Lord more than anxiety and worry.

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 reemphasizes the command “do not worry.” He does this by using the word oun (oon), meaning “so” or “therefore.” That is, in light of God's providential care, there is no need to fret 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 do not serve any helpful purpose (Matthew 6:27). He continues by saying that worrying too much about all the earthly needs is the mark of the Gentile—“all these things do the Gentiles (pagans) seek” (v. 32). 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 own 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. Christ's disciples should therefore lead lives that contrast 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 Gentiles (pagans) do, we are to make the kingdom of God and God's righteousness our preeminent concern. The Lord who knows all our needs (vv. 8, 32) will also give us “all these things” (v. 33). To “seek” or in Greek epizeteo (ep-eed-zay-TEH-o) 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, when we seek “first” the kingdom of God and His righteousness, we make God our utmost, continuous priority in service and worship. It means that we strive to live in a right relationship with God our Father and allow Him to govern our lives—in all activities of life and in all our relationships with other people. By seeking Him first,
we give our absolute allegiance to God, submitting wholeheartedly to His will always. We have the assurance that if we will earnestly pursue His kingdom, hunger and thirst for His righteousness (Matthew 5:6), God will meet our needs because of who He is and because He cares for us (Philippians 4:6; 1 Peter 5:7). After all, He cares for the birds (Matthew 6:26) and the plants (vv. 28, 30), which are of lesser value.

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, “take . . . no thought for the morrow” (“do not worry about tomorrow,” NIV; “do not be anxious about tomorrow,” ESV). The phrase “for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself” 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, kak- EE-ah) or “trouble” to today's. God's grace for today is sufficient for today and should not be wasted on tomorrow's worries. God will provide new grace to meet whatever trouble tomorrow may bring.

Sources:


Say It Correctly

Pagans. PAY-gans.