

The Sermon on the Mount

Session 10 – “Worry and Anxiety” – Matthew 6:25-34

Verse 25...*Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?*

Remember, when a passage starts with “therefore” it relates to what was previously said. (You need to know what the “therefore” is there for.)

1. How do you think this passage relates to “You cannot serve both God and ‘Mammon’”? (Look also at verse 32 below.) One of the greatest worries that many have is related to money.

The first question in the Westminster Shorter Catechism is, “What is the chief end of man?” The answer is: “To glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever.” We cannot serve and glorify God if we are constantly filled with doubt about His ability to care for us.

Jesus is not forbidding advance planning or careful, prudent preparation and care. (Even the animals, such as those that Jesus mentions, do that.) Just don’t worry about it.

The Greek word for “worry” means to be anxious or distracted. This is an imperative, and Jesus wouldn’t have commanded it if it weren’t necessary.

2. Do you think worry is a sin? Why or why not? (Note that “do not worry” is in the imperative form.)

Verses 26-27...*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? ²⁷And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?*

“Look at the birds...” Not just casually see, but “to observe fixedly or discern clearly.” John R. W. Stott said, “We should all be bird watchers. Christ commands it!” “Birds of the air” and “lilies of the field” are in the environment they are supposed to be in. Sparrows under water and lilies on concrete don’t do well!

Jesus frequently uses “how much more” arguments, as He does here. If God gave us life, He can certainly be trusted for the lesser things that support that life. God has demonstrated that He will care for us, most completely in our salvation through Christ.

As we trace the life of the Apostle Peter through the Gospels, we find that he often worried. When Peter walked on the water toward Jesus, he became so worried, he began to sink (Matthew 14:30). He worried that Jesus might not pay taxes (Matthew 17:24ff). We see him worried about who would betray Jesus (John 13:24). He worried that Jesus’ role as Messiah might be short-circuited and that He would have to suffer. He worried about his own safety, and so he denied Jesus when he was in the courtyard of the high priest (Matthew 26:58ff). But as Peter came to really know Jesus, he discovered that Jesus could take care of Himself, and also take care of His disciple. And so, near the end of his life, Peter wrote to all Christians: “Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7)

Verses 28-30...*And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰But if God so*

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clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? “Consider the lilies....” Not just think about, but “to learn thoroughly or note carefully.”

3. Read Psalm 8:4-5. How does this passage underscore what Jesus is saying here in the Sermon on the Mount? Note the contrast between the grass of the field which is transitory and “you” – an eternal soul.

Verses 31-32...*Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’³² For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. Note...another “therefore”!*

When Jesus uses the term “Gentiles”, or NIV says “pagans” – the Greek word is “ethnos”, meaning nations. It was particularly used by Jews to refer to non-Jews. So what Jesus is basically saying is that worry is a characteristic of a non-believer, not one who lives in relationship with, and trusting in, God. Contrast between the striving (seeking) of the Gentiles for “things” and the striving (seeking) for the kingdom of God.

Verses 33-34...*But strive first for the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.³⁴ “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.*

4. How is verse 33 an antidote to worry? When you worry, where are your thoughts focused? Which petition of the Lord’s Prayer addresses this?

Isaiah 26:3-4 (NLT) says, *You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in You, whose thoughts are fixed on You! Trust in the LORD always, for the LORD GOD is the eternal Rock.*

When God has our full attention, it is hard for worry to get a “foot in the door”. The reverse is also true: when we are worrying, we aren’t really focusing on God. In other words, trusting God and worrying are mutually exclusive.

Kenneth S. Wuest in *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament* wrote, “God commands us to ‘Stop perpetually worrying about even one thing.’ We commit sin when we worry. We do not trust God when we worry. We do not receive answers to prayer when we worry, because we are not trusting.”

We should get into the habit of turning to God whenever we find ourselves even beginning to worry. It should become like a conditioned reflex. We all experience normal reflexes. If you put your hand near the burner on the stove, you will quickly pull it back. You don’t think about it, you never really learned it. It comes naturally. A conditioned reflex is something you have learned. A lot of the things that you do in driving a car are conditioned reflexes. If you see a child run out into the street, your foot immediately goes to the brake. It doesn’t result from instinct, but from training and practice. In the same way, we need to learn to immediately turn to the Lord in a time of trouble or worry. (We especially need to learn to do this first, not as a last resort!)

So, three antidotes for worry that are a matter of focus:

- 1) Focus on the kingdom of God.
- 2) Focus on righteousness – doing the right thing. (Micah 6:8)
- 3) Focus on today only.

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Don't rehash the past (Learn from the past, but don't brood over it.)

Don't rehearse the future

Just rejoice in God in the present.

This third antidote to worry is in verse 34. Live one day at a time. After all, that's all you can do anyway.

Are you familiar with the "Serenity Prayer" that is used by AA and other "anonymous" groups? (It would certainly be appropriate for "Worriers Anonymous"!)

*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change;
the courage to change the things I can change;
and the wisdom to know the difference.*

This also reminds us that worrying is often caused by looking at our problems and difficulties like a dense forest that must be chopped down. But we need to learn to say, "By the grace of God, I'll chop down 3 trees today, the next day 3 more – maybe 4 – but no more."

To summarize, this passage contains seven arguments and defenses against worry.

1. If we trust God for our life (and thus our salvation), we can trust Him for the lesser things. (v. 25)
2. If the rest of creation doesn't worry, why should we? (v. 26) We should learn from nature, and also our own past.
3. Worry is a futile activity. (v. 27) It is often counter-productive, and sometimes it can actually be injurious.
4. We are of eternal significance, as compared to temporal, though beautiful, flowers. (vs. 28-30)
5. Worry is what those who do not know God do. (v. 32) It is irreligious.
6. Seek – concentrate on – God and His kingdom and will, then there will be no room for worry. (v. 33)
7. Live one day at a time. (v. 34)

Corrie ten Boom, the Dutch lady who was imprisoned by the Nazis for hiding Jews, wrote, "When I worry, I go to the mirror and say to myself, 'This tremendous thing which is worrying me is beyond a solution. It is especially too hard for Jesus to handle.' After I have said that, I smile and I am ashamed."

