

# "Faith Fitness"

By Allan Pole



Theme: Exercise your faith and it will chase away your worries.

Text: Matthew 6:24-34

Here's a thought: Robert Frost (1874–1963) wrote, "The reason why worry kills more people than work is because more people worry than work."

One morning Death was walking into a city when a man stopped him and asked what he was doing.

Death answered, "I'm going into the city to kill 10,000 people."

The man replied, "That's terrible that you would kill 10,000 people."

Death responded, "Taking people when their time has come is my job. Today I have to get my 10,000."

Later, as Death was coming out of the city, the man met him. Again, he was furious. He said, "You told me this morning that you were going to take 10,000 people, but 70,000 died today."

Death answered, "Don't get mad at me. I only took 10,000. Worry killed all the rest." (From Haddon W. Robinson, *What Jesus Said About Successful Living*, Grand Rapids: RBC, 1991, 221)

Jesus talks straight about worry in Matthew 6:24-34:

24 "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. 25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? 28 "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin.

29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. NIV

Faith grows stronger when you:

**Look at the Birds**

**See the Plants**

**Seek His Kingdom**

Faith grows stronger when you:

**Look at the Birds** (Matthew 6:24-27)



When the word “therefore” appears in the Bible you need to look at the verses leading up to it and determine what it’s “there for”. Jesus explains that no one can serve two masters and we must choose between God and Money. The Bible uses the term “hate” in this way several times and it merely signifies to love less so. For example, Jacob loved Rachel but hated Leah (Genesis 29:31 NKJV). This is why it is so difficult for rich people to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 19:23). This is why the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6:10).

Jesus says you cannot serve God and Money in the New International Version while the New King James Version leaves it transliterated as mammon. Mammon is a Syriac (Aramaic) word, a name given to an idol worshipped as the god of riches. It is not known that the Jews ever formally worshipped this idol, but they used the word to denote wealth. The meaning is, you cannot serve the true God, and at the same time be supremely engaged in obtaining the riches of

this world. One must interfere with the other. (From Barnes' Notes, Electronic Database Copyright © 1997, 2003, 2005, 2006 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

While we might think this is simply a change of attitude it is actually a change of allegiances. Once we make the decision to serve God wholeheartedly we decide to place our trust in Him alone as our provider. The One who is the same yesterday, today and forever transcends the economy and our bank account. The fruit of pursuing God is faith while the fruit of pursuing money is worry.

The poet Robert Frost (1874–1963) wrote, “The reason why worry kills more people than work is because more people worry than work.”

*Therefore* do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? While these are basic needs for survival, the Lord calls us to lift our sights higher than daily life. This does not mean we should be irresponsible or impractical when it comes to our work and management of daily affairs, but we need not lay awake at night worrying about who and what is our source.

“Jehovah-Jireh” is one of the many different names of God found in the Old Testament and it means “The LORD Will Provide”. This name first appears when God provided the ram to be sacrificed in place of Isaac in Genesis 22:13-14:

13 Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.”  
NIV

The birds go about their daily lives finding food and building their nests, but who supplies them with all they need? The same One who supplies you and me with all we need. Jesus’ original listeners had no access to bulk buying at Costco or to freezers to store their food. Instead, they depended upon a regular cycle of rain and sunshine to grow their crops.

The next time you are tempted to worry about how you will put food on the table go out and watch the birds. Reflect on people who lived 2,000 years ago. If they could live without worrying about where their next meal was coming from how much more can we today?

Faith grows stronger when you:

Look at the Birds

**See the Plants** (Matthew 6:28-32)



Why do you worry about what you will wear? The grass and the flowers testify to God's abundant provision and creativity. The common dress of ancient Eastern kings was purple but sometimes they wore white robes. Jesus draws this comparison between King Solomon and the white lily that grows in the field. There could be such a scarcity of fuel that even dried grass and withered flowers were used for making a fire. If the Creator bestows such beauty upon something that lives and dies so quickly, how much more concerned is He with people?

This question came from someone living in the United Kingdom and was posted on an international tourism website site: "I have never seen it warm on Canadian TV, so how do the plants grow?" This answer was posted in response: "We import all plants fully grown and then just sit around and watch them die."

The Lord clothes the plants with such incredible diversity how much more will He clothe us? Worry does not help us to live longer or grow taller; instead it shortens our existence and makes us smaller, lower capacity people. Humans are the only ones in creation who are tempted to turn to money for our existence while every other part of creation acknowledges its ongoing dependence upon the Creator.

The motto "IN GOD WE TRUST" was placed on United States coins largely because of the increased religious sentiment existing during the Civil War. Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase received many appeals from devout persons throughout the country, urging that the United States recognize the Deity on United States coins. "IN GOD WE TRUST" first appeared on the 1864 two-cent coin (from [www.treasury.gov/about/education/Pages/in-god-we-trust.aspx](http://www.treasury.gov/about/education/Pages/in-god-we-trust.aspx)). The continued security and prosperity of the world's largest economy depends upon its citizens trusting their Provider and honouring His principles as outlined in the Bible.

Will you let the plants inspire you to trust God for everything you need to survive? Will you let this trust chase away your worry?

Faith grows stronger when you:  
Look at the Birds  
See the Plants

**Seek His Kingdom** (Matthew 6:33-34)

## → seek first ←

Knowing that the Lord will look after your needs you can move on to why you are here. Jesus calls His followers to move beyond a preoccupation with the ordinary needs in life such as food, clothing and shelter to focus on eternal matters. Having put this distraction behind us we can seek first His kingdom and His righteousness.

To seek the kingdom is to seek the King. Jesus is worthy of our complete attention and affection. To seek Him is to submit to His kingship in every area of our lives. It is to be ruthless in rooting out every thought, attitude, priority, word and action that is not in submission to Christ. To seek His kingdom is to become so sick and tired of sin that we refuse to justify ourselves any longer and repent so His righteousness will be established in us. It is to be painfully honest with ourselves so Christ can be fully formed in us.

The Apostle Paul says it this way in Colossians 3:1-4:

1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. NIV

Who and what do you really care and think about? The battle is won or lost in your heart and in your mind. Your growth or deterioration there will be evident in what you say and what you do. This is why Jesus is so much more concerned about transforming you from the inside out than with cleaning you up on the outside.

Note that Jesus does not say we should avoid *planning* for tomorrow; we should, rather, avoid *worrying* about tomorrow. You and I are called to live by faith rather than by worrying. Life is more than what we will eat, drink or wear. Life is about daily and eternally enjoying our Heavenly Father and His provision. Focus on knowing, loving and serving your Provider and let Him look after you.

Someone has observed, "Faith is the starting point of obedience." The Lord will ask you to give up *everything* and *everyone* to follow Him but this will seem impossible if you do not trust Him.

Take a step back and monitor your thoughts. Who or what dominates your thoughts and dreams? This is the key indicator of where you are heading in life.

The cheerful girl with bouncy golden curls was almost five. Waiting with her mother at the checkout stand, she saw them - a circle of glistening white pearls in a pink foil box. "Oh please, Mommy. Can I have them? Please, Mommy, please!"

Quickly the mother checked the back of the little foil box and then looked back into the pleading blue eyes of her little girl's upturned face. "A dollar ninety-five. That's almost \$2.00. If you really want them, I'll think of some extra chores for you and in no time you can save enough money to buy them for yourself. Your birthday's only a week away and you might get another crisp dollar bill from Grandma."

As soon as Jenny got home, she emptied her penny bank and counted out 17 pennies. After dinner, she did more than her share of chores and she went to the neighbour and asked Mrs. McJames if she could pick dandelions for ten cents.

On her birthday, Grandma did give her another new dollar bill and at last she had enough money to buy the necklace.

Jenny loved her pearls. They made her feel dressed up and grown up. She wore them everywhere - Sunday school, kindergarten, even to bed. The only time she took them off was when she went swimming or had a bubble bath. Mother said if they got wet, they might turn her neck green.

Jenny had a very loving daddy and every night when she was ready for bed, he would stop whatever he was doing and come upstairs to read her a story. One night when he finished the story, he asked Jenny, "Do you love me?"

"Oh yes, Daddy. You know that I love you."

"Then give me your pearls."

"Oh, Daddy, not my pearls. But you can have Princess - the white horse from my collection - the one with the pink tail. Remember, Daddy? The one you gave me. She's my favourite."

"That's okay, Honey. Daddy loves you. Good night." And he brushed her cheek with a kiss.

About a week later, after the story time, he asked again, "Do you love me?"

"Daddy, you know I love you."

"Then give me your pearls."

"Oh Daddy, not my pearls. But you can have my baby doll. The brand new one I got for my birthday. She is so beautiful and you can have the yellow blanket that matches her sleeper."

"That's okay. Sleep well. God bless you, little one. Daddy loves you." And as always, he brushed her cheek with a gentle kiss.

A few nights later when her daddy came in, Jenny was sitting on her bed with her legs crossed Indian-style. As he came close, he noticed her chin was trembling and one silent tear rolled down her cheek.

"What is it, Jenny? What's the matter?"

Jenny didn't say anything but lifted her little hand up to her daddy. And when she opened it, there was her little pearl necklace. With a little quiver, she finally said, "Here, Daddy. It's for you."

With tears gathering in his own eyes, Jenny's kind daddy reached out with one hand to take the dime-store necklace, and with the other hand he reached into his pocket and pulled out a blue velvet case with a strand of genuine pearls and gave them to Jenny.

He had them all the time. He was just waiting for her to give up the dime-store stuff so he could give her genuine treasure.

So it is with our Heavenly Father. He is waiting for us to give up the cheap things in our lives so that he can give us beautiful treasure. Will you trust Him? Are you holding onto things that God wants you to release? Do you *need* the nicest clothes, the biggest house or the newest smart phone? Has worry become your closest friend? Are you holding on to relationships, habits and activities that you have become so attached to that it seems impossible to let go?

If you are willing to let go of your life and this world to pursue the kingdom of heaven and His righteousness the Lord promises to provide for you. Sometimes it is so hard to see what is in the other hand but you can believe this one thing - God will never take away something without giving you something better in its place.

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## **Seek His Kingdom**

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