

**Living as a Kingdom Disciple : Dealing with Worry**  
**Matthew 6:25-34**

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I'd seen that face before. The curved up muscles of her smile straightened as her face tightened. The eyes, that only a moment earlier had been bright with joy, now darkened with concern. The relaxed body that was engaged in a comfortable social conversation tensed up a little when she first grasped the situation.

It was the face of my mother. Her expression changed when she got a good look at me. It was many years ago when I was a young adult and had recently moved out of my parent's home to live with some friends in downtown Calgary. I still attended the same church as Mom and Dad. So sometimes I wouldn't see or talk to my parents for a few days. Then we'd see each other at church. My Mom was always happy to catch up with me there.

But the day before that Sunday, we had a ball hockey game. During that game I got cross checked with a hockey stick just above my right eye. I could feel the swelling and pain during the rest of the game. By the next morning I had a black and bruised eye and forehead. So when I showed up to church, my Mom was initially glad to see me. But as soon as she glimpsed the eye her expression changed to that face. It was the face of a concerned mother.

She immediately ended her conversation and marched over to find out what happened and where the other guy was so she could take him down. You know how most mothers rise up like a mother bear when one of their cubs has been threatened or wounded. I of course downplayed the incident and pretended to be embarrassed by all this motherly concern. But deep down it meant a lot to know my Mom was looking out for me.

It's Mother's Day. Most mothers are naturally concerned about their children. Bible Commentator Michael Wilkins writes *"Mothers have special concerns. As they carry their child during pregnancy, they have the concern of the birth itself and then the ongoing care of this fragile little blessing. They're concerned about the healthy growth and the proper friends and influences; they think about whom their children will marry and whether they, as mothers, can handle all these responsibilities. Then they become concerned about their own failures as a mother, whether they give enough discipline and love, enough guidance and freedom, or appropriate reward and restriction. Of course, fathers are all involved in these same activities, but the special role of a mother often leads to more direct concern about the past and the future in raising their children."*

Bible Teacher Warren Wiersbe made this comment during a chapel message: “It is often said that we are continually being crucified between two thieves—the regrets of yesterday and the worries about tomorrow.” When a mother turns her eyes off Jesus, responsible concern often turns to the worry of despair, or fear, or hopelessness.

But mothers are not the only ones who struggle with worry. Men worry about their jobs, position, recognition and families. Adults worry about their aging parents, children and grandchildren. Young people can worry about relationships, body image, pressure, loneliness, relationship with their parents and school. Seniors can worry about health, provision, loneliness and lack of purpose. People worry about public speaking, competitions, job reviews and changes in the economy.

**To worry is to be or feel anxious about something unpleasant that may have happened or may happen.**

Worry is a troubled, unsettled feeling that causes anxiety. We all have the potential to worry or become anxious. If you have ever experienced or lived through stressful times you know this feeling. You may have experienced a pit in your stomach or butterflies. You may have sweated, felt your heart rate increase, struggled with sleep or felt like throwing up. Though many of us worry, I don’t think I’ve ever met anyone who likes worrying or can’t wait to get back at it.

Is there an alternative to anxiety and worry? Jesus addresses this in the next paragraphs of the Sermon on the Mount. We’ve seen Jesus give this message to his disciples. He describes what the life of a kingdom disciple should look like. Remember, a kingdom disciple is someone who has trusted Christ and entered into living life under the reign of God. Last week, Jesus taught about our greatest treasure. He reminded us that storing up earthly treasures for ourselves is ultimately a waste because they won’t last. But storing up treasures in heaven will be something we can enjoy forever. Jesus probed our hearts with statements like “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” and “You cannot serve God and money.” Next he will talk about worry. He gives us several reasons why we need not worry. Instead He shows us what we can focus on instead of worrying. My hope today is that by the end of our time together, we will see good reason to turn to Christ with whatever concerns us today when we come to Jesus’ table.

Matthew 6:25-34 (ESV)

<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? <sup>26</sup> 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? <sup>27</sup> And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? <sup>28</sup> And why are you anxious about

clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin,<sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.<sup>30</sup> 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?<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.<sup>33</sup> But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

<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.

Now two quick comments before we plunge into this. *What is the difference between healthy concern and worry?* Concern is appropriate attention directed toward right things, kept within bounds that cause us to our proper duty. Worry is over-concern. The word translated "anxious" means a state of mind where one is over concerned about something. We talked about this as staff this week and realized that it's not easy to discern when we cross the line from healthy concern to worry. But we thought it was something like if **our minds get consumed with this thing that worries us and we can hardly think of anything else**, we're probably worrying especially in light of a loving Heavenly Father. So somewhere there is healthy concern & over-concern called worry.

My second comment concerns how broadly we can apply Jesus' principles here. We will see him talk about life, food, body and clothes. So is it appropriate to apply this to concerns about children or health or parents or work? I think we can apply this to whatever worries us because the testimony of Scripture is consistent. We can trust the Lord for everyday things in life. So I'm going to take the position that no matter what worries us, we can apply what we learn from Jesus here to that situation.

The last thing Jesus said prior to our passage is "you cannot serve God and money." You have to choose your master – God or money. Jesus expects His disciples to choose God as their master. But there is still this matter of food, clothing and the daily needs of life. With the word "therefore" I think Jesus anticipates the fear or concern over putting God as the ultimate treasure instead of stockpiling resources for ourselves with the word "therefore." Therefore, if you choose God as your master and not money, you don't have to be anxious. You don't have to worry. **You need not worry. Why?**

**Reason 1 – God has already provided for the greatest needs in your life. So He can certainly provide for the lesser needs.** "Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more

than food and the body more than clothing? That last phrase is where the first reason comes from. Somehow life is more than or superior to food and the body is more than or superior to clothing. But how? A person needs food to live. A person needs to cover their body with appropriate clothing to survive.

Yet if you don't have a life and don't have a body, you have no need for food and clothing. For you and I to actually exist as human beings, we need a life and a body. Who gave that to us? Well it directly comes from our biological parents. But where did they get life from? And you go all the way back to the origin of life. Life originates with God. Life comes from Jesus. God has already provided us with the greater need of actual life and body. So if God can provide that, He is able to provide food and clothing. It's an argument from the greater to the lesser. If God provide the hardest thing, He can certainly provide the easier thing.

You need not worry. Why? **Reason 2 – God provides food for birds who do not plant, harvest or store food. So He will certainly provide for you, His own child.** Has anyone here ever seen a group of birds going back and forth across a field planting seeds in the spring? Has anyone ever seen birds driving farm machinery in the late summer harvesting crops? Has anyone ever seen a barn built by birds to store the harvest? No. The birds certainly have to go work. They have to find seed and food to survive and feed their young. But there is food to find. There is seed to be discovered. God provided it.

So if God is willing to provide for birds that don't have anything to do with producing the food, how much more will he provide for us, His kids? Jesus says, "Are you not of more value than they? God is the Creator of birds. But he's not the Father of the birds. He is our Father. If our Father goes to that much trouble to provide for little birds, how much more will He provide for His own kids?

**Reason 3 – Worry produces nothing valuable or helpful.** Verse 27 - Who of you by worrying can add a single hour or span to his life? For a lot of people listening to Jesus that day, survival was a question not far from their minds. They didn't make plans for next year because they didn't know if they'd survive next season. Death was a lot earlier and a lot more common for them. People starved. A lot more infants died in or around childbirth. Plague could strike or soldiers or raiders. One crop failure could mean starvation. People constantly pursued longer lives. So Jesus goes right at that basic need for survival that dominated their minds. It's like He's saying - *Okay, you want to live longer and ensure your family's survival? Well worry doesn't help that goal one bit. It does not produce anything that will increase the*

probability of a longer life. If anything, it will decrease your life because of the negative health effects or the time wasted that you could have been doing something more productive. Worrying is a waste.

**Reason 4 - God clothes field flowers with more majesty than the richest king. So he will clothe His own (28-30).** Most of the people listening to Jesus that day could only dream of wearing colorful clothes. Commentator Craig Keener notes –*The sheep was the most common grazing animal in the ancient Mediterranean region. So clothes were made of wool or of linen made from flax. Only the rich wore silk. Poor people often wore undyed wool or when possible stained their clothes with cheap dark dye producing a grey or dull brown cloak. For dressier occasions they might wear brighter colors from vegetable dyes. Only the rich could afford various shades of purple.*” So when a king wore a royal purple robe, people knew that was an expensive piece of cloth.

Yet Jesus asks the crowd to look around and consider the wild flowers. Maybe they were the purple and red anemones common to the Galilee region. They were easily seen and virtually worthless. When they finished flowering, people used them as fuel in their ovens. Yet these wild flowers were more beautiful and colorful than the richest king’s robe. Jesus says “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?”

For the first time, Jesus hints at the deeper issue behind many anxieties – little or lack of faith in God’s ability to provide. Little faith translates a word used elsewhere in Matthew for the disciples when they failed to trust Jesus in a situation of physical need. Faith is, for Matthew, a very practical reliance on the care and power of the Father and of Jesus.

**Reason 5 – There is more to life than the frenzied pursuit of more. Besides, that’s the way the world lives.** Verses 31 and 32. “Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles (or pagans) seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.” The Gentiles or non-Jews were the people without God. They spent their lives pursuing more and more food, drink, clothing and materials. But in one way, it made sense for them to do that. They had no God who they believed really looked out for them or helped them. So you would expect them to seek after all these things.

But the people of God should live in a profoundly different way. We have a loving heavenly Father. Our Father knows we need these things. So why would we spend so much of ourselves on the endless pursuit of more security or

resources or insulation from the hard things of life? A person with an intimate love relationship with their heavenly Father would surely know and trust that Father to provide for these basic needs. But if we're devoting our lives to seeking after these things, just like people with no faith, what does that say about our faith?

Now I don't want to minimize the struggles some have had with anxiety or worry. Some of you have experienced an anxiety that disables and debilitates you. We live in a world that is sometimes harsh. Anxiety is becoming a biological, emotional and psychological response to disturbing news and world problems. There are many factors that contribute to our anxiety and worry. But maybe a large chunk of our worry stems from taking our eyes off of Jesus and substituting him with despair, hopelessness or fear. Then we turn to our own efforts to try to control our environment. But Jesus says kingdom disciples must learn to not go in that direction. Instead of fretting, they must trust Him in faith.

What about starving people or those who face some other deep trial? God may very well provide for their needs through aid and the gifts of others. But life is not only about the material and temporary. Life is about the eternal and spiritual. God is able to provide what is needed even in the face of starvation – He is able to provide safe passage to heaven. He has provided Christ's sacrifice on the cross to pay for sin.

What about if something really troubling or hard comes into our lives? What if we have to face cancer or some other difficulty? Jesus did not promise a trouble free life. He did not say "don't worry because God will work everything out or you will never have any trouble. He said "don't worry because you have a Heavenly Father who will provide for you." He will provide what we need when the time comes – we'll expand on that in a moment.

So what's the alternative to worry?

Jesus answers with a somewhat famous verse. "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you." **Make it your first aim to pursue life under God's reign and will.** (33) Make the kingdom of heaven the center of your continual, daily priorities. We must enter into, submit to and participate in the new saving reign of God. In seeking God's righteousness, we seek to live a life of full submission to the will of God.

But what does it look like to seek first the kingdom and His righteousness? I don't know what it looks like for you. But for me it requires that I make God my number one priority. I must make Him my greatest treasure. When I seek Him first, I approach conversations, visits, appointments, errands and food differently. I look at life differently. I

seem to have more time, more patience and more focus on things that really matter. I have a deeper earnestness for His will and His purposes. And I discover a deep sense of satisfaction and energy when I participate in His purposes. It starts with Him. When I seek Him first thing in my day, He redirects me to where He wants me to go, who or what He wants me to see, what He wants me to focus on and sometimes what to do or say in a given situation. It starts with Him and His Word and a prayer – Lord help me to hear from you today – help me to see you – please empower me to obey you and seek you with all my heart. Help me with this message – last Sunday – help me get through this message.

**Live one day at a time. Enjoy God’s grace today and His promised provision for tomorrow.** (34) We can’t live more than one day at a time. So we must give our 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 us deal with whatever hard things come up when the times comes.

Max Lucado provides sound advice to mothers and others when thinking about tomorrow’s problems. Maybe a woman says “I don’t know what I’ll do if my husband dies.” Lucado answers “you will when the time comes if you trust in Christ.” Or “when my children leave the house, I don’t think I can take it.” It won’t be easy. But strength will arrive when the time comes.

Everything we face, we face with the Lord. We have a loving heavenly Father who watches over us and knows what I need before I ask. We need to be responsible and diligent with what has been presented to us including the opportunities and resources. But we don’t have to madly scramble to try to figure it all out. We can rest in the fact that God is ultimately in charge and proves Himself again and again to be a faithful provider.

God has done this in our salvation. The hardest part of obtaining our salvation was the cross. God provided His Son to ensure we could be saved. So if God can do that, He can certainly provide for our lesser needs. So I invite you to come to God now with your worries and replace your worried thinking with faith filled thinking. Let us do that as we prepare to meet Jesus at His table.