From the Pulpit of Keith Miller
Meadowbrooke Church
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Despair and the Mind
Matthew 6:25-34

Introduction
What is anxiety? Anxiety is the body's response to fear, tension, or worry. Symptoms of anxiety include an increased heart rate, higher than normal blood pressure, physical tension, sweating, insomnia, and depression. The brain is designed to handle certain stressors for a short period of time and will release cortisol and adrenaline as a way to prepare your body to fight or run from the danger. The body was not made to be in a constant state of anxiety where the body's anxiety response continues long enough that it becomes harmful to a person physically.

Karen Cassiday, a psychologist, said that when a person lives in a heightened state of anxiety the body, "has gotten ratcheted up and then has lost its ability to calm back down. It's kind of like a car being stuck in high idle where the engine is racing too fast, but it's not in gear."[1] Prolonged anxiety can increase the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, breathing problems such as asthma, stomach and gastrointestinal issues, a weakened immune system, weight gain, chronic muscle problems, and insomnia.

God designed our bodies in such a way that when threatened we can better defend ourselves, but we were not made to stay in a state of anxiety or high stress. When we remain in a state of anxiety for long periods of time, we get ulcers, get sick, or even have high blood pressure that can eventually bring great harm to us. Most of our anxiety and stress is over things we have little to no control over. In a sermon on this same scripture passage, Timothy Keller offers the following insight:

> I think when Jesus says, "… do not worry about tomorrow …" at the very end of the passage, he's summing up everything else he said. Worry is concern about the potential not the actual. Worry is concern about that which we can't control. The essence of anxiety is the desire to control that which we can't control. That's why we're anxious. We feel the need for control in an area where there is no possibility of control. That causes anxiety. Now that's what it is. Anxiety is the will to control the uncontrollable.[2]

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus offers us two reasons why anxiety makes little sense for the Christian. Because Jesus understood the nature of human beings, he also understood that the emotions are not something you can just turn off. When it comes to the anxious thoughts of God's people, there is no "easy button" to keep your mind from racing in the darkness of the night. The same two reasons Jesus gives us here also serve to help us fight against the root of our anxiety.

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[1] Renee Fabian, "9 Ways Anxiety is Impacting Your Physical Health" May 4, 2018.
[2] Keller, T. J. (2013). *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*. Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

You see, anxiety is what comes when we listen to our hearts instead of reason; reason says: "you do not have control" while the heart tells us: "take control." The way to address our anxiety is to speak to our hearts the truth of God's word. The root of anxiety is unbelief in the promises of God. The only way to address your unbelief is not to feed it with worry, but to starve it by feeding your mind with who God is and what he has said.

You may be asking: "Pastor Keith, where in the world do you make the connection that the source of anxiety is unbelief?" Permit me to show you where I make that connection, and then allow me the time to show you how what Jesus says in verses 25-34 serves to help you battle anxiety. So, where I make the connection between unbelief and anxiety is in what Jesus says in verse 30, "**But if God 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?**"

Now, let's consider the two reasons Jesus gives us for why we should not be anxious.

Reason #1: God is Adonai (vv. 25-30)

During our time in the Lord's Prayer, I showed you that the reason we can pray the way that Jesus modeled prayer for us is because our heavenly Father is Elohim (he is Creator), Yahweh (he is faithful), and Adonai (he is sovereign).

In six days, God created all things. We believe that God created everything not because any of us were there on the first day of creation to witness it, but because our faith, along with reason, compels us to believe it to be. What we read in Hebrews 11:3 makes more sense than the theory that all of matter happened by accident: "**By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.**" In Revelation 4:11, we discover that God is celebrated because he created all things: "**Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things and by your will they existed and were created.**" This is why the prophet Jeremiah could pray in the wake of the unparalleled suffering of his kinsmen:

> "**Ah, Lord [**Adonai**] God [**Yahweh**]! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you. You show steadfast love to thousands, but you repay the guilt of fathers to their children after them, O great and mighty God [**Elohim**], whose name is the LORD [**Yahweh**] of hosts, great in counsel and mighty in deed, whose eyes are open to all the ways of the children of man, rewarding each one according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds**." (Jeremiah 32:17–19)

In verse 25, Jesus uses the same verb tense (present imperative) that he used in verses 19-20 regarding treasures: "***Do not lay* up for yourselves treasures on earth… but *lay up* for yourselves treasures in heaven.**" The first word we see in verse 25, is "therefore" which means: "In light of your treasure that is being laid up in heaven, '**where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal…**'" And, because God is a better master who loves you… instead of money which cannot give life, "**…*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**" (v. 25). In other words, be vigilant in not worrying.

When I was in seminary, I was required to read a book written by John Piper titled, *Future Grace*, I read my first copy to the point that the binding is falling apart; I had to get a second copy. He has a whole chapter on anxiety, listen to what he said about it:

> Stop for a moment and think how many different sinful actions and attitudes come from anxiety. Anxiety about finances can give rise to coveting and greed and hoarding and stealing. Anxiety about succeeding at some task can make you irritable and abrupt and surly. Anxiety about relationships can make you withdrawn and indifferent and uncaring about other people. Anxiety about how someone will respond to you can make you cover over the truth and lie about things. So if anxiety could be conquered, a lot of sins would be overcome.[3]

Anxiety forces us to take our eyes off God and who he is and places the focus on the self, who can do nothing but worry. So, Jesus gives us a way to move our focus back to where it should be with one word and three examples: "Look…". The word, "Look" (*blepō*) can also be translated, "look intently at" or "to contemplate."

So, what should I contemplate, Jesus? For starters, how about the birds that "…**neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them**" (v. 26). In other words, God feeds the birds that are insignificant creatures compared to humans, yet he cares for them. Yet God moved time and space to send his Son to die in your place for your sins, don't you think that you are worth far more than the birds of the air and that he is able to provide food for you who are able to sow and reap?

What else should I contemplate Jesus? How about the fact that you woke up this morning. How much control do you really have over your life? How much time does your worrying and anxiety add to your life? Medically speaking, it actually does more to decrease the quality of your life: "**And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life**" (v. 27)?

Finally, a third thing to contemplate is the beauty of the lilies and the grass that covers the field. I decided to look up how to make a seed germinate, here are the six steps I found:

1. Prepare the seed-starting soil mix.
2. Place the seeds in soil or a wet paper towel.
3. Cover the seedlings with a plastic bag or lid.
4. Place the seeds in a warm location.
5. Keep the potting mix moist.
6. Thin seedlings to encourage larger plants.

Not one step tells me how to make the seed actually germinate. I can do everything right for the seed to grow, but at the end of the day, its life is dependent on God to make it happen. Jesus tells us that the flowers, "**neither toil nor spin**" and the grass is alive today and tomorrow it is gone (vv. 28-30).

Listen, if God cares enough to beautify a field and cover the brown dirt with a blanket of grass, "…**will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?**" Do you really think that God is

[3] John Piper. *Future Grace* (Colorado Springs, CO: 2012), p. 51.

ignorant of your needs? Your heavenly Father will meet your needs when it is best and in his perfect timing. It might not be what you want, but he will provide what is needed in his grace.

So, what do we do with these three examples Jesus gave us? You speak to your anxious heart is what you do. Do what the Psalmist does in Psalm 42 and preach to your weary soul and tell your heart who God is: "**Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.**" Do what the apostle Peter says we should do: "**Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you**" (1 Peter 5:6–7). When you are afraid, do not turn to yourself, but to God (Psalm 56:3).

Reason #2: Adonai is Your Heavenly Father (vv. 31-34)

Therefore, in light of the God who cares for birds, who sustains life, who makes seeds into beautiful flowers, and covers the dirt of the earth with a blanket of grass, "**do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'**" (v. 31). The God who created, who is faithful to his promises, and alone is sovereign, treasures you, dear Christian, like no other among his creation! "**What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things**" (Romans 8:31–32)?

The danger of an anxious heart is that it can push you towards disobedience, but what Jesus is saying in these verses is that we can trust God by pushing through our disbelief by speaking to our hearts:

> Our God is God, and there is no other; our God is God, and there is none like him, who declares the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, who declares: "*My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,' calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.*" (Isaiah 46:10–11)

Remember that Jesus is speaking to the Christian here. He is not speaking to the world, but to you Christian! I know this because of what he says in verses 32 and how he singles out the Gentiles, which was just another way for saying "Pagans." Here is another way you can say what Jesus said: "For those who are far from God worry about what they will eat, what they shall drink, and what they shall wear." The Gentiles look not to Elohim, Yahweh, or Adonai for their day to day needs because they do not know him, yet their ignorance does not negate the fact that the reason why they eat, the reason why they drink, the reason why they have something to wear, and the reason why they got up this morning had nothing to do with their control over tomorrow. And yet, unlike the pagan Gentiles, you, dear Christian, know the God who is Elohim, Yahweh, and Adonai, and you just don't know him; he knows you and calls you, his child! Unlike the pagan Gentiles, you call the one responsible for waking you up, clothing you, satisfying your thirst, and feeding you, Abba, which means Daddy. You are a member of his family!

But wait! There is more! Not only is he the reason you are able to eat, drink, and not have to worry about going outside naked, but you also are aware that he is the reason for your existence because, "**He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also**

with him graciously give us all things" (Rom. 8:32)? That Son, who died for you, also redeemed you, and now your spiritual hunger has been satisfied because he is the bread of life. The Son who died for you is the living water who satisfies your thirsty soul. Jesus, the Son of God, who lived the perfectly righteous life you could not live and died the death that you deserved because of your sin, has clothed you in his perfect righteousness!

Now, God knows just how fickle our hearts really are. Jesus, in the preaching of his Sermon on the Mount, knew that he would be betrayed by Judas and arrested; he knew that not one of his disciples would come through that night without caving into their anxieties over his suffering and death. We all go through seasons where our hearts scream doubt and worry so loudly that the echo of our anxious hearts ring through the chambers of our minds with such volume that makes rest seem impossible. So, the question you may be asking right now is, "What help do Jesus' words in these verses afford me?" I believe the help is found in verse 33, "**But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.**"

You may not be able to turn your mind off, but you can fight against your anxiety by turning your eyes away from yourself and back to where they need to be: The kingdom of God where your citizenship resides! And know that as you do so that there is a mercy that will not allow you to be swallowed up by your despair so long as you look to the One who endured the cross and despised its shame on your account! And as you look to him know that his mercy is inexhaustible, or as Charles Spurgeon put it: "God's mercy is so great that you may sooner drain the sea of its water, or deprive the sun of this light, or make space too narrow, then diminish the great mercy of God."

So, Jesus concludes: "**Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble**" (v. 34). When it comes to addressing your anxious heart, listen to John Piper's wise counsel "…you deal with anxieties by battling unbelief. And you battle unbelief by meditating on God's Word and asking for the help of his Spirit. The windshield wipers are the promises of God that clear away the mud of unbelief. And the windshield washer fluid is the help of the Holy Spirit."[4]

So, speak to your heart: "**Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.**" This is what Brandon Lake meant when he wrote in his song:

> So come on, my soul
> Oh, don't you get shy on me
> Lift up your song
> 'Cause you've got a lion inside of those lungs
> Get up and praise the Lord

[4] Piper, J. (2007). *Sermons from John Piper (1980–1989)*. Desiring God.