

# Seek First the Kingdom

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Matthew 6:25-34

**Sermon Series: The Kingdom of God**

*Surely there is more to life than eating right and dressing well.*

**W**orry. We all do it. I haven't met a person yet who doesn't worry about something. Some of us let our worries show. Others of us do all our worrying on the inside. Some of us are born worriers. Parents worry about their children. Children worry about their parents. We worry about jobs, schoolwork, friends, family, you name it.

Twenty years ago, an accomplished jazz singer, Bobby McFerrin, had his one and only hit song, *Don't Worry, Be Happy*, climb to the top of the Billboard charts. It received the "Best Song of the Year" honors at the 1988 Grammy Awards, the first such a cappella song to be so recognized. The song has been re-recorded several times, most notably by Bob Marley.

The refrain, "Don't Worry, Be Happy," repeats over and over in the song. While the lyrics are not particularly profound, they make the point, "Listen to what I say. In your life expect some trouble, when you worry you make it double."

In our Scripture lesson, Jesus instructs his followers not to worry no less than three times in a span of ten verses. At the outset of the passage, Jesus says, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what

you will wear" (6:25). He speaks nearly identical words in the middle of the passage: "Therefore, do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?'" (6:31) He concludes the passage in similar fashion: "So, do not worry about tomorrow" (6:34). At the beginning, middle and end of our lesson, Jesus counsels his followers not to worry. Surely there is more to life than eating right and dressing well.

Jesus supplies, in verse 26, a concrete example of needless worry: "Look at the birds of the air." Birds become the object lesson of Jesus' outdoor sermon. "They do not sow, reap or store into barns yet your heavenly father feeds them."

Some of you are avid bird watchers. Jesus invites us to let birds become our teachers.

Birds show great concern in building nests and gathering food, but they don't worry. They go about their business, unconsciously fulfilling the purposes God has for them. Although they work hard for their food, God provides the time and place for them to be fed. Birds are carefree in God's care.

Worry originates from a Middle English word meaning "to strangle." Worry can strangle us. There is nothing wrong with caring about something. What Jesus decries in these verses is becoming consumed

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with care. There is a world of difference between making careful provision for the future and undue worry. While concern prompts us to take constructive action, worry disables us.

Nowhere does Jesus condemn the wise management of food and clothing. Rather, he warns about the illusion of thinking we can find security in stockpiling material goods.

Jesus supplies a second concrete example in verse 28 about needless worry. He directs his followers in this open-air sanctuary to “consider the lilies of the field....“These lilies don't toil or spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.” King Solomon can dress up in regal splendor, but only God can make a flower.

Flowers don't worry about growing, they simply grow. In their own instinctive way, they draw water and nutrients from the soil.

If birds don't worry and flowers don't worry, why should we? “If God so 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?” (6:30).

Jesus admonishes his disciples not to worry for three principal lessons. First, worry is unnecessary. It is pointless. Worry continually recycles anxious thoughts in our minds without ever coming to resolution. Someone said worry is like a rocking chair. It gives us something to do, but it doesn't get us anywhere.

Chris and I replaced our refrigerator this weekend. Our new refrigerator was delivered yesterday, so we placed all the pictures of family and friends posted on our old refrigerator on the kitchen table. I happened to notice those pictures this morning as I prepared to come to worship. I thought of all the worries as well as joys associated with those pictures. As I thought about those anxieties this morning, it occurred to me how many worries have receded into the background.

Can you remember what you were worrying about one year ago today? If so, it probably qualifies you as obsessive-compulsive! Most of the things we worried about yesterday have assumed a different proportion today.

Second, worry is unproductive. Jesus asked, “Which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?” Worrying is, quite literally, a waste of time. It is not only unproductive, worry is counterproductive. We can't add time or value to our lives by worrying, but we can shorten it. Worry causes headaches, backaches, ulcers, insomnia, high blood pressure and a host of stomach ailments. “I'm worried sick,” is truer than we might realize. Worry takes years off our lives. This ought to give us something to worry about!

Third, worry is unchristian. Worry is practical atheism; it's an affront to God. Jesus tells us, in verse 32, that worry is characteristic of people who haven't yet learned to trust God.

Jesus' antidote for worry is trust. “If God so clothes the grass of the

***If all worry is confined to tomorrow, then we are free, for it is always today.***

field, which is alive today and tomorrow in thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith” (6:30).

Trust belongs to the kingdom of God. Worry, on the other hand, belongs to the kingdom of this world, the kingdom that is passing away.

This instruction about worry follows Jesus’ teaching about prayer earlier in the chapter. These verses serve to amplify the petition, “Give us this day our daily bread.” Jesus teaches his followers to live with the assurance that God answers prayer. Can we not trust God to supply the things we pray for?

Jesus instructs his disciples, in verse 33, to “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” “These things” refer back to everything that worries his disciples in earlier verses.

The words “seek first” call us to make the kingdom of God our first priority. “Seek first” is written in present imperative. We are to keep on seeking God’s kingdom and righteousness.

I’ve said on numerous occasions, the kingdom of God is not only a place believers go after we die. Jesus said, “The kingdom of God has come near” (Mark 1:14-15). The kingdom of God extends into those places that preoccupy us with debilitating worry.

The Bible doesn’t merely contain a bunch of feel-good promises that pertain to the next life. God’s promises belong to this life. If God

cares for birds and flowers, surely he cares for us. We can trust God for the things necessary to sustain life.

F. D. Bruner wrote in his commentary on this passage, “As a former missionary to the Philippines, I was concerned about how this text could be preached to the poor. Isn’t it cruel to tell the poor not to be anxious about getting enough to eat or wear? Could we say to those suffering from famine in Africa, ‘Don’t worry, be happy?’”

Jesus doesn’t teach us to remain indifferent to people who don’t have enough to eat or wear. His whole ministry teaches otherwise. The questions Jesus asks, “What shall we eat” or “What shall we drink” or “What shall we wear” are purposely self-centered questions— it’s about my food and my clothes. Jesus commands us to take our eyes off of ourselves and look for places where we can busy ourselves with the kingdom of God. This passage not only tells us the things Jesus saves us from but what he saves us for. We are saved from selfishness and for God’s righteousness.

Jesus’ teaching concludes on a practical note in verse 34: “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.” Jesus doesn’t mean while we cannot worry about tomorrow today, we can do so tomorrow. If all worry is confined to tomorrow, then we are free, for it is always today.

Tomorrow, as it were, never comes.

Forty-five percent of the things we worry about never happen, and 25 percent of the things that make us anxious have already happened.

***The antidote  
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Why worry about things that will never happen or carry yesterday's burden all over again? Mark Twain said, "I've seen many troubles in my time, only half of which ever came true."

Jesus calls us to a higher purpose than worrying about life. Seek first the kingdom and all these things [that worry you] will be given you as well.

We are making available today a worry box. We want you to take an index card and simply write your worries on it. During communion, we invite you to come forward and place your card in the worry box. By placing your worries in the box you are giving them to God. By putting them in the box, you commit to leaving your worries here. If you feel you must worry about it again, you can return to this sanctuary during the week, fetch your worry out of the box and take it with you. Otherwise, it stays here, under God's safe keeping.

Maybe you worry about your job—keeping your job, finding a new job, quitting your job or deciding whether to retire.

Maybe you worry about school—grades, exams, getting into the right college or whether to go to grad school.

Maybe you worry about housing—moving out of the house, finding an apartment, buying or selling a condo, buying or selling a house, or downsizing.

Maybe you worry about the people in your life—your wife, son, daughter, parents, siblings, friends or classmates.

Maybe you worry about your life—things that happened in the past or things that might happen in the future. You worry about your health, money, weight or appearance.

The antidote for worry is trust. Don't worry. Trust!

