

Don't Worry?

Matthew 6:25-34

April 28, 2019



Before reading this manuscript, please read Matthew 6:25-34.

Earlier this week, while I was writing my sermon on not worrying, my wife Debbie came by to get me from church so that we could pick up one of our vans that had been in for some repairs. We were discussing how now we needed to drop off our other van, for its own set of repairs. Needless to say, I wasn't very thrilled about all of these repairs and repair bills and the seemingly never-ending trips to the mechanic. As I was voicing these concerns, my wife says to me with a sly grin, "maybe you shouldn't worry about it!" Since the day that Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, people have been worrying.¹ And the people around us, who've been listening to us worry, have been urging us NOT to worry.

In fact, many people have written songs urging us to NOT worry²: Back in 1977 Bob Marley & the Wailers recorded "3 Little Birds." "Don't worry, about a thing. Cause every little thing is gonna be alright." Back in 1988 Bobby McFerrin recorded a song: "Here's a little song I wrote, You might want to sing it note for note, Don't worry, be happy." Back in 1994, Disney released the movie, Lion King, which taught us about a "Hakuna Matata." "What a wonderful phrase... It means no worries, For the rest of your days, It's our problem-free philosophy. Hakuna Matata!" From Reggae to Jazz to Disney, the message is the same: Don't worry! Songs like these can be a helpful reminder, that sometimes as people, we just need to RELAX and to "take a chill pill dude!" But there must be something more behind what Jesus is teaching His disciples in Matthew's Gospel. What does Jesus mean by "Don't Worry?" We'll answer that question this morning as we dig into God's Word together.

Jesus teaches us in Matthew 6:25, "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 than food, and the body more than clothes?" The 1st thing we should notice is that Jesus' begins with the word "therefore." This indicates that He is actually pointing us back to what we learned last week in verses 19-24. Last Sunday we talked about the fact that we can't serve both God and money. It's vital for us as Christ-followers to make sure that we are devoted to God above all else. Jesus showed His devotion to us, by going to the cross and rising again. We now, in turn, can show our devotion to Him by making Him our one and only master.³

Jesus is using this word "therefore" in verse 25 to help us connect two ideas: wealth and worries. SINCE as a Christ-follower you have chosen to serve God rather than money (v. 24), there is THEREFORE no reason to worry about your life or your body (v. 25).⁴ Our confidence is NOT in our wealth to meet our needs; our confidence is in our God who takes care of us. It's interesting to note that last week focused on treasures while this week focuses on necessities: food, drink, clothing. And this is important to note, because even our basic NEEDS and the staples of life are not sufficient grounds for us to justify worrying. Just as we were instructed not to store up earthly treasures, so also, we are now instructed not to fret and worry about the daily essentials and core needs. In other words, even the things we truly need and can't live without, can get in the way of our 1st and primary allegiance.⁵ This caution is not just for the wealthy, this is an instruction for ALL of us, no matter how rich or how poor we may be.

¹ See Genesis 3:10.

² In 1967 Walt Disney Records released "The Bare Necessities" song in their movie Jungle Book with a wonderfully fun rendition by Baloo the Bear. Back in 1915 George Henry Powell wrote a World War I marching song called, "Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag and Smile, Smile, Smile." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pack_Up_Your_Troubles_in_Your_Old_Kit-Bag

³ See notes in *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1941.

⁴ Wealth and worries are often linked together. And so, Jesus addresses them right next to each other in His Sermon on the Mount. Last week we noted that we shouldn't allow the pursuit of treasures on earth to distract us from full devotion to God. This week, in the same way, we shouldn't allow the worries of this life to distract us from seeking first His kingdom. See discussion by D.A. Carson, *Jesus's Sermon on the Mount and Confrontation with the World*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2018 ed., pp. 100-101.

⁵ Consider Jesus words in Matthew 4:4, "...Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Now, when Jesus teaches us not to worry, we shouldn't conclude that He is somehow recommending that we never be concerned about anything or never think about the future. He's not teaching us a careless, apathetic approach to life, where we embrace indifference or laziness.⁶

1. "Don't Worry" is not a call to ignore reality.⁷ John Stott cautions us against **3 possible misunderstandings** of Jesus' teaching on "Do not worry."⁸

1) "Do not worry" doesn't exempt us from working to earn a living. Even birds have to leave their nests to gather food. When you see Robins in the spring, they're not waiting in their nests for God to drop worms from the sky into their mouths. They are out on the lawn working to dig up the worms God has provided in the soil.⁹ Put another way, God feeds the birds by providing them with what they need to feed themselves.¹⁰

2) "Do not worry" doesn't mean we can ignore the needs of others.¹¹ Is someone needs help; we shouldn't just tell them "don't worry" and then walk away. Throughout the Bible we read that one of God's primary ways of providing for His people is through the generosity of other believers. "God has provided ample resources" in our world, but a key hindrance is the disparity of how those resources are being spread out.¹² Therefore, rather than hoarding our wealth, we share it through things like our benevolence fund, the food shelf, or helping with relief efforts in the wake of the spring flooding.

3) "Do not worry" doesn't mean that believers won't experience trouble.¹³ A Christian's freedom from worry is not the result of lives that are free from struggle. It is the result of our confidence in God, our Heavenly Father who knows our needs. In fact, even though we know that any struggle we have, is a struggle that He has allowed, we are STILL confident, because we know that even our struggles are within the boundaries of His watchcare and provision.¹⁴ As Christ-followers we know that "it is reasonable to trust in our heavenly Father's love, even in times of grievous trouble."¹⁵ Because even as God worked for our good through the traumatic events on Good Friday, He also works for our good through the traumatic events in our own lives.¹⁶ God has not forgotten us; He has not abandoned us. Because we know the loving character and goodness of our Heavenly Father's heart, we do not need to worry, even in our darkest hours. **"Don't Worry" is not a call to ignore reality.**

If we honestly consider WHY most of us worry, it forces us to ask ourselves some sobering questions: "Why isn't my trust in God more unshakeable?" "Why are the worries of this life keeping me from trusting in His provision?" One of the most likely causes of our worries and anxieties, is our own unbelief, our own distrust in God.¹⁷ (Let me give a brief disclaimer here. There are also sometimes medical reasons for why some of us experience higher levels of worry and anxiety. Anxiety can be a mental health condition. That's not what Jesus is addressing here, so let's keep that in mind as we go forward.)

Later on, in Matthew 13, Jesus tells the Parable of the Sower. He warns us in Matthew 13:22 that, "The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful." We sincerely want to believe God and we want to trust Him. But that desire is often be choked out by the realities of life. Worry is powerful; it drains our strength. It sucks the life right out of us and it can immobilize us and damage our faith in very detrimental ways.

⁶ This may very well be the message of some of the songs we talked about at the beginning of this message, but that is NOT what Jesus' is saying. See also D.A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010, p. 214.

⁷ Jesus uses "worry" 6 times in these 10 verses. 3 times he specifically says "do not worry." Worry = μεριμνάω "to be apprehensive, have anxiety, be anxious, be (unduly) concerned." (Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 632). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.)

⁸ See discussion on pp. 165-168 by John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 1978.

⁹ Even flowers need to gather in the sun, rain, and soil nutrients in order to do the work of photosynthesis.

¹⁰ Consider 2 Thessalonians 3:6-10.

¹¹ See Matthew 25:31-46 and James 2:14-17.

¹² See 2 Corinthians 8:13-15. John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 1978, p. 167.

¹³ Consider Jesus' words in John 16:33.

¹⁴ See 1 Peter 1:6-7.

¹⁵ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 1978, p. 168.

¹⁶ See Romans 8:28.

¹⁷ See D.A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010, p. 216.

2. “Don’t Worry” means trusting in God’s provision and sovereign control. In verse 26 Jesus urges us to consider how God provides for the birds. He reminds us that birds are valuable to God, but that God’s children are much more valuable! I know that many of us greatly enjoy the birdsong that returns with the coming of spring. Let that beautiful chirping remind you of this: **God cares for you, you are valuable to Him, He will provide for your needs.** Martin Luther once said, “You see, he is making the birds our schoolmasters and teachers... Whenever you listen to a nightingale, therefore, you are listening to an excellent preacher... It is as if he were saying, ‘I prefer to be in the Lord’s kitchen. He has made heaven and earth, and he himself is the cook and the host.’”¹⁸ Jesus asks a rhetorical question in Matthew 6:27, “Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?” Jesus says this to drive home His point: worrying is not helping; it can’t even add a single hour to your life. In fact, most of us are well aware that worry is actually more likely to REDUCE the length of our life, and not by hours but by YEARS!

Jesus goes on to illustrate His message of “Don’t Worry” with the beautiful flowers of the field. He says in Matthew 6:30, “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—you of little faith?”¹⁹ Charles Spurgeon once said, “Lovely lilies, how [you] rebuke our foolish nervousness.”²⁰ Once again there is a lesson for us to learn from God’s creation: Don’t worry, rather have faith. Trust in God’s provision and His sovereign control over all things. As I was meditating on this passage this week, I couldn’t help but think of the Serenity Prayer. It would be a shame if we were to think of this prayer, as something only for people who are trying to overcome addiction. In light of our discussion about worry, I think it’s a helpful prayer for all of us to consider:²¹ God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, Courage to change the things I can, And wisdom to know the difference.²²

“Don’t Worry” means trusting in God’s provision and ACCEPTING His sovereign control.

Jesus’ teaching takes an interesting turn in Matthew 6:31-32, “So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.”²³ A pagan is simply someone who doesn’t know God, someone who doesn’t follow Jesus. Therefore, they are prone to run after the things of this world because they have not yet encountered God’s greater purposes for life.

3. “Don’t Worry” gives witness to a watching world. Trusting God to meet our daily needs, is a prime opportunity for us to live out distinctive Christian lives. We can be witnesses of God’s goodness. In front of people who do not yet know God, who do not yet know about the peace and provision that His children enjoy.²⁴ When others fret and worry, the Christ-follower’s genuine response can be, “I don’t need to worry, my Heavenly Father is in control and He knows what I need.”²⁵ I read a wonderful snippet this week, related to this idea of our Christian witness: “In the 4th century, the Roman emperor Julian the Apostate failed in his efforts to suppress Christianity, largely because of the distinctive living he found among believers. He told his officials, ‘We ought to be ashamed. Not a beggar is to be found among the Jews, and those godless Galileans [he meant the Christians] feed not only their own people but ours as well.’”²⁶ In other words, not only were believers

¹⁸ Quoted by John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 1978, p. 164.

¹⁹ Grass was often burned “to heat clay ovens in the Holy Land.” *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1603.

²⁰ Quoted by John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 1978, p. 165.

²¹ “The Serenity Prayer is the common name for a prayer written by the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971)... Niebuhr, who first wrote the prayer for a sermon at Heath Evangelical Union Church in Heath, Massachusetts, used it widely in sermons as early as 1934 and first published it in 1951 in a magazine column. The prayer spread through Niebuhr’s sermons and church groups in the 1930s and 1940s and was adopted and popularized by Alcoholics Anonymous and other twelve-step programs.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serenity_Prayer

²² **I found a longer version this week:** God, give me grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, Courage to change the things which should be changed, and the Wisdom to distinguish the one from the other. Living one day at a time, Enjoying one moment at a time, Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace, Taking, as Jesus did, This sinful world as it is, Not as I would have it, Trusting that You will make all things right, If I surrender to Your will, So that I may be reasonably happy in this life, And supremely happy with You forever in the next. Amen. “The prayer has appeared in many versions. Reinhold Niebuhr’s versions of the prayer were always printed as a single prose sentence; printings that set out the prayer as three lines of verse modify the author’s original version.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serenity_Prayer

²³ Verse 30 ends with the phrase “you of little faith.” In other words, don’t be of little faith; don’t be like the pagans.

²⁴ See D.A. Carson, *Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount and Confrontation with the World*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2018 ed., pp. 111-112.

²⁵ To respond to life’s troubles with worry sends a counterproductive message. If we are overwhelmed with worries about our daily needs, it advertises a message to our lost friends and neighbors, that we’re not sure whether our Heavenly Father will truly take care of us or not.

²⁶ D.A. Carson, *Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount and Confrontation with the World*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2018 ed., p. 120. See also <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/342592-the-roman-emperor-julian-writing-in-the-fourth-century-regretted>

known for having their own needs met, but they were also known for giving from their abundance to help others. That's the kind of witness that we can have when we entrust ourselves to God's watch care and provision.

Jesus then comes to His crescendo by calling us as His followers to seek something greater with our lives! Jesus declares in Matthew 6:33, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

4. "Don't Worry" means committing to Kingdom priorities. As we've studied Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, He's been talking about seeking His greater righteousness for a couple of months now.²⁷

God's kingdom is "the reign of God that he brings about through Jesus Christ – i.e. the establishment of God's rule in the hearts and lives of his people."²⁸ This is the powerful impact that Good Friday/Easter have. Jesus' sacrificial death and His glorious resurrection, are establishing God's kingdom reign, more and more in the lives of His people. This is why Jesus taught us to pray: "Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:10) John Stott puts it to us directly: "To 'seek first' this kingdom is to desire as of first importance the spread of the reign of Jesus. Such a desire will start with ourselves, until every single department of our life – home, marriage and family, personal morality, professional life and business ethics, bank balance, tax returns, life-style, citizenship – is joyfully and freely submissive to Christ. It will continue in our immediate environment, with the acceptance of evangelistic responsibility towards our relatives, colleagues, neighbours and friends. And it will also reach out in global concern for the missionary witness of the church.... [nothing less than] The glory of God and his Christ is at stake."

As Christ-followers, let's "refuse to become engrossed in our own concerns, but instead seek first the concerns of God."²⁹ It would be a sad reality if the people of God were to lose sight of His kingdom realities and just "live to live." If we were to become so preoccupied with sustaining our own physical survival that we prioritized food/clothing as "the be-all and end-all of existence."³⁰ While this may be true for birds and flowers, surely for mankind, this life has far more significance.³¹ It's been said that "...we tend to move toward the object on which we fix our gaze."³² If you've ever ridden your bike on the shoulder of a road, I hope that you've learned to keep your eyes forward, fixed on the goal. Because each time you look over your shoulder to check for what's coming up behind you, you tend to veer into that lane of traffic. If our hearts are distracted by the worries and concerns of this life, they'll make us keep looking over our shoulder and they'll keep pulling us back into the dangerous lane of traffic. But, if our hearts are fixed on seeking 1st His kingdom and His righteousness, then we'll stay right where God wants us to be.³³

As we mature in our Christian faith and grow in our relationship with God, our trust in God will deepen to the point where the worries of this life fade to the background. It's not that they just go away, but rather our worries are squeezed out by the greater and more significant priorities of God's kingdom.³⁴ **Brother or Sister in Christ, rather than worry, let's trust God. Let's focus on seeking that which matters most in this life: His kingdom and His righteousness.**

*This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
on April 28, 2019 by Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson*

²⁷ "The idea of God's kingdom is central to Jesus' teaching and is mentioned 50 times in Matthew alone." *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1593.

²⁸ *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1593.

²⁹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 1978, p. 160.

³⁰ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 1978, p. 162.

³¹ Let's choose to embrace the principle we find in 1 Corinthians 10:31, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 1978, p. 162.

³² D.A. Carson, *Jesus's Sermon on the Mount and Confrontation with the World*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2018 ed., p. 101.

³³ Read Martha and Mary's story in Luke 10:38-42.

³⁴ See D.A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010, p. 217.