

# Worry: When Your Hope Is In the Bank

Straight Talk – Part IX

Matthew 6:25-32

## Introduction

In our last discussion, materialism was exposed and condemned by the words of Christ in Matthew chapter 6. Jesus further exposed, by twin arguments:

- two treasures – earthly or heavenly;
- two perspectives – temporal or eternal;
- two masters – God or material.

Today, we will focus on the results of what happens when we pursue material things. Jesus will give the results of a lifestyle that is following the wrong perspective, having the wrong goals, and serving the wrong master. The result is insecurity, which He calls, in this chapter in Matthew, “worry or anxiety”.

In a Gallop poll of a group of teenagers, the question was asked, “What is your overall feeling toward life?”

The overwhelming response was, “Fear. Fear about life in general.”

*Time* magazine, a few years ago, told us that adults gulp down seven tons of sleeping pills every twenty-four hours.

Alcoholism is on the rise and the age of alcoholics is getting younger and younger. So eight, nine, and ten year olds are surfacing, hooked to this drug.

What are people doing in our culture today? I think they are trying to drown out the ever present whisper of worry. It has grabbed our culture by the throat.

A. S. Roche said, “Worry is a thin stream of fear trickling through the mind. If encouraged, it cuts a channel into which all other thoughts are drained.”

In other words, worry, if allowed, can become a way of life to every individual.

William Ward wrote these words, “Worry is faith in the negative, trust in the unpleasant, assurance of disaster, and belief in defeat. It is wasting today’s time with yesterday’s troubles and tomorrow’s problems.”

For those who worry about safety, by the way, do not take a trip by water, air, or train. Sixteen percent of all accidents occur during these trips. Do not take a walk either. Fifteen percent of all accidents happen to pedestrians. Do not get into a car. Twenty percent of all accidents happen while in a car. However, do not stay home either. Seventeen percent of all accidents happen at home. You are not even safe in church, as .001 percent of all accidents happen there. Your best bet, I guess, is to stay in bed, pull the covers up, and hope for the best.

There is no way to avoid trouble. Is it any wonder then, that Christ, in our text, will severely warn the believer about worry? The believer is not immune to worry just because he has been inoculated by saving grace. It can cripple the life of the believer, just as it can the life of the unbeliever.

So turn in your Bible to Matthew 6 and let us look at Jesus’ words on worry. We will begin with Matthew 6:25.

*For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. . . .*

The English word “worry” comes from the old German root “wyrigan,” which means “to choke or to strangle.” So the word began to develop into a meaning that meant “mental strangulation.”

Now right up front, we need to be honest because we, as Christians, are very clever. We do not admit that we worry – we just have a concern. When we express that, we might get the response, “Oh you do? Well, I’m troubled by the same burden, brother.”

We need to drop the platitude and just admit we are worried about certain things.

I love the story of the lady who tried to do a little more than just worry. She was worried that she would never find a husband. She prayed about it for years and received no answer from God. So she thought she would try something a little more direct to get the Lord’s attention. She went to the clothing store and got a pair of men’s pants. She brought them home and every night before she retired, hung them over the bedpost. She then, got down on her knees and prayed, “Father, in heaven, hear my prayer and answer it, if You can. I’ve hung a pair of trousers here. Please fill them with a man.”

Prayer or not, I think worry basically says, in this spinster’s life and in ours, that God is not quite big enough to pull it all together.

## **Five Realistic Reasons to Run From Worry**

Let me give, from Jesus’ words in Matthew 6, five realistic reasons to run from worry.

1. The first reason to run from worry is that worry distorts our perspective.

Look at the last phrase in Matthew 6:25.

*. . . Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”*

What is Jesus Christ doing with this question? He is giving a greater to lesser argument. In other words, He says, “Life is greater than food and clothing. Therefore, if God is capable of giving life, He is capable of doing that which sustains life.”

This is the greater to lesser argument.

Let me give an illustration of this. Suppose I went to the show room of a Rolls Royce dealership

and was going to purchase one; in fact, had the cash to pay for it. Would I go in there and bite my nails over the gas mileage? No. Why? Because if I have the money to purchase that kind of car, then the lesser thing, the weekly trip to the gas station, is not going to be a problem.

This is the issue that Jesus is pointing out in this verse. If Jesus Christ has the power to create life, do you think He is unable to provide food for that life and sustain it? Is not that the lesser of the two?

Now you may think that the people in Jesus’ day had fewer things to worry about than people today. However, I think, from studying the history of that culture, that the people lived like people of the Third World today. Water was scarce. Food was a problem. The workers were paid every day rather than weekly, because they needed the money to take care of the food needs for the next day. The government gave them no security and they had no insurance net. They paid, some believe, forty percent of their income in taxes. Times were tough then – as tough, if not more so, than today.

Jesus Christ said to them first, “*Stop worrying! I can take care of life.*”

2. The second reason that Jesus gives to run from worry is that worry denies our God-given worth.

Before we read the verse that gives this reason, let us imagine the scene. Jesus is sitting on the hillside of Galilee speaking this sermon. The crowd of people are sitting below Him. Just above the Sea of Galilee, they can see the air creating a ripple across the water. The sun is probably shining and birds are singing. It is a gorgeous day.

Because of the text, I would think that Jesus probably motions upward as He speaks. Everyone probably looks up at the living illustration. Read Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:26 and note the question that He asks.

*Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?*

Have you ever noticed that birds never get together and say, “Fellows, we need to come up with a strategy to survive. We’ve got a problem. We’re on our own.”

We never hear this. God has planted deep within them, by His creative power, something called

“instinct”. As a result, they are capable of finding exactly what they need to live.

My family has had the privilege, this past month, of watching a family of birds that have moved into our garage. It is a privilege at this point. I do not know what kind of bird they are, but they have built a nest into the insulation in the garage. The nest is high enough that we need to climb on a chair or a ladder to see it. The little mommy has given birth to twins. My wife and I, with our twin sons, can feel rather sympathetic! In fact, I think that is the reason my wife goes out to check on her all the time! It is interesting to watch them, because the mommy bird spends a lot of time in the nest with the kids, while the daddy bird goes out and rummages around and get the worms. He brings the paycheck home and gives it all to his wife and she gives it to the kids.

This behavior sounds familiar, does it not? Who told these birds how to act this way? God did. God creatively designed their instincts so that they could survive. Now, if God can do that for some birds, He can do it for us. This is the argument.

Jesus then gives a wonderful teaching in the last part of Matthew 6:26. Underline this because it is radical teaching today,

*... Are you not worth much more than they?*

The fact that Jesus says we are worth much more than the birds is, by the way, news to a New Age society. It is a society that will spend thousands of dollars and man hours to save some animal, yet take the life of an unborn child without a second thought. Figure that one out.

I see bumper stickers all the time that say, “Animals have rights too.” Ladies and gentlemen, as long as a society denies God and the Book that He has written, they will give animals equal standing in society.

I am all for saving the animals, but what we are going to have in this country, is exactly what they have overseas. In India today, animals not only have rights, they have more rights. A sacred cow will walk down the street, protected by their system of religion, and will pass by hundreds of starving children.

How do we know that an animal is not worth as much as a human being? How do we know that we should eat the thing and live? In Matthew 6:26, Jesus Christ says, “You are worth more than a bird.”

Does this mean that birds do not matter? That is not what Jesus said. He said, “Birds matter so much

and I care so much about them that I have given them the instinct to know how to live.”

The point is, Jesus cares *more* about us. We are worth *more* than anything else He has ever created.

Has a bird been created in the image of Jesus Christ? Has a bird been given the privilege of being a joint heir with Christ? Is a bird going to co-reign with Christ in the kingdom? Has a bird had a place prepared for it in heaven forever? No, but we have.

Jesus Christ says, “Worry steals your sense of worth.”

Someone wrote, years ago, “No fox ever fretted because he had only one hole in which to hide; no squirrel ever died of anxiety lest he should not lay by enough nuts for two winters instead of one; no dog ever lost any sleep over the fact that he did not have enough bones laid aside for his declining years.”

This is an illustration to us. It is a little too convicting, so let us go to number three!

3. The third reason to run from worry is that worry diverts productive energy.

Now, by the way, I am not suggesting that by running from worry, we get rid of forethought. Jesus Christ wants us to get rid of foreboding about the future.

Worry diverts productive energy. Look at Matthew 6:27.

***And which of you by being anxious can add a single cubit to his life's span?***

In other words, worry is absolutely non-productive. It will never add to what we have today; in fact, it will take away.

What do we worry about? I came across an interesting survey. The things we worry about, in percentages, include:

- 40% over the future;
- 30% percent over the past;
- 12% over our health;
- 10% over petty things that cannot change or that do not really matter whether they happen or not.

So, in total, 96% of what we worry about cannot be changed.

This is the reason one man wrote, and I like this, “Worry is like a rocking chair – it gives you something to do but it never takes you anywhere.”

Worry all you want, but you are not going to live longer. People are basically, afraid of dying. This is one of the chief worries.

Let me read a letter that I received in the mail. It was not written by a member of our church, by the way.

“This paper has been sent to you for good luck. The original copy is in New England. It has been around the world nine times. The luck has now been sent to you. You will receive good luck within four days of receiving this letter – provided you, in turn, send it on. Please send twenty copies and see what happens in four days.”

Then, in capital letters, it says,

“THIS IS NO JOKE.”

I took it very seriously, as I am sure you can tell. It continued.

“Send copies to people you think need good luck. Don’t send money, as fate has no price. Don’t keep this letter. It must leave your hands within ninety-six hours.”

Then, there is the advertisement.

“Joe Elliot received 40,000 dollars and lost it because he broke the chain. Constantine Diaz received the chain in 1983. He asked his secretary to make twenty copies and send them out. A few days later, he won the lottery of two million dollars. Andy Dodd, an office employee, received the letter and forgot it had to leave his hands within ninety-six hours. He lost his job. Later, after finding the letter again, he mailed the twenty copies. A few days later, he got a better job. Dalon Fairchild received the letter and, not believing, threw the letter away. Nine days later, he died. While in the Philippines, Gene Welch lost his wife six days after receiving the letter. He failed to circulate the letter.”

The letter ends with the following words in capital letters:

“REMEMBER: SEND NO MONEY AND DO NOT IGNORE THIS.”

At the bottom of the letter, someone scribbled in big letters,

“IT WORKS.”

This is classic, is it not? I did not send it on. I still have my wife and I am still alive. Of course, if something happens this week, do not think it is related to this letter.

Some people, however, will get into this. They will send twenty copies because they dare not do anything to hurt whatever good may come.

This is worry about the future. Forty percent of our worry has to do with the future. It diverts productive energy.

4. The fourth reason to run from worry is that worry destroys the assurance of faith.

The Greek word for worry literally means, “a divided mind.”

This is a very convicting reference to a believer who should know better because he is in Christ. He is living, however, as if there is no Christ. As a result, he becomes worried and he divides his mind.

Do you remember what James said? In James 1:8, he wrote,

*... a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

Is it not fascinating though, that we, as believers, can be divided in this way? We have sufficient faith to believe that God can get us to heaven, but not enough faith to think that He can get us through the next twenty-four hours. We are absolutely confident of the future, but we are not so sure about now. We know we will be in heaven in the sweet by and by. We are confident of this, right? But we are not so confident about the nasty now and now.

Perhaps Jesus, at this point, swept His hand across the hillside and said, in Matthew 6:28-29,

*And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these.*

“The lilies of the field” was a general term. The field lily was the iris and the term field lilies included the gladioli and the scarlet colored poppy, which flourished on the Palestinian landscape. There was a myriad of colors.

Jesus Christ said, “Do you see all of this? Man in all of his glory, even Solomon in his finery, as an example, cannot compare to the hues and the colors of these flowers.”

To put on your nicest clothing, by the way, there is an organization that will help find your right color. This organization has a chart that shows which season a person belongs to – winter, spring, summer, or fall. So about the time a man thinks his wife has a nice

wardrobe and everything is peaceful, she gets a consultation and discovers all of the colors are wrong. It is no longer whether the clothing is new or old, but now, it is whether the clothing is the right color and hue.

Why do they do this to us? Who came up with this scheme? What I want to know is, what these people are going to do when they get to heaven and God hands out the white robes. I think there are going to be some very upset women. I can just hear them, "Lord, my color is not white. Give me red or blue."

Some of this stuff works, by the way. My wife will put on a certain color, and her blue eyes will just dance to life. That is none of your business!

Now, continue to Matthew 6:30. Note that in this verse, Jesus repeats words that are similar to the illustration of the birds. Notice as well, the last phrase of this verse, which has key words.

***But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!***

The furnace is a reference to the oven. In that day, the women would take the field lilies and the grasses, and cut them and dry them. They would then use them to control the heat of their ovens. If they needed a quick flash of heat, they would grab a bundle and throw it in.

Jesus Christ says, "The ladies are going to go out and cut those beautiful things down and dry them. They will then use them to control the heat of their ovens, which is the best place for them, once they are dead. If God spends so much time on a field lily that is used for baking fuel, how much more will He spend time on you who will live forever?"

The answer is, "So much more."

5. The fifth reason to run from worry is that worry denounces our testimony of distinction.

Look at Matthew 6:31-32.

***Do not worry then, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear for clothing?" For the Gentiles [unbelievers] eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.***

The point is, the world is scrambling for these things; for security. What makes us, as believers, different from the unbelievers? It is that we have a

heavenly Father who should be able to replace, if we will allow Him, panic with security. However, it is our choice – we can live like an unbeliever or we can live like a child of God.

A life free from worry should be one of the chief characteristics and the chief distinctions of the believer over the unbelieving world, as Jesus said in these verses. The unbeliever lives without God, the worried believer lives the same way, thinking, "God, I just don't believe that I can trust You." The theme song to this kind of living is, "Take your burdens to the Lord and . . . take them back," I mean, ". . . leave them there."

Let me ask a question of you. Do you believe that God can redeem you? Do you believe that God can save you from sin, break the shackles of Satan, take you from hell to heaven, and give you immortality? Is it not possible then, that He can take care of everything that you need over the next twelve hours?

A lady once asked Pastor G. Campbell Morgan, a great expositor of yesteryear, this question, "Do you think God is interested in my little problem?"

He responded by saying, "Ma'am, do you think that any of your problems are big to God?"

This response cuts to the heart of the matter. The reason anxiety is going up is because our view of God is going down. If we have a great God, the problems of life are little. If we have a small God, the problems of life are great.

## **Two Timeless Solutions for Overcoming Worry**

Now Jesus continues and gives two solutions for overcoming worry. Let us dig them out.

1. The first solution is to live with the simple priority that the kingdom of God comes first.

Do you want to overcome worry? Then it has to do with priority. Look at Matthew 6:33.

***But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.***

The word "seek" is used in reference to the hunter, who, with great skill and concentration, would focus on the animal he is hunting. At that point, his whole life – his impulses, his nerves, his reflexes – are geared toward catching that animal. He needs it to survive. We, as believers, are to, with the same intensity, the same focus, the same alertness, focus on

the kingdom of God; make the kingdom of God our priority.

What does this mean? It means that it is Jesus Christ who reigns in our lives right now, and it is a delight and a desire to see His kingdom come, in literal form and fashion, to reign on planet earth. This is our focus.

If this is our priority – the reign of Christ as King and Lord in our lives – then, what happens to worry? The problem with anxiety is that the wrong things are coming in first.

2. The second solution to worry is to live with the simple principle of “one day at a time”.

Where do you think this principle came from? It came from Matthew 6:34. Let us look at this verse.

***So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.***

Frankly, I would never have added the last phrase in this verse, “Each day has enough trouble of its own.” Is Jesus Christ a pessimist? Why in the world would He put this phrase in the verse? Because He is a realist.

I want you to understand what He is saying. In effect, He is saying, “Do not add tomorrow’s potential problems to your burden today, because you will outweigh yourself.”

Jesus only gives grace for today. Some people are overly worried about what might happen tomorrow. If it happens tomorrow, God, in His grace, will give the measure you need tomorrow. Jesus says, “Live for the deposit of grace you’ve been given today. His grace is sufficient.”

I like this saying, “Satan seeks to crush our spirit by trying to make us bear tomorrow’s burdens with only today’s grace.”

God divided life into bite-size chunks called “days”. When we try to chew off more than one day, we are going to choke. We will become strangled, which is what the word “worry” means.

Ian McLaren wrote these words, “What does anxiety do? It does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows, but it empties today of its strength. It does not make you escape the evil; it makes you unfit to cope with it if it comes.”

Now, we have to balance this a little because God’s word has given us promises for tomorrow, has it not?

I came across a story that occurred in World War II. The death of many adults left many orphans. So the allies set up camps to help these children and then help locate them. In these camps, they would feed the children and clothe them and take care of them. At one of the camps, there was a problem that was really perplexing the staff – the children would not sleep through the night. These children would cry and wake up screaming, as if in panic and fear.

So the staff called in a team from the United States to try to figure out what was wrong with these children. It was found that they, or the majority of them, had evidently gone through such difficulty that they were afraid to sleep at night for fear of not having anything to eat tomorrow. To help with this problem, one man came up with a brilliant plan. After the staff tucked all the children into bed, the man would go down the row of beds and would place a small piece of bread in each child’s hand. The children would clutch it in their little hands and it was not long before they were all sleeping through the night.

A worrier is like an orphan. If there is a piece of bread that we can hold on to for tomorrow; that we can wrap our hands around, though they tremble, it is this,

***. . . my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. (Philippines 4:19)***

One of the greatest worriers of the disciples was Peter. He wrote, because he learned it,

***casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. (1 Peter 5:7)***

We can take this little piece of bread from Peter and clutch it in our hands and hold onto it, and we will be able to sleep.

Look back at Matthew 6, where we read over and over again, the words,

- verse 26, “. . . ***and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?***”
- verse 30, “***But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? . . .***”
- verse 32, “. . . ***for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.***”

My friend, your hope and security is *not* in the bank; *not* in your accounts; *not* in your home, *not* in your job. Your hope is in the King who will reign as

King. And in that reigning, He will give you and I the sense of security that dashes to pieces worry.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 6/30/1991 by Stephen Davey.

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