

The Antidote to Anxiety

Luke 12:22-34

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Fear and worry are a natural part of the human experience. Many people feel anxiety when they encounter a big change in life, face struggles, or are unsure how to handle a specific situation. But Jesus taught His disciples that anxiety and worry uncover a deeper problem, they distract us from the total sufficiency of God and our total dependency on Him. From this teaching, we can learn that the closer we align ourselves to God, the less anxiety we will feel about the matters and concerns of our lives.

When Abraham Lincoln was on his way to Washington to be inaugurated as president of the United States, the threat of civil war was hanging in the air. It was the most common topic he was asked about by anxious citizens as he made the trip.

He stopped over in New York and his host was Horace Greeley, a senator and newspaper editor. Greeley asked him if he was worried about a civil war.

In his characteristic fashion, Lincoln responded by leaning back in his chair and telling a story. He talked about his early years as a circuit-riding lawyer, riding on horseback from one court session to the next.

He said that on one occasion, there had been a lot of rainfall and he and his companions had to cross swollen streams. And they knew that they were going to have to cross Fox River—still ahead of them on their journey.

They often said to one another, “If these streams are giving us so much trouble, how in the world are we ever going to get across Fox River?”

Darkness fell and they stopped for the night at a log tavern that rented rooms for travelers. Another guest that night was a circuit riding Methodist preacher who rode through that part of the country in all kinds of weather, and he knew all about Fox River. They gathered

around him, expressing their concern; they asked him if he knew the present state of the river.

The old circuit rider smiled and said, “I’ve had to cross Fox River many times and I understand your worry. But I travel with one fixed rule in my mind about Fox River: I never cross it until I reach it.”

Adapted from R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: Volume II* (Crossway, 1998), p. 54

That’s a wonderful home-spun antidote to worry, isn’t it? Don’t try to cross Fox River until you get to it.

The truth is, God hasn’t given us the grace or the strength or the level of trust to cross Fox River—or any other obstacle in life—until we get there.

In his book entitled, *Getting Through the Tough Stuff of Life*, Chuck Swindoll commented on the passage we’re about to study today; he put it so colorfully when he wrote:

Worry casts shadows on your future; anxiety works like a thief in the dark corners of your thoughts as it pickpockets your peace and kidnaps your joy.

Charles Swindoll

Charles R. Swindoll, *Getting Through the Tough Stuff of Life* (Word Publishing, 2004), p. ix

The reality is obvious, although we face it time and time again. If whatever you’re worried about happens, worry did not prepare you for it; and if what you’re worried about doesn’t happen, it will have robbed you of joy along the way.

Let me tell you, there’s always another Fox River up ahead. The question is, how do we handle those uncertainties in life that can rob our peace and steal our joy?

The Lord is about to give us some inspired, divine wisdom. **Let’s go back to Luke’s Gospel account in chapter 12**, where the Lord has just finished delivering a parable to make a point. This parable sets the stage for what the Lord says next, specifically to His disciples.

In fact, go to **verse 21**, and circle the word **“treasure.”** You can draw a line, as I have, over to **verse 34**, where the word **“treasure”** appears again.

These conversations are connected.

It all started back in **verse 13** with a young man who was upset about his inheritance; evidently his older brother was sitting on his hands. And this younger brother is angry about it; he has plans and thinks it’s rightfully his.

Jesus pulls the mask off his frustration and calls it greed; he was being consumed by covetousness.

He might be correct legally, but he was wrong spiritually.

Jesus expands his answer to this young man by telling him—and the crowd—a story, a parable about a rich man who couldn't squeeze one more possession into his *barn*.

So, this man decided to build a bigger barn, which never happened because he died.

Now again, as we learned in our last study, the Lord isn't against bumper crops, material gain or even a bigger barn.

The issue isn't what you own, the issue is what owns you. And that's the issue Jesus is uncovering.

And He says here in **verse 21**:

“So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

Luke 12:21

In other words, he doesn't care about other people or even God.

And now with that parable, Jesus turns to His disciples specifically and says to them in **verse 22**:

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.”

Luke 12:22-23

Now it's as if Jesus anticipates what the disciples are thinking here following Jesus's command to literally stop being anxious: stop worrying about your next meal and what you've got hanging in the closet.

And the disciples are probably thinking, “But wait a second, Lord: If we don't look after our needs, who will?”

Adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, [Insights on Luke](#) (Zondervan, 2012), p. 330

Anticipating that concern, Jesus now begins to give them an answer; it's really a three-part antidote to anxiety:

Part one is to think correctly!

Jesus says here in the opening line of verse 24:

“Consider the ravens ...”

Luke 12:24a

Again, you could circle this verb **“consider”** in **verse 24** and draw a line down to **verse 27** where it appears again: **consider the lilies**.

The verb means to think perceptively, to think based on knowledge.

Fritz Reinecker & Cleon Rogers, [Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament](#) (Regency/Zondervan Publishing, 1976), p. 177

In other words, when you are weighed down by worry, tell yourself the truth.

This same verb is used in **Hebrews 3:1 where we’re told to consider Jesus**. In other words, we need to think correctly about Jesus; we need to get the truth about Jesus right, according to Scripture.

Adapted from Dale Ralph Davis, [Luke: Volume 1](#) (Christian Focus, 2021), p. 225

So, to **consider**, Jesus is telling them and us, is to think biblically, which means to think correctly.

So, what is it that worry messes up in our thinking? Where does worry ambush us and attempt to lead us down the wrong path?

Let me break it down several ways, first:

Worry distorts the preciousness of human life.

Go back to verse 24:

“Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!”

Luke 12:24

The word for the raven here is a word that includes the entire crow family of birds, which includes the raven.

Reinecker & Rogers, p. 177

Ravens were considered the most useless type of birds in the Jewish world. Sparrows were cheap in that world as well, but they could be sold for food and used as temple sacrifices. But ravens were considered unclean, entirely unusable.

Beyond that—and to this day—for avid bird watchers, they really aren't that interesting; there are no patterns of blue or red or yellow or brown, no flashes of color; ravens don't have a pleasant song, they basically squawk and screech.

It isn't an accident that Jesus specifically mentions this bird because, if any bird isn't going to be cared for, it's a raven. If any birds might fall off God's radar or concern, it's this bird.

If you think that you're not all that special or talented or eloquent or useful or effective or noticeable: "surely God will overlook me, so I'd better start worrying about who's going to take care of me!"

No, Jesus says, "Take a good look at them; they're your antidote to anxiety. If God cares about them—**think**—what does that tell you about you, uniquely created in God's image, with an eternal soul, the ability to worship and serve Him, the privilege one day to co-reign with Christ in His kingdom?"

Do you really think God would feed the ravens and forget His disciples?

R.C.H. Lenski, [The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel](#) (Augsburg Publishing, 1946), p. 694

Now notice **verse 25**:

"And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?"

Luke 12:25

In other words, worry says you care more about the length of your life than God does. So, you must worry about it, when God already has it mapped out, from beginning to end.

Psalm 39:4 says, The Lord know the measure of my days.

Job says in chapter 14 and verse 5: "God has determined already how long I will live."

Now Jesus isn't saying you shouldn't take care of yourself, exercise, go to the doctor, cut back on Krispy Kreme, take your medicine.

What He is saying is that worrying about the length of your life will not add one hour to it.

And maybe you think that the people of Christ's day had a lot less to worry about in those days. You know, it was simple back then.

The truth is, they had many more reasons to worry than we have today. The typical worker was paid daily, not weekly or monthly. They were paid for that day and they would have to work the next day in order to be paid. There was no sick leave, maternity leave or disability.

They didn't have Social Security or pensions and welfare. There were no benefit packages with insurance companies; no such thing as Medicare or Medicaid. There were no pharmacies or urgent care units; no penicillin or aspirin.

We could go on and on about the lack of refrigeration and clean drinking water. Listen, they had every reason to worry about their next meal; they would easily wonder if they would survive another day.

Jesus says, "Worrying will not add one hour to the length of your life, that's in your Creator God's hands."

In the meantime, the joy of life—the value of life—is only diminished by worry.

Now Jesus goes on to give us another illustration from creation in verse 27:

"Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

Luke 12:27

Those purple anemones in that field that bloom for a day, Solomon's royal robes of purple can't compare to their beauty.

Adapted from [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Volume 1](#) (Zondervan, 2002), p. 429

So, this is what worry is really doing for you: it's distorts the preciousness of your life in the hands of your Creator God.

Now secondly:

Worry questions the power of God.

Verse 28:

"But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!"

Luke 12:28

In other words, if God is powerful enough to create this world and the ravens with instinct and the flowers with beauty, and even the grass that will be dried and used to fuel the clay

ovens in the Lord's day generation, if God can do all of that, but He can't take care of you, then He isn't all powerful and He isn't able, evidently, to keep His promise.

Consider this, think about this: if God is powerful enough to create the world, He is powerful enough to manage the world.

If He created Fox River, He's capable of getting you over it, when He's ready for you to cross it.

Look, here's the point: if God is powerful enough to create *your* life, don't you think He is able to direct your life?

It's as if Jesus is saying, "Look at the world around you; look at creation, it's delivering a message loud and clear, even through that squawking raven: God's creative glory is everywhere.

Maybe we're too much in hurry, too worried about stuff that we've stopped looking around.

I was in the truck with one of my grandchildren the other evening at sunset and I heard a gasp from the back seat, "**Papa, look at the sky over there.**" I hadn't even noticed. I wasn't looking at the sky, in fact, I was wondering why the guy in front of me was driving so slowly. I had started praying for him—unspoken prayers of course.

And what a beautiful sunset I was missing in my worry to get somewhere.

Worry distorts the preciousness of human life.

Worry questions the power of God.

Now the Lord gives one final danger:

Worry adopts the perspective of unbelievers.

Verse 29:

"And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them."

Luke 12:29-30

Your translation may read, "Gentiles (pagans) seek after these things." In other words, this is what the pagans are chasing after. All they care about is their body.

Now this might sound like Jesus is saying it's wrong to plan meals and go grocery shopping, to seek what you need to eat and drink.

The verb here to **“seek”** has to do with instinctive, internal passion. This is a word that refers to determined focus; this is what their hearts are set on.

This passage on the birds reminds me of an illustration of this kind of instinctive passion and focus.

The other day, Marsha had just finished putting out some fresh bird seed; I was standing there at the window watching all the different birds arriving to eat, and then out of the corner of my eye I saw movement on the ground.

I looked and saw a large white cat carefully moving near the bushes toward the bird feeder. It was a well-fed cat, had a collar, I'd never seen it before, and I watched it glide a little and then pause, then carefully put another paw out and take another step: every fiber in its body was tensed and ready, it was never for a moment distracted, it had one thing on its mind: murder, slaughter; so I went out and tried to witness to it but the cat wasn't interested.

This word here means that kind of focus: to set your mind on—your heart on—something and nothing is going to distract you.

See, here's the convicting question; are we chasing the same things our unbelieving world is chasing after, today?

Adapted from Bruce B. Barton, [Life Application Bible: Luke](#) (Tyndale House, 1997), p. 324

Here's the contrast in verse 31:

Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

Luke 12:31

Let every fiber of your being—your focus in life, your heart—be set on the things of God, and God will take care of the things you need on earth.

In other words, when God matters most, worry takes a back seat.

This is what it means to think correctly, the antidote to worry is thinking correctly.

Now the Lord gets personal and tender with His disciples.

Notice verse 32a:

“Fear not, little flock . . .”

Luke 12:32a

Luke is the only place in the New Testament where the term **“little flock”** is used for believers.

Ibid, p. 325

And I must tell you, I’m glad He didn’t wrap this lesson up by saying, “Fear not, courageous leaders” or “Fear not, great men of faith,” no, He already had to tell them to stop worrying, back in **verse 22**.

No, the Lord calls them defenseless animals who will need a shepherd—a Divine Shepherd—if they ever hope to make it across Fox River and the challenges of life.

He even references here that their numbers are small; you’re just a little flock and compared to the population of the world of unbelievers, we’ll always be in the minority; beloved, we are still to this day a little flock.

Verse 32 again:

“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

Luke 12:32

The construction indicates that the kingdom is already theirs, whether they stop worrying or not. Their eternal destination is set, but the joy along the journey will be decided by their thinking, their perspective.

Part one to this antidote to anxiety is: think correctly.

Now, part two is live generously!

Jesus tells them—and us—here in verse 33 to feel free to:

“Sell your possessions, and give to the needy.”

Luke 12:33a

You see, the antidote to worry isn’t just thinking correctly, it’s living generously.

Now the Lord doesn’t say here to sell *all* your possessions and give everything you have to the needy. If you did that, you’d be needy, and somebody else would have to bail you out.

Adapted from Lenski, p. 698

Jesus is giving a contrast here to the rich farmer who kept everything for himself and didn’t care about anyone else.

One author writes that what the Lord is saying here is to hold on to possessions loosely.

Adapted from Swindoll, [Insights on Luke](#), p. 334

Be ready to give away what you really don't need to missionaries in another country, or a needy family you hear about. Give some of your time and join one of the teams of volunteers that are needed in our church.

Think correctly, live generously, and finally, here's **part three** in this divine antidote to anxiety.

Invest eternally!

The Lord says here in verse 33 – the middle part:

“Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Luke 12:33b-34

I love the analogy here; earth's moneybags have holes in them; this stuff won't last, and it won't satisfy.

But Heaven's moneybags, so to speak, have eternal dividends; the results of your investments will last forever.

Are you investing in eternal things that last forever?

People last forever. So, invest in ministry to them.

God lasts forever. So, invest in the gospel and the ministry that brings Him glory.

Jesus isn't putting in a plug here for donors. God isn't looking for donors, He's looking for partners, investors who have a vision for eternal treasures.

Adapted from Randy Alcorn, [The Treasure Principle](#) (Multnomah Publishers, 2001), p. 43

So, invest your time and talent and treasure in that!

And what will happen to you in the meantime?

Anxiety will be crowded out, there's no room for it to take hold; it no longer will call the plays, direct your mind and heart and life.

That's what happens when you start thinking correctly, when you start living generously, and when you start investing eternally.

I close with this; a young retailer in the late 1800s started his own business. It wasn't long until his Midwest store chain became highly successful, earning him more and more profits each year. By the early 1900s he was a millionaire. The year before the stock market crashed, his network of retail stores had earned revenue of nearly \$184 million dollars.

Then he lost it all in the Wall Street crash of 1929. It left him destitute, crushed by the weight of anxiety about his family's future.

Broken emotionally and mentally, he began to lose his grip on sanity, believing that everyone was against him, including his family.

In 1931, he was placed in the Battle Creek Sanitarium for the Mentally Insane where he wrote farewell notes to his family and friends and assumed he would die there alone.

One night, between shifts, he tiptoed downstairs to roam around and heard music from the hospital's chapel. A few people had gathered and were singing a hymn. He went in and sat down and listened.

It was God's divine appointment for him because the words of that hymn brought to his memory the gospel of his past that he had rejected. He knew the gospel in those words were God's message for him. He returned to his room and gave his heart and life to Jesus Christ.

He would tell people from then on that he had been born again in a Sanitarium.

His mental health returned, and he was dismissed from the institution with a newfound passion for Christ.

Even though he was 56, he decided to reenter the retail business, and it quickly began to succeed. This time, however, as his wealth grew, he began giving to charitable causes, especially those connected to the gospel of Christ.

He continued leading his company over the next 35 years, until he died in 1971, at the age of 95.

His name was James Cash Penney. We know him as J.C. Penney. And the year he died, his company earned \$5 billion in revenue.

Adapted from Paul Harvey: "The Rest of The Story"

But for J.C. Penney, what mattered most was that he had begun thinking clearly, living generously, and investing eternally. And by the way, the hymn that he heard that night as a patient in the Sanitarium was inspired by this text in Luke's gospel:

It's the antidote to anxiety; some of the lyrics read:

Be not dismayed whatever arrives

God will take care of you.

Through every day, o'er all the way

God will take care of you

No matter what may be the test

God will take care of you.

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