

WHAT ARE YOU WORRIED ABOUT?

Matthew 6:25-34

A curious name was found on ancient documents: TITEDIOS AMERIMNOS. TITEDIOS is a personal name. AMERIMNOS is the Greek word for worry, negated. It is not so much a name as it is an epithet, like FREDERICK THE GREAT or JAMES THE JUST or IVAN THE TERRIBLE. This man was “Titedios, the non-worrier.” Could that be your name? Would the people who know you best describe you as one who never worries? Could you honestly call yourself Jack or Jill or whoever, the non-worrier? The question is not about what others think about you or even what you think about yourself. What would the Lord Jesus Christ say to or about your anxiety? In Matthew 5:25-34, Jesus instructs his disciples to trust God and not worry.

Verse 25 says, *“Therefore I tell you, 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.”* To be *anxious* means to have a divided mind. Faith pulls you in one direction. Doubt pulls you in another. Hope drags you one way. Fear drags you another way. You wish for the best. But you expect the worst. You become mentally, emotionally, and spiritually pulled apart with excessive concern. In fact, our English word worry is derived from a German word that means to choke or strangle. Worry is internal strangulation at the ruthless hands of uncertain circumstances. Jesus commands his disciples to trust God and not worry. This prohibition is in a grammatical emphasis that forbids an action that is already in progress. Literally, Jesus says, “Stop worrying.” *What are you worrying about?* Whatever it is, Jesus commands you to stop it. But this passage is more than a prohibition against worry. In Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus gives three principles to practice to overcome worry.

I. DO NOT WORRY ABOUT YOUR PHYSICAL NEEDS.

In Matthew 6:19-24, Jesus teaches about the fleeting nature, powerful grip, and corrupting influence of materialism. The Lord’s essential concern is stated in verse 24: *“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”* Jesus did not say you cannot *have* God and money. But you cannot *serve* them both. You must choose between God and money. Those who serve money worry tend to worry, no matter how much they have. Material possessions do not produce true security. Only those who trust God are free to live without worry.

Verse 25 says, *“Therefore I tell you, 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. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”* Jesus commands us not to worry about our lives. Then he specifies our most basic physical needs – food and clothing – to represent all that is essential for our survival. This prohibition also applies to unmentioned sources of anxiety like the war, terrorism, the economy, job cuts, natural disasters, or anything else that threatens our survival. Verses 26-28 illustrate why we need not to worry about our needs.

A. DON'T WORRY ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO EAT.

Verse 26 says, *“Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”* Jesus tells us to look at the birds and remember the sovereign, faithful, and generous ways God cares for his creation. The birds do not work the soil, plant seeds, or harvest grain. They do not have stable jobs, bank accounts, insurance policies, or 401k plans. Birds also do not have high blood pressure, panic attacks, or nervous breakdowns. The birds simply trust God to take care of their basic needs.

**SAID THE ROBIN TO THE SPARROW:
“I SHOULD REALLY LIKE TO KNOW
WHY THESE ANXIOUS HUMAN BEINGS
RUSH ABOUT AND WORRY SO.”**

**SAID THE SPARROW TO THE ROBIN:
“FRIEND, I THINK THAT IS MUST BE
THAT THEY HAVE NO HEAVENLY FATHER,
SUCH AS CARES FOR YOU AND ME.”**

The carefree life of the birds does not sanction laziness, negligence, or irresponsibility. God feeds the birds. But he does not put food in their nests. Birds work for food. When Jesus says birds do not sow, reap, and harvest, he is not saying farming is unnecessary. The ancient Near East was an agricultural society. Their economy was based on the process of sowing and reaping. They worked hard and trusted God to send the harvest. Jesus is not condemning legitimate work. He is condemning our thinking or acting like your survival depends on your work. Your life is in the hands of God. Verse 26 says, *“Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”* Of course you are. You are so valuable that God sent his only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for your sins. Romans 8:32 says: *“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?”*

B. DO NOT WORRY ABOUT HOW LONG YOU ARE GOING TO LIVE.

In verse 27, Jesus asks another question that illustrates the futility of worry: *“And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?”* Some translations render this verse as a question about the height of one's stature. Others render it as a question about the length of one's lifespan. Either way, the answer to the rhetorical question is the same: absolutely not. Worry is like chewing gum, there is motion but no progress. Worry is like sitting in a rocking chair. It may give you something to do; but it will not get you anywhere. Worry cannot make you grow

taller or live longer. The ESV translates this verse to refer to one's span of life, which I believe is accurate. How many of us worry about how long we are going to live? Worry will not make you live any longer. Worry will most likely shorten your life expectancy, not lengthen it.

Verse 27 teaches us not to worry about how long we will live. It also teaches a practical way to overcome worry as we live. One of the sins of the spirit I have wrestled with the most is worry. One of the things that helped me overcome my worries was a simple agreement I made with myself. I made a decision not to worry about things I do not have any control over. This is what Jesus teaches in this verse. You should not worry about how tall you are, how long you will live, or any other thing in your life you have no control over. If you cannot do something about it, what good is it to worry about it? Entrust the matter to the sovereign authority, perfect wisdom, and gracious care of our heavenly Father. If you can do something about it, what good is it to worry about it? Do something!

C. DO NOT WORRY ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO WEAR.

Verses 28-29 read, *"And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, 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."* Lilies of the field are not prized, pampered, and protected plants. They are unplanted wildflowers that spontaneously sprung up in the fields. The lilies of the field do not worry about whether they will have something to wear. They do not worry about style, material, or brand of their clothes. Yet *Solomon*, the wealthiest and most glorious king of Israel, could not outdress the God-clothed wildflowers.

This is the second illustration from nature Jesus gives to teach the futility of worry. But there is an important distinction here. *Birds* can scratch up, hunt down, and fly to food. *Lilies*, however, are inanimate objects. They do not have ability, intent, or volition. God sovereignly plants the lilies of the field. They grow where God places them. The lilies teach us that you do not have to be in a special place, condition, or situation for the Lord to bless, use, or help you. In Psalm 23:5, David testifies, *"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows."*

Verse 30 says, *"But if God so 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?"* The Old Testament points to the grass to declare the frailty and brevity of human life. Isaiah 40:6-7 says, *"All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flowers fades when the breath of the Lord blows on it; surely the people are grass."* Jesus uses this familiar image to make a lesser-to-greater argument about the trustworthiness of God. Grass grows up one day. It is mowed down and used for fuel the next day. If God cares for something so insignificant as grass, how much more will God take care of you?

Matthew 5:1-2 make it clear that THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT was addressed to the disciples of Jesus, even though a multitude of others listened in. Yet Jesus calls these believers “*you of little faith.*” This indictment cuts to the heart of anxiety. Chronic worry is more than a personality type, a psychological disorder, or a physiological problem. At its root, anxiety is a spiritual issue. It is a matter of trust. Jesus does not say that worry is a sign that you have no faith. But he says it is a sign that your faith is weak, small, little. Weak faith worries.

George Muller Massena, one of Napoleon’s generals, suddenly appeared with 18,000 soldiers before an Austrian town that had no means of defending itself. The town council met, certain that surrender was the only answer. But the old minister of the church reminded the council it was Easter. He begged them to hold services and to leave the trouble in God’s hands. They followed his advice. The dean went to the church and rang the bells to announce the service. The French soldiers heard the church bells ring and concluded that the Austrian army had come to rescue the town. They broke camp and vanished before the bells ceased ringing. What battles could you overcome, if you trusted, prayed, and worshiped, instead of worrying.

II. LEARN TO WORRY ABOUT THE THINGS THAT MATTER THE MOST.

In verse 31, Jesus commands his disciples to stop worrying for the second time in this passage: “*Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’*” Yet not all worry is bad. The same word used here for anxiety is used in 1 Corinthians 7:32-33, where Paul says: “*I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife.*” It is also used in 1 Corinthians 12:25, which says that we ought to have the same care or concern for one another. In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul defends the credibility of his ministry by cataloging his sufferings for Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:28 sums up this list of his hardships by saying, “*And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.*”

Not all worry is bad. We should not worry about our physical needs. But we should worry about our spiritual priorities. D. MARTIN LLOYD-JONES commented that Jesus is telling us not to worry about anything, but since we probably will anyway, then worry about something significant. In verses 32-33, Jesus contrasts what people who do not know God seek and what people who know God seek after.

A. PEOPLE WHO DO NOT KNOW GOD SEEK STUFF.

Verse 32 explains why you should not worry about what you are going to eat, drink, or wear: “*For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.*” *Gentiles* is not a racial distinction. It is religious terminology that refers to people who do not know God. Those who do not know God anxiously seek a way to get their needs met. This is a warning. If God is not your

Father through the new birth in Christ and the adoption agency of his cross, you have a lot to worry about. Worry is the symptom of an absentee God. A child does not worry all day about whether his home will be there when he gets home from school or whether his parents will have a meal for him that evening. Children do not worry about such things, because they trust their parents. In the same way, trust your heavenly Father to supply what is best.

Notice the contrast in verse 32: *“For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.”* You do not have to worry about how your needs will be met from day to day because the Father knows you need food, clothing, and shelter. This is the second time in this chapter that Jesus reminds us of the compassionate omniscience of God. Matthew 6:7-8 says: *“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”* We never give the Lord a “Breaking News” flash in prayer. Prayer is not informing God of something he did not already know. It is the affirming that God is the only one able to handle what is going on in your life. God knows. Remember that when you pray. And remember it after you pray, when you are tempted to worry about what you have already prayed about.

**WE ARE OUR HEAVENLY FATHER’S CHILDREN.
AND WE ALL KNOW THAT HE LOVES US ONE AND ALL
YET THERE ARE TIMES WE FIND WE ANSWER ANOTHER’S VOICE AND CALL
IF YOU ARE WILLING, HE WILL TEACH US
HIS VOICE ONLY TO OBEY NO MATTER WHERE
FOR HE KNOW, I GLAD HE KNOWS, JUST HOW MUCH WE CAN BEAR**

B. PEOPLE WHO KNOW GOD SEEK HIM.

Matthew 6:33 is the grand summation of this section of the SERMON ON THE MOUNT. The passage is filled with rebukes, warnings, and prohibitions. But here Jesus gives a positive command with a wonderful promise: *“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”* This is a word to believers. Sinners may seek the benefits God provides. But they do not seek God. Romans 3:10 says: *“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God.”* Lost people do not seek God. God seeks them. Luke 19:10 says: *“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”* Only salvation through faith in Christ makes a person a God-seeker.

The command here is not to seek God. It assumes disciples of Jesus seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness. The focus of the command is to see God *“first.”* This word does not refer to what is first in series, order, or process. It is first in priority. Seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness is to be the most important thing in your life. To put anything ahead of God is the worst thing you can do. Seek God first in your family. Seek God first in your career. Seek God first in your possessions. Seek God first in your time. Seek God first in your money. Seek God first

in your possessions. Psalm 37:4 says: *“Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”*

There is a wonderful promise in verse 33: *“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”* This is God’s affirmative action program. This is God’s social security system. This is God’s faith-based initiative. If you seek God first, God will add everything you need. It is a matter of faith. Hebrews 11:6 says, *“And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”* It’s also a matter of focus. The word “added” means to place alongside. If you focus on your needs, you will never get your needs met. But if you focus on the kingdom of God and his righteousness, God will place what you need alongside of you. Psalm 37:25 says: *“I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken of his children begging for bread.”*

III. WAIT TO WORRY ABOUT TOMORROW.

Jesus commands us not to worry about what CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON called “the world’s trinity of care” – what you will eat, drink, or wear. But in the closing verse of the text, Jesus targets another area of sinful anxiety: TOMORROW. Some people worry about what they are going to eat, drink, or wear today. Most people worry about what they are going to eat, drink, or wear tomorrow. The average person is crucifying himself between two thieves: the regrets of yesterday and the worries about tomorrow. In verse 34, Jesus says, *“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”* Here is the point: Wait to worry. This is actually the point the Lord makes throughout this passage.

- **Worry when it will feed and clothe you.**
- **Worry when it will make you grow taller or live longer.**
- **Worry when you want to know how it feels to have no God on your side.**
- **Worry when you want to make tomorrow worse than it is already going to be.**

EUGENE PETERSON’s *Message* paraphrase of verse 34 reads: “Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don’t get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when tomorrow comes.” Do you believe that? Then wait to worry. Leave tomorrow in the hands of God. Trust God who has been faithful in the past to be faithful in the future. In Psalm 90:12, Moses, prays, *“So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.”*

GEORGE McDONALD put it this way: “No man ever sank under the burden of the day. It is when Tomorrow’s burden is added to the burden of today, that the weight is more than a man can bear.” Think about it. Today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday. In two days, tomorrow will be yesterday. Hebrews 13:8 says, *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”* We believe what scripture says the Lord has done in the past. And we believe what scripture promises the Lord will do in the future. But we struggle to trust the presence and power and purpose of

Jesus in my present situation. Victory over anxiety happens when you can confidently declare these two words: *"and today."*

When the stock market crashed in 1929, J.C. Penny lost almost all of his material assets. He became physically ill and deeply depressed. As a result, he had to be hospitalized. One night, Penny thought he was dying. When he woke up, he realized he was still alive. As he walked down the hospital corridor that day, he heard singing coming from the hospital chapel. The song was *God Will Take Care of You*. These words kindled a spark in his heart. He went into the chapel where the prayers and reading of Scripture directed his focus from his problems to God who cared about him and was able to deliver him from his difficult circumstances. This was the turning point for J.C. Penny. He made a complete recovery from his illness and went on to build one of the most successful retail businesses in the United States.

BE NOT DISMAYED WHATEVER BE TIDE,
GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU;
BENEATH HIS WINGS OF LOVE ABIDE,
GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU.

THRU DAYS OF TOIL WHEN HEART DOTH FAIL,
GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU;
WHEN DANGERS FIERCE YOUR PATH ASSAIL
GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU.

NO MATTER WHAT MAY BE THE TEST,
GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU;
LEAN, WEARY ONE, UPON HIS BREAST,
GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU.