

# Worrying doesn't help

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[ 0 : 00 ] Our reading today is from the Gospel of Luke. Luke's Gospel, chapter 12, beginning from verse 22. Luke, chapter 12, verse 22.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear.

For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens, they do not sow or reap. They have no storeroom or barn, yet God feeds them.

And how much more valuable are you than birds? Who of you, by worrying, can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?

Consider how the wildflowers grow. They do not labour or spin, yet I tell you, Not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these.

[ 1 : 04 ] If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, you of little faith?

And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink. Do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your father knows that you need them.

But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.

Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Amen. I wonder how many of you feel worried at the moment.

[ 2 : 09 ] How many of us watched Boris and Nicola giving us updates on Tuesday night, and how many of us watch the news every day, and we feel profoundly worried. Worried about the state of our world, the state of our country, worried about the implications of this pandemic, and worried perhaps about the implications of government responses to this pandemic.

Worried whether we'll still have a job in three months' time. Worried what the long-term consequences for the economy will be, and how that will affect ordinary people. Worried about what Christmas will look like this year, whether students will be allowed to go home or not.

Worried about our elderly relatives, as we're discouraged from spending time with them. Worried about our children's education, catching up on those last six months, and studying now in strange circumstances, and with this ever-present threat of a two-week absence, because somebody in the house has a cough.

And all of these new worries, they pile on top of the old worries, don't they? Those haven't gone away. In fact, for years, we in the West, we've been teaching one another to worry more and more, to set higher and higher and higher goals for ourselves, so that we can worry more and more about whether or not we will reach those goals.

And if we do reach our goals, well, we set new ones that are yet higher. And if we don't reach the goals we've set, we feel like failures. Whatever happened to contentment?

[ 3 : 36 ] What happened to saying, this is enough? But we're anxious about everything. We're anxious about practical necessities. We're anxious about whether we're doing enough.

We're anxious on an interpersonal level. Author Shauna Nyquist, she says, I've spent most of my life and most of my friendships holding my breath and hoping that when people get close enough, they won't leave.

And fearing that it's a matter of time before they figure me out and go. I wonder if that resonates for you. We're worried, aren't we, about being found to be a fraud.

Worried about whether people are only near us because they want something from us. We are constantly, constantly anxious about absolutely everything. We live in a society that is consumed by worry.

We are driven by the fear of missing out. We live lives filled with stress about what we think we need but don't have. We're filled with anxiety.

[ 4 : 39 ] And in many ways, this is nothing new. Jesus' warnings in this passage from Luke's Gospel, his warnings show us that for much of the world, for much of history, has faced this same worry problem.

There's differences about what level the anxiety strikes at. We might even say that Jesus' contemporaries had more reason for concern than we do without government furlough schemes and unemployment benefits in the NHS because many of his hearers only just had enough to live on and always the prospect that one day they would not have even that.

Most of them may be one spare garment, not more. And that's true for some in our world today as well, isn't it? And we ought to be aware of that and we ought to be doing what we can to respond to it.

And most of us aren't in that situation. Our anxiety isn't at that level. But the fact that our anxiety isn't at that level doesn't mean it isn't real.

It doesn't actually really help us all that much to say to one another, there's children starving in Africa, get over yourself. Our struggles may not be quite as acute, but they are genuine.

[ 5 : 51 ] So instead of berating ourselves, let's instead ask, how does Jesus respond to an anxious world? Now, he absolutely does say, do not worry.

Several times in these verses, in fact, he says that. Do not worry. But that isn't all that he says here. And if you want a short summary of the message of these verses, I suggest it's something more like, worrying doesn't help, more than do not worry.

Now, of course, the intent is the same. The objective is to put an end to worry. But Jesus does more here than just command. He exhorts. He offers reasons why we need not worry.

I suggest we can helpfully think about these verses under three headings. Firstly, worrying doesn't help because you can't change the things that matter. Second, worrying doesn't help because the one who can change things already knows.

Thirdly, worrying doesn't help, so be generous. Worrying doesn't help because you can't change the things that matter. Friends, hear the truth of verse 25.

[ 7 : 04 ] You cannot add a single hour to your life. You can't. In the span of a life, what's a single hour? And yet even such a small thing, you cannot change.

No matter how hard you try, you can't do it. You can spend hundreds and thousands of pounds on various creams and lotions and potions to keep you looking young. And they might achieve that look, at least to an extent, but they will not change the span of your life.

You might go to still greater lengths. You can spend hundreds of thousands of dollars having your body cryo-preserved in hopes of future revival in a day when there's a cure for whatever disease ails you.

But there is very little chance of success. Many of the companies that have purported to offer this have failed. As of a couple of years ago, all but one of the companies set up back in the 70s, all but one had gone out of business.

And all those carefully preserved corpses defrosted and disposed of. Even these most science fiction-like prospects, they offer no guarantees.

[ 8 : 12 ] And they will not succeed. You cannot add a single hour to your life. Psalm 39 verse 4 says, Show me, Lord, my life's end and the number of my days.

Let me know how fleeting my life is. You have made my days a mere hand-breath. The span of my years is as nothing before you. Everyone is but a breath, even those who seem secure.

As David reflects in this psalm on the span of a life, David's desire is that we might achieve wisdom in light of the transitory nature of this life. That we might not put our trust in that which seems to offer security, but rather find our hope in God.

As he declares, verse 7, that we might come to him and him alone for the hope that we need. And here in Luke chapter 12, the focus isn't quite so much on the brevity of life as rather the fact that its length is fixed.

You can't change it. You cannot change it, so don't keep trying to do so. Jodie Pickle says, Anxiety's like a rocking chair. It gives you something to do, but it doesn't get you very far. [ 9 : 22 ] You can't change it. Worrying doesn't change things. You cannot add a single hour to your life. So how do we respond to that reality?

Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die? Well, it's not quite Jesus' idea, is it? He says, verse 24, Consider the ravens. They do not sow or reap.

They have no storeroom or barn, yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds. Jesus doesn't say, Make the most of it while you can.

No, he says, Trust God. Trust God because the God who preserves even the ravens will surely care for you who are far more valuable. Ravens are unclean, according to God's law.

You can find that in Leviticus chapter 11. So ravens are kind of symbolically unholy, symbolically far away from God. They might reasonably be considered unworthy of God's care.

[ 10 : 23 ] Yet he does, in fact, care for them. And some commentators suggest ravens were also kind of notoriously careless birds. The exact opposite of the squirrel gathering up his nuts.

The raven has a laissez-faire attitude. I don't know enough about birds to know whether that's true or not. But certainly Jesus uses them as an example. They don't need to store up food because God provides for them.

And he will provide for his people too, Jesus assures his disciples. Friends, do not worry because you can't change the things that matter. Secondly, do not worry because the one who can change things already knows.

Friends, God knows what you need. See verse 29. Do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink. Do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things.

And your father knows that you need them. Unlike the pagan world, those who trust in God don't need to run around after such things. We don't have to stress.

[ 11 : 26 ] We don't have to worry. Because God already knows. It isn't news to him that we need food to eat and clothes to wear.

God isn't unaware of the things you're anxious about. So as we see supermarkets starting to run low on certain items all over again in fear of a second lockdown, friends, we do not need to join the panic because God knows what we need.

God is not unaware that we're in the midst of a pandemic. He's not unaware of the circumstances of your life. God knows your needs. And he says to trust him, to provide.

Psalms 127, Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat.

For he grants sleep to those he loves. This anxiety about the future that drives you to sleeplessness, that drives you to anxious toil, to spending every possible moment desperately trying to have enough.

[ 12 : 37 ] It's fruitless. Because God already knows and he's the one who can do something about it. There aren't safer hands that you could find to leave things in than God's hands.

He knows what you need. In fact, not even, you know, not just there are no safer hands, I think we could say there are no other safe hands at all.

There isn't any other hope, is there? It's only God who can be trusted to care for us. Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain. Now maybe that's not a very comfortable thought.

In the blank book, Lemony Snicket writes, to hear the phrase our only hope always makes one anxious. Because it means that if the only hope doesn't work, there is nothing left.

I think there's something to that, isn't there? We don't like the idea of not having backup plans, of having only one possible option. Certainly when I'm planning out how I'm going to do something, I have in the back of my mind, well if that doesn't work, I'll do this instead.

[ 13 : 48 ] And if not that, then the other. But that's not what we need here, is it? We don't need backup plans. There are no other safe hands.

We don't need an alternative hope because God is absolutely trustworthy. And he says he knows what we need. If even the flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, if even they are clothed in splendour, friends, will he not provide for your needs?

When you are faced with anxiety, when you are worried about what tomorrow may bring, when you are not sure what you're going to eat or what you'll wear or what you'll be permitted to do tomorrow,

when you're stressed and concerned, don't imagine Jesus standing there wagging his finger angrily and saying, do not worry.

No. See him standing there with arms outstretched, see him pulling you into his arms and saying, I've got this. You don't need to worry.

It's under control. You don't need to be anxious. I'm in charge. You don't need to be stressed. I know what you need. You don't need to be concerned. Leave everything to me.

[15:09] Thirdly, remember worrying doesn't help because you can't change the things that matter. And worrying doesn't help because God's in charge. The one who can change things knows what you need.

Thirdly, worrying doesn't help, so be generous. Let's pick up from verse 31. But seek his kingdom and these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.

Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

So what do we replace our anxiety with? Seek his kingdom. Instead of worrying whether we'll have food and clothes and therefore hoarding things for ourselves, instead give to the poor.

Worrying doesn't help seek the kingdom of God. And there's all manner of things that could be potentially encompassed by this instruction to seek his kingdom. And I don't think we should try and narrow it down too far.

[16:14] Leon Morris says this will mean trying to produce in our own lives conduct appropriate to those who have accepted the rule of God. And it will also mean trying to bring others into a like way of living, for it is in this way that the kingdom grows.

It's both conduct in our own lives, how we ourselves behave, and trying to bring others in. This is seeking the kingdom. Then the particular application of this principle highlighted in the following verses is generosity, isn't it?

Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Seek the spiritual blessings of the kingdom, not the material blessings of this life. And because we're freed from worry about whether or not we will have enough, then we can be generous with what we have.

Now, of course, this isn't a total and immediate thing. Jesus and his disciples had at least some funds on hand, at least some of the time.

We know they had some money, at least that they gave to other people. They gave alms and so on. They didn't immediately give away literally everything that they had.

[17:30] And giving away to the extent that you become destitute is not wise and simply makes you a burden to others. So this isn't that kind of total monastic go and live on a rock kind of thing.

But let's not empty this command of its force. And let's be honest that by the time we're talking here about selling possessions, that this is clearly generosity to the extent that we feel it.

This isn't generosity because we have so much we're not even going to notice when it's gone. This is generosity that costs something. And I suggest that for many of us that maybe the thing to take away is to think about prioritizing generosity.

To give to others first, not last. To give to others when we don't feel certain that we'll have enough at the end of the month, but rather to do it as a deliberate thing, confident that we will have enough at the end of the month because God will provide.

Prioritizing generosity. Maybe that means putting money in an envelope at the start of the week that you're then going to give away. For me, most of the money that we give away is by standing order because we've made a plan for it.

[18:52] And the priority of doing that for me is reflected in the fact that it's the topmost line in my budget program. When I set out how are we going to spend our money, I do that first.

And it's also reflected in the fact that I aim for it to come out of our bank account only a day or two after payday so that I'm not tempted to look at my bank account and think, oh wow, look how much money I can spend because it's already gone.

Prioritize your generosity, whatever that looks like for you. And as we do this, as we seek God's kingdom, not least by committing our financial resources to the growth thereof, as we seek God's kingdom, then the glorious promise of verse 31 is that these things will be given to you as well.

The things which verse 30, God knows you need, the food, the drink, the clothes, these will be given to you as well. There was that comparison between the flowers and King Solomon and his splendor back in verse 27.

And I think maybe we're meant to draw another comparison to Solomon here. Maybe you remember from 1 Kings chapter 3, maybe you've read it not too long ago, or maybe you remember we actually referred back to it a few weeks ago, thinking about Jesus as the one who is wiser than King Solomon.

[ 20 : 15 ] 1 Kings chapter 3, God says to Solomon, ask for whatever you want me to give you. And Solomon asks for wisdom to govern well. He asks for a discerning heart. And God grants that request.

He gives him wisdom. And then he says, verse 13, moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for, both wealth and honour, so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. And Solomon enjoys a good reputation and considerable wealth. Solomon is richly blessed by God. I think maybe we're meant to have this with King Solomon in the back of our minds as we read here in verse 31, all these things will be given to you as well.

Now friends, this is not an invitation to be sneaky. This is not an invitation to think, well, well, I'll tell God I'm seeking his kingdom.

I'll do things that look like I'm seeking his kingdom and therefore he will give me all these good things. Now verse 34 has the right of it. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

[ 21 : 25 ] God knows your heart. God knows what you are truly seeking. And if you are truly seeking heavenly treasure, if you are seeking his kingdom, then your heart is directed in the right way.

And you may not grow wealthy as the world understands riches. You may not, but you will not lack. When you seek his treasure, you are guaranteed to find it.

My friends, do not worry, because you cannot change the things that matter. Charles Spurgeon says, our anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows, but only empties today of its strengths. Do not worry, because you cannot change the things that matter. Do not worry, because the one who can change things already knows. And do not worry, but seek the kingdom, be generous. Let's pray. Lord God, Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, thank you that you delight to give good things to your children.

[ 22 : 32 ] Thank you that you promise us that we need not worry about the daily necessities of life, that you know what we need, that we cannot change these things ourselves.

Lord, impress these realities upon our hearts. Help us to feel the truth that we cannot change these things ourselves, that we must entrust them to you as the only one who is sufficient for these things. And therefore free us up, Lord. Free us to be generous. Free us to give away what you have entrusted to us. Free us to seek the growth of your kingdom, to seek in our own lives the fruit that evidences our discipleship, to seek amongst our friends and our family, the growth of your kingdom as others come to know and to love and to trust you as we ourselves have done.

Lord Jesus, grant us these things we ask. And with the growth of your kingdom, everything else that we need. Thank you, Lord. Amen.