

# Roots of Anxiety

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[ 0 : 00 ] One of the most dominant marks of our time is anxiety. In fact, a lot of people are beginning to call this the age of anxiety. So much so that it appears that many of us are becoming addicted to anxiety.

As though we do not feel right unless along with the majority of other people we're anxious. We have a carefree day and we worry that we're not worried. There's a lot of good reason to be anxious though.

Turn on the television, read the paper. I regularly find myself anxious. Anxious about finances.

Anxious about the safety and well-being of my children.

Anxious about the future of GPC. Anxious about this transition time we're now going to go through.

Anxious about the larger transition that the larger church is going through all over the world.

I don't know where all that's going, but as you've heard me say, it's going to require some fundamental kind of change. And that makes me anxious. Anxious about the future of America.

[ 1 : 12 ] Anxious about the future of Social Security. I put \$12,000 a year into Social Security and I got a feeling I'm not going to see it. Anxious about the judicial system. Anxious about the potential balkanization of the United States, particularly in Southern California.

And most of all, I find myself regularly anxious about earthquakes. Ever since January of 1994, I find myself anxious at night.

Don't leave me out here alone. There are some others of you who are anxious too, right? Just slip a little finger up and join me. I go through a little routine every night. I put my jeans and my tennis shoes and my sweatshirt and my wallet and my keys and my flashlight all there in that right.

I know where they are. And if the ground starts to move, I'm there and I'm out of there. I'll come back for Sharon later. I'm just teasing.

I'm just teasing. Because she's not anxious about it. She just goes to sleep and I'm laying there, you know. I think I said during the weeks right after the earthquake that I've discovered that sleep is a profound act of faith.

[ 2 : 26 ] Right? I'm just going to go to sleep. Because I have no control over this. So I know what anxiety is. And this text of Scripture before us today speaks to anxiety.

One of the best places that speaks. It's Matthew chapter 6 verses 19 through 34. It's part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. And if you are able, will you stand now for the reading of His Word?

Jesus is speaking to us. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in or steal.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore the eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.

If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! No one can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other.

[ 3 : 33 ] You cannot serve God and mammon. For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life. As to what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor for your body as to what you shall put on, is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?

Look at the birds of the air. They do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns. Yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And which of you, by being anxious, can add a single cubit to his lifespan?

And why are you anxious about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow. They do not toil, nor do they spin. Yet I say to you that even Solomon, in all of his glory, did not clothe himself like one of these.

But if God so arrays the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will he not much more do so for you, O people of little faith? Do not be anxious then, saying, What shall we eat or what shall we drink?

With what shall we clothe ourselves? For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

[ 4 : 42 ] Therefore, do not be anxious for tomorrow. Tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Amen to the last line. Spirit of the living God, we believe that you inspired Matthew the tax collector to write down these words for us long ago.

And now we pray in your mercy and grace that you take these words off the page, make them come alive in our minds and in our spirits as never before. For we pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. You may be seated. On first reading, this text appears to be a series of loosely connected wisdom sayings, much in the vein of the book of Proverbs.

But as you read it again and again and again, you'll see that it is very carefully crafted, and it has one message. Look at verse 25.

You don't need to see all these verses up here. You've got them in front of you. But look at verse 25. It starts with, For this reason I say to you. Now, whenever you've seen this text on Hallmark cards, it begins with verse 25 and then goes on to talk about the birds of the air and the lilies of the field and seeking first the kingdom and righteousness of God.

[ 6 : 02 ] But this little phrase, For this reason, says you can never begin the reading at verse 25. You have to read the verses before. For this reason points back towards Jesus' teaching on treasure and vision and masters.

I think that Jesus is saying here that somehow then anxiety is rooted in the choices that we are making about our treasures and about our vision and about our masters.

This says to me that we cannot understand what Jesus is saying in verse 25 and following unless we also understand what he's saying in the verses beforehand.

Now, in those verses beforehand, Jesus is working with what I will call three laws of the human heart. Three laws of the human heart. By the word law, I do not mean something that has been imposed upon the human species from outside, but something that is inherent to the human heart, like the law of gravity.

The law of gravity is not imposed on creation and on human beings. It's inherent to the fabric of our being. There are three laws of the human heart that Jesus is working with here that are inherent to our very being.

[ 7 : 19 ] Now, each of these laws has a corollary, and each of the corollaries poses a crisis, poses a decision. And I think that Jesus is saying to us that anxiety is rooted in wrong decisions we are making about these fundamental movements of the heart, and that freedom from anxiety will come by making the right decisions.

Let me show you what I mean. Law 1, it's in verses 19 to 21. 1, every human being is an investor. Every human being is a treasurer.

Every human being, whether consciously or subconsciously, is looking for and investing in some sort of security against the uncertainties of tomorrow.

Jesus says, do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, but store up for yourselves treasures on heaven. Literally, do not treasure treasures for yourself on earth, but treasure treasures for yourself on heaven.

Law 1, we all treasure treasures. And notice that Jesus here does not criticize us for this. Jesus does not tell us that we are not to do this.

[ 8 : 41 ] Investing in securities against the uncertainties of the future is not the result of sin. It's inherent in our being created by the living God. Furthermore, notice that Jesus does not say, do not treasure treasures for yourselves.

He doesn't say, do not treasure treasures for yourselves. Many commentators will concentrate on that phrase, for yourselves, and argue that the point of Jesus' words here is selfishness. Our problem is that we're selfishness.

We're getting treasures for ourselves. But notice that he uses the phrase, for yourselves, with both clauses, both with regard to treasures on earth and treasures on heaven.

He expects us to treasure treasures for ourselves. The issue is, what kind of treasures? Jesus is not saying that the problem we have is that we are selfish.

I think he's saying that the problem we have is that we're foolish. May I put it this way? Jesus is not saying that we are too selfish. He is saying that we are not selfish enough when it comes to this matter of treasures.

[ 9 : 55 ] We are not selfish enough as investors. It's a law of the human heart to invest. Treasure treasures for yourselves, he says. Just be wise.

Now, here's the corollary to law one. Our hearts follow our investments. Jesus says, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Note the order. Not investments follow the heart, but the heart follows investments. I wish it were the other way around.

I wish we could say that the investments will follow wherever the heart goes. That's not the way it is. The heart always goes wherever the investment is. Now, by this term heart, the Bible means more than the organ that's pumping blood.

Heart refers to the control center of our lives. The heart is not only the seat of the emotion, it's the seat of the will. The heart is the place where we gather in all of the data around us, we weigh it, and we sort it.

[ 11 : 05 ] And Jesus is telling us now that the control center of our lives follows our investments. Here then is the crisis, the decision.

Will we treasure treasures on earth or in heaven? What helps me is to know that the phrases on earth and in heaven do not refer so much to the location of the investment as to the kind of investment.

On earth means the things of the earth, the things of human society organizing itself without God. In heaven means the things of heaven, the things of God, and I think it means the things of God on earth.

Because we saw last week that Jesus is saying that heaven is coming to earth. The things in heaven then mean the things of the living God both in heaven and on earth.

The issue, therefore, is the issue of durability. Jesus here is making explicit what we all implicitly know, but seldom admit to ourselves, namely that the things of earth are profoundly insecure.

[ 12 : 15 ] We know that, but we will not face it. That's the redemptive consequence of an earthquake. The things of earth are profoundly insecure.

Do not treasure treasures for yourself on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. Here Jesus is helping us be realistic about life, to be really realistic.

All the treasures of earth, however good, are subject to the corrosions of one sort or another. Dale Bruner puts it this way. The moth represents nature's corrosion eating away at our treasures.

The rust represents time's corrosions eating away at our treasures, and the thief represents humanity's corrosions eating away. All the treasures of earth, however good, are subject to corrosion.

Isn't it interesting to observe that the more we have of what we think will make us secure, the more we feel constrained to protect it?

[ 13 : 23 ] Why is that? It's because our hearts implicitly know, but they will dare not admit, that our securities are insecure against nature's and times and humanity's corrosions.

I was reflecting on this earlier this week, and it dawned on me that we simply do not get the irony. We don't get the irony. We accumulate all of this stuff that tells us we're going to feel secure, and then we have to spend thousands of dollars on fancy secure systems to keep them secure.

Get the irony of that. Get the irony of that. We're told if we just have this, we'll feel secure. We get it. Whoa. This isn't secure.

I've got to get alarms up. I've got to get bars up. I've got to get people to be around me with guns. I've got to protect this because this is supposed to protect me. The irony of that.

Jesus reminds us investors that there is only one safe investment, and it is the things of heaven, the things of the living God, which cannot be eaten away by moth and rust and by thieves, nor by drought or floods or inflation or revolution or earthquakes or death.

[ 14 : 46 ] Law 2. It's verses 22 and 23. Every human being comes at life from a frame of reference.

Every human being has a vision of reality. Every human being has a worldview. Every human being has a set of deeply held presuppositions about the nature and character of reality.

Although we cannot articulate those presuppositions, we all have them. And they are revealed every day in the way we treat people, the way we spend our time, the way we spend our money.

Now here's the corollary of Law 2. Our vision of reality affects the whole of our lives. The basic presuppositions that we hold about the nature of reality will affect everything about us.

Jesus says, the eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is good or sound or single, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, not sound, not single, your whole body will be full of darkness.

[16:03] Although Jesus' words are literally true, that is, that what literally comes into the physical eye affects the physical body, I think Jesus is also speaking here metaphorically. John Stott points out that not infrequently in Scripture, the eye is equivalent to the heart.

And to set the heart and to fix the eye are synonymous. Here Jesus is telling us that what we fix the eye of our heart upon, what we allow to occupy our mental attention, will determine everything about us.

E. Stanley Jones used to say, what gets your attention gets you. What gets your attention gets you. Here then is the crisis, the decision.

Where will we focus our eyes? What will we allow to fill the center of our attention? What will be the presuppositions by which we enter into the world?

And the choice we make affects everything about us. For another way of making this point is to say, that we become like that upon which we fix our attention. We become like it.

[17:17] That's the argument about television, isn't it? If we, and I'm not going to say either positive or negative about the television programs, I'm just going to make the point that we become like that which we allow ourselves to fix attention on.

And either we focus on the things of the light of the world and are full of light or we focus on the things of this present darkness and we're full of darkness.

And as we all know, it's, you can't feel very secure in the darkness. Law 3 is verse 24. Every human being serves some sort of God.

Someone has said that the human species is incurably religious. There are no true atheists.

Everybody has some sort of God.

You remember Bob Dylan's song. I quoted it, I think, in the fall sometime. Where I think he hauntingly sings this inherent law of the human heart. One stanza. You may be an ambassador to England or to France.

[18:25] You may like to gamble. You may like to dance. You may be the heavyweight champion of the world. You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls. But you're going to serve somebody. Yes, indeed, you're going to serve somebody.

It may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you're going to serve somebody. Birds fly in the air. Fish swim in the sea. And human beings serve some sort of God.

Now, here's the corollary of law three. We can only serve one God at a time. Jesus says, no one can serve two masters.

Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will despise the one and cling to the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Notice the word cannot. Underline that word cannot.

Jesus does not say, you must not serve two masters. Jesus does not say, you should not serve two masters. Jesus says, you cannot. It's impossible.

[19:30] It's not possible to do. Now, a lot of us try to prove him wrong, but it's impossible. In only two places that I know of in the Gospels does Jesus speak so absolutely.

There's John 15, 5, where Jesus says, I'm the vine, you are the branches, you cannot do anything apart from me. And the other place is here. And most people ignore him on both counts.

This impossibility of serving two masters, serving two gods, is brought out in the actual word Jesus uses. He uses the word master, not the word employer. You see, you can serve, I can serve, one, two, three, four different employers.

But no one, but you can only be related to one master. You're the slave of one master. One commentator said, single ownership and full-time service are the essence of slavery.

How does God put it at the beginning of the Ten Commandments? I'm Yahweh, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. You shall have no other gods before me. No one can serve

two masters, he says.

[ 20 : 37 ] We cannot serve God and mammon. It is either or, not both and. Mammon. Now, I understand why many people, many versions of the Bible translate that as money.

And that's because most of the versions of the Bible come from the parts of the world where money is a mammon. But mammon does not refer only to money. And I think it's erroneous to translate it that way.

It misses the point. The word mammon is derived from the word aman, from which we get the word amen. And aman means that in which one trusts.

Aman, that in which one trusts. Mammon is anything or anyone other than the living God in which we trust. Mammon is anything or anyone other than the living God in which we find security against the uncertainties of tomorrow.

Now, most mammons are in and of themselves very good. In fact, they have to be good or appear to be good in order for them to win us.

[ 21 : 45 ] We would not put our trust in something that we didn't think was good. So, Jesus is not here judging our mammons. He is not saying the mammons are bad. He is just bringing us to an essential fact of life that it is impossible to serve a mammon and the living God at the same time.

The human heart has the capacity for only one all-encompassing allegiance, which means then that you and I are always on the verge of idolatry. Right?

We're always on the verge of putting our trust in something other than the living God in an idol. Idols are not made of wood and metal only.

In fact, the most seductive idols are invisible. They are values and goals, systems, and ideologies. Perhaps it would be helpful if I just took a moment and gave some help on how we can spot the mammon in our souls.

Money is an obvious one, but there are others that we need to recognize. I found it helpful to periodically ask myself four questions. And it's real helpful to ask these four questions in the presence of someone who knows me well, so I'll answer them honestly.

[ 23 : 02 ] Question one, what is it that gives me hope? When I look out at the future, when I look at the horizon before me, what is it that gives me hope? If my answer is anything other than the living God, then that answer has a potential for being a mammon or an idol.

Question two, what is my greatest delight? As I reflect on my life, what is it that gives me the greatest joy? If I were to answer that spontaneously right now, it's watching my daughter Marissa play softball.

But can you see the potential for idolatry that comes in that? I love to preach. Why do I love to preach? Because I love the thrill of preaching or because I love the one whom I preach?

Question three, what do you fear? Fear is always a good clue to one's idols. Primitive idols were often projections of what people feared.

And people would do anything to appease what they feared so that what they feared wouldn't hurt them. What do you fear? I encourage you to face whatever it is you fear because it can lead to a potential mammon or idol.

[ 24 : 26 ] Do you fear rejection? So much so that you will water down the gospel and the world in order to be accepted. Then it means then your mammon is other people's affirmation.

Do you fear criticism? So much so that you will lie to save face. Then the mammon is your reputation. You see my point. Question four, where do I resist God's word?

What portions or themes of Scripture do I resist? We do it, don't we? Am I the only one that does this kind of stuff? There are portions of Scripture that you just neatly pass over, right?

Why do we do that? I would suggest that it's because those portions of Scripture are threatening an idol or a mammon somewhere. For instance, why do we who are well off resist the sections of Scripture that teach on poverty and the poor?

We know what Jesus has to say about the poor. We know what He has to say about immigrants. We know what He has to say about sojourners. We know what He has to say about all that.

[ 25 : 35 ] Why do we resist those passages? Why do we neatly not have them in our devotions? Because they threaten the idol of financial security. Why do preachers avoid preaching the hard truths and the hard texts?

Because people won't want to hear it and people might even get angry. Which means the idol of acceptance is being threatened. You get my point. Do you?

Inherent law of the heart. Everyone serves some sort of God and the corollary is we cannot serve two gods at the same time. Here's the crisis then, the decision to decide every day. Whom will I serve? It's either or, not both and. Either we serve the living God or we serve mammon. Either we use mammon to serve God or God forbid we use God to serve mammon. Three laws, three corollaries, three decisions all interrelated. Does Jesus put them in the order He does to make a point? I think so. I think He's telling us that the decisions we make about our investments come out of our vision of reality.

[ 26 : 53 ] And our vision of reality comes out of the relationship we have with the God we have chosen to serve. Now, as we all know, we can deceive ourselves on this matter.

We can claim that we are treasuring treasures in heaven but be treasuring treasures in earth big time. We can be claiming that we see clearly but missing reality big time.

We can think that we are serving the living God in Jesus Christ but actually be serving false gods big time. How can we tell whether or not we are deceiving ourselves?

Now we come to the major point of this text. It is this. The choices we make about these inherent laws of the human heart set up particular states of being which issue in particular preoccupations of the mind and heart.

I'll say that again. The choices we make about these inherent laws of the human heart set up particular states of being which then issue in particular preoccupations of the mind and heart.

[ 28 : 06 ] The state of being set up by treasuring treasures on earth and by focusing our vision on other than the living God at the center and by serving some sort of mammon that state of being is anxiety.

We are anxious because we are tethered to treasures which our hearts know are insecure. We are anxious because our vision is clouded by the lesser and false gods around us.

We cannot see the stable, the eternal rock of ages because we are absorbed with the values and ideologies of our time. We are anxious because the mammon we are serving is unstable and our hearts implicitly know that.

All forms of mammon are unstable. There's a picture in the book of Isaiah of people erecting these wooden idols and the idols are so insecure that they're always having to prop them up with these other beams and the idols, you know, and that's a picture of mammon.

Every mammon is implicitly wobbly and when I put my hope in that, I am going to live wobbly. No mammon, however good, be that my wife, be that my children, be that my health, be that the church, be that the earth, it's not stable enough to take away my fear of the future.

[ 29 : 36 ] And therefore, whenever I place my hope in it, my state of being is going to be anxiety, nervous restlessness and worry. And my preoccupation of mind is going to be the so-called world's trinity.

What shall I eat? What shall I drink? And what shall I wear? On the other hand, if we are tethered to heavenly investments, treasures which cannot be destroyed by moth or rust or thieves, if our focus is on the eternal one in the midst of time, if our vision of life is full of him in whom all things hold together, if we are serving the living God and banking our hope on his faithfulness and on his goodness, then the state of being is going to be security.

And our preoccupation of mind and heart is going to be with the only things that finally matter, namely the kingdom and righteousness of God.

We need not be anxious because we know that nothing can overcome him who has come to us as Jesus, and we know that nothing can finally stand in the way of the coming of the kingdom.

Thus, in this text, Jesus exhorts us to do three things, to stop, to start, and to keep on. Start, stop, sorry, stop.

[ 31 : 12 ] Verse 25, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat, what you shall drink, what you shall wear. Literally, Jesus says, stop being anxious.

He could see the anxiety in the faces of those who were gathered around him at the mountaintop. And he says to them, stop your preoccupation with things. He's not saying that eating and drinking and clothing don't matter.

He's not saying that. He's just saying, stop letting those things fill your vision. I hope I don't offend anyone with this, but one of the best ways to live an anxious life is to fill your vision with Sunset Magazine.

Sunset Magazine's perfectly good. Don't get me wrong. But if that's all I read, I'm going to have an anxious life. Stop it, says Jesus.

Stop letting your mind get filled with things that make you anxious. And start. He says in verse 26, look at the birds of the air.

[ 32 : 22 ] And in verse 28, observe the lilies of the field. Literally, start looking and start observing. See, he can tell that our vision's in the wrong place.

We're looking at the things that are making us anxious. And he tells us, I want you to fix your eyes elsewhere. Look at the birds and look at the flowers. The birds, they don't sow or reap or gather into barns and yet your heavenly Father feeds you.

Are you not worth more than they? The King James Version used to have it, take no thought of the morrow. I understand why they translated it that way, but it misses the point.

Jesus is saying, take thought. Look at those birds. He's not saying to us, then stop sowing and reaping and gathering into barns.

He's not encouraging a thriftless, shiftless kind of life. He's saying to us, look, these birds, they're very industrious, but do you see any anxiety in them?

[ 33 : 29 ] You don't because the birds know someone who's bigger than they who holds them in His hands. And He says, start looking at the lilies of the field.

Have you done that lately? I don't want to ruin someone's nice flowers here and picking it up, but look at that. And He says, even Solomon in all of his glory was not arrayed as one of these, and yet they're in the garbage can tomorrow.

If God cares about one of these little flowers the way He does, don't you think He cares about you? John Calvin says that the birds and the flowers are preachers.

They preach to us. And the birds and flowers say to us day after day, where's your faith? The birds and the flowers say to us, don't you know the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Don't you know the Father? The birds and the flowers say to us, hey, look, I got a secret for you.

Did you know that all of the activity on the Los Angeles freeways doesn't make the world go round?

[ 34 : 42 ] It doesn't. The earth's going to go around if the freeways are shut down. The sun is going to come. The rain, the earth is going to yield its vegetation.

and the birds and the birds and flowers say to us, you're nuts. That's not what makes the world go round.

Don't you know the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ? Helmut Thiele is right when he says that every worry is a vote of no confidence in God. Boy, that's stinging to me, a worrier like I am.

Every worry is a vote of no confidence in God. Sorry God, but Father, I can't trust you this time. This one is just too big for you. He wouldn't say that out loud, but that's what the worry says, isn't it?

Or worse, what I discovered as reflecting on this week is that every time I worry, what I'm really saying is Jesus, you're not right about the Father. Sorry, Jesus, I know you're the Son of the Father, but Jesus, you're not right.

[ 35 : 46 ] I'm going to tell you some things about this Father that make me, you don't know the Father, because if you knew the Father, you know, it's ridiculous. Every time I worry, I'm implicitly saying Jesus isn't right about the goodness of the Father.

Stop, he says, and start looking through the flowers, looking through the birds to see the Father. And then keep on. Verse 32, keep on seeking first the kingdom and righteousness of God, and all these things will be added unto you.

Take all of that nervous energy and now channel it in a different direction to seek the rule of God and to seek the right relatedness of God. This word, seek, is translated in other place, persecute.

That'll give you the intensity with which we're supposed to seek. Move all of that energy now to seek to live under the rule of the Father and to enjoy His right relatedness.

So when we're anxious, we're to stop looking that way, start looking this way, and keep seeking the kingdom and righteousness of God. Well, we all treasure treasures.

[ 37 : 05 ] Which will they be? We all have a vision of reality. Is it clear? And we all serve some sort of God. Is it the living God or is it some sort of mammon?

The answer's not hard to find. Just ask our kids to tell us what our lives are marked by. Either great anxiety or a passion for the kingdom and righteousness of God.

Lord Jesus, you're going to have to help us. I thank you that you only speak your hard word in order to arrest us and set us free.

Jesus, I pray that you would help us see the Father the way you see him so that we indeed can follow you in banking everything on him and knowing the security that comes from having it all in the hands of the good Father.  
In your mercy and grace, will you do that for us? Amen. Amen.