

# Anxiety Some Causes and Cures - Part 1

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[ 0 : 00 ] Know My Heart. The song the choir sang, composed in 2007, is inspired by a song sung hundreds of years before Jesus came into the world.

The ancient song that inspired this contemporary song is Psalm 139. Psalm 139 is at once a declaration of what God has already done and a prayer that God do an even deeper work. The affirmation, O Lord, you have searched me and known me. The prayer, search me, O God, and know my heart. You know my heart, so here's my heart.

Search me and know my heart. Try me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any way of pain in me and lead me in the way everlasting.

As we continue following Jesus into his Sermon on the Mount, we come to a section in which he answers that prayer. He can answer the prayer because he knows my heart.

[ 1 : 12 ] The preacher on the Mount knows my heart. The preacher on the Mount knows your heart. The preacher on the Mount knows the human heart better than anyone else, more intimately than anyone else.

And in the section of his sermon we are now going to read, he tells us things about our hearts we would have never figured out on our own. Here, the chief cardiologist, if you will, opens up mysteries of the human heart we would have never discovered by ourselves.

This is one of my favorite texts to preach for the simple reason that it is one of the texts I most need to hear.

Matthew chapter 6 verses 19 through 34. Kate, would you come and lead us in this reading? And as she does, if you are able, would you please stand in the presence of the crucified and risen creature?

On first reading, Matthew 6, 19 to 34, appears to be a series of loosely strung together wisdom sayings, much in the vein of the book of Proverbs.

[ 2 : 38 ] On first reading, it appears that Jesus speaks about treasures, and then goes on to vision, and then goes on to masters, then raises the issue of anxiety, then talks about looking at birds and considering the flowers of the field, and then about seeking first the kingdom and righteousness of God.

On first reading, there does not seem to be any inherent connection between treasures, vision, masters, worry, birds, flowers, kingdom, and righteousness of God.

But when you read this text over and over again, you soon discover that it is all carefully crafted around one main point.

The whole text is making one main point. Let me show you what I mean. In his teachings on treasure, vision, and master, Jesus is working with three intertwined movements of the human heart.

I thought about using the term law, that Jesus is working with three deeply intertwined laws of the human heart. By law, I would not mean something imposed on us from the outside, but rather something inherent to the human heart.

[ 4 : 07 ] But because this word law is so quickly associated with legalism, I chose the word movement. Jesus is working with three subterranean movements of the human heart.

Movements which we would have never understood if Jesus had not revealed them to us. Three movements of the heart that have intense practical implications for every moment of every day.

In Matthew 6, 19-34, Jesus brings these three movements of the heart around one main point.

It is this. The sign that we are not paying attention to these movements of the heart is anxiety.

The sign that we are not making wise decisions relative to these three movements of the human heart is anxiety.

[ 5 : 19 ] Worry. That uneasiness, apprehension, distress that manifests itself in restlessness and uptightness, and a loss of perspective and sometimes even fear.

A condition that can choke the vitality out of our lives. In this text, Jesus, the smartest person who ever lived, is telling us that worry is a symptom.

It's the dominant symptom of making unwise choices relative to these three movements of the human heart.

Now, where do we discover this one main point? In verse 25. In the therefore of verse 25.

Therefore, I say to you, do not worry about your life.

Literally. Therefore, I say to you, stop worrying about your life. You have heard me say, quoting what other biblical teachers often tell us to do, whenever you come across the word therefore in a text, you are supposed to ask what the therefore is there for.

[ 6 : 34 ] So, Matthew 6.25. Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life. The therefore is therefore to point us back to what proceeds.

The therefore is therefore to point us back to treasures, vision, and masters. And Jesus is telling us that anxiety, worry, is rooted in unwise decisions we are making relative to treasures, vision, and masters.

And he's telling us that freedom from constant worry will come by making wise decisions relative to those movements. So, let's go back and listen to Jesus again from this framework.

Three fundamental movements of the heart. Before we do, just a word about the kind of anxiety to which Jesus is speaking in his sermon. He's not addressing that clinical condition known as anxiety disorder.

I don't think he's addressing here that anxiety that is rooted in traumatic experiences in our childhood or our adulthood. He's not speaking to post-traumatic stress disorder.

[ 7 : 55 ] Jesus does bring healing for that kind of anxiety. And what he says in this text can bring a measure of freedom. But the kind of worry Jesus is speaking about in Matthew 6 is this low-grade anxiety that marks this moment of history.

Especially in this part of the world. Such anxiety, Jesus says, is rooted in unwise decisions we are making relative to these movements of the human heart.

Okay. Movement 1. It's in verses 19 to 21. Movement 1. Every human being is a treasurer. An investor.

Every human being. Every single one of us. Consciously or unconsciously. Is looking for and investing in some sort of security against the uncertainties of the future.

Tell me about it, Jesus. Jesus literally says, do not treasure treasures on earth, but treasure treasures in heaven.

[ 9 : 10 ] So, movement 1. We all treasure treasures. Now, notice that Jesus does not criticize us for doing so.

He does not tell us not to do this. Investing in securities against the uncertainty of the future is not a sin.

It's constitutive of our humanity in a real world. Furthermore, notice that Jesus does not say, do not treasure treasures for yourselves. He does not say, do not treasure treasures for yourselves.

Some readers of the text focus on the little word, the phrase for yourselves, and say that what Jesus is talking about is that we are selfish. He's addressing selfishness. But notice, the little phrase for yourselves is with both clauses.

Treasures on earth and treasures in heaven. He expects us to treasure treasures for ourselves. The issue is where? In what bank?

[ 10 : 15 ] May I put it this way? Jesus is not saying that our problem is that we are selfish. He's saying that our problem is that we are foolish.

More, Jesus is not saying that we are too selfish. Jesus is saying that most of us are not selfish enough. It is an inherent movement of the heart to treasure treasures.

Treasure treasures for yourselves, the Lord of Life says. Just be wise. Put them in the right bank. Then Jesus tells us what we would have never discovered.

Our hearts follow our treasures. Our hearts follow our investments. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Note the order. I wish it were, I wish it was true of us, that our hearts follow our treasures. No, it's the opposite. I did it wrong, didn't I?

[ 11 : 29 ] I wish he had said, treasures follow our hearts. That's what I meant to say. I wish he had said that treasures follow the heart. But they don't. The heart follows the treasure. Eugene Peterson in the message renders Jesus' words this way.

The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be and end up being. Our hearts follow our treasures.

Now, as you know, in the Bible, the word heart does not only refer to the organ that pumps our blood. In the Bible, heart refers to the control center of our lives.

The heart is the seat not only of the emotion, but of the will. The heart is the place where we gather all the data of life, and then assess it, and then make the great decisions of our life.

And Jesus is telling us that the control center of our lives follows our treasures. So which will it be?

[ 12 : 33 ] Treasure treasures for ourselves on earth, or treasure treasures for ourselves in heaven? On earth and in heaven do not necessarily refer only to a place, but to the kind of treasures.

On earth means the things of earth, the things of human-made society, the things of human society organizing itself without God. In heaven means the things of heaven, the things of the kingdom of heaven, the things of the living God, the things of the kingdom of heaven on earth.

I think you can see then that what Jesus is addressing is the issue of durability. Jesus is making explicit what we all implicitly know, but seldom allow ourselves to face.

Namely, that all of the treasures of the things of earth are profoundly insecure. It was supposed to be a ship that could not sink.

Do not treasure treasures for yourselves on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. Thieves like Bernard Madoff or other unnamed financial wizards who are stealing our investments.

[ 13 : 54 ] Here Jesus is helping us be realistic. All the treasures of earth, however good, are subject to some kind of corrosion.

My friend Dale Bruner puts it this way. The moth represents nature's corrosion. Rust represents time's corrosion. And the thief represents humanity's corrosion eating away.

I think I've asked the next question on other occasions, but I think it's worth asking again at this time. Have you ever noticed that the more we have of what we think will make us secure, the more we are constrained to protect it?

Why is that? We buy all of this stuff that is supposed to make us feel secure against the future, and then we buy all this expensive security system to protect what's supposed to keep us secure.

Why do we do that? Because our hearts implicitly know what they will not admit. That all of the securities of earth are insecure against time's corrosion, nature's corrosion, and humanity's corrosion.

[ 15 : 21 ] Jesus is telling us investors, there's only one safe investment. The things of heaven, the things of the living God, which cannot be taken away by moth, or rust, or thieves, or by flood, or fire, or earthquake, or revolution, or financial collapse, or even death.

Movement one. Movement two. It's in verses 22 to 23. Movement two. Every human being has a vision of reality.

Every one of us looks out at life from a frame of reference. Every one of us has these deeply held presuppositions about the nature of reality. We may not be able to name those presuppositions, but they are there.

They're reflected in the way we treat people, the way we spend time, and the way we spend our money. Or, to put it more simply, as I have many times, every single one of us wears a set of glasses. These glasses were given to us by our family, by our childhood experiences, by the books we read, by the experiences we've had, by the movies we have seen.

Now, here, Jesus is going to tell us something that we would have not discovered on our own.

Jesus tells us that these pairs of glasses, these visions of reality, affect the whole of our lives.

[ 16 : 41 ] The eye is the lamp of the body, says Jesus. If the eye is good, this word good means sound, or clear, or single. If the eye is single, then the whole body will be full of light.

But if the eye is bad, if it's not sound, if it's not single, then the body will be full of darkness. Now, although Jesus' words are literally true, what we let into our physical eye affects our physical body. Jesus here is speaking metaphorically. What we let into the eye of our heart. What we fix the eye of our heart on. What we allow to influence and occupy the control center of our lives is going to determine everything else about us.

We become like that upon which we focus our vision. We become like that upon which we focus our vision.

Either we focus on the light of the world and are full of light. Or we focus on the things that are not in sync with the light.

[17:57] And we're full of darkness. And as every one of us can testify, it is hard to feel secure in the darkness. Movement 3, verse 24.

Every human being serves some sort of master. Every human being serves some sort of God. Maybe you've heard the phrase, someone once said, that the human species is incurably religious. Look at the opening decade of the 21st century. Incurably religious. Folk singer Bob Dylan wrote a song that hauntingly sings this third movement of the human heart.

It's entitled, Gotta Serve Somebody. You might recognize it. He got a Grammy Award for it. You may be the ambassador to England or to France.

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.

[19:07] Yes, indeed, you're going to serve somebody. You may be a construction worker working on a home. You may be living in a mansion. You might live in a dome. You might own guns. You might even own tanks.

You may be somebody's landlord. You may own banks. But you're going to serve somebody. Yes, indeed, you're going to serve somebody. You may be a preacher with your spiritual pride. You may be a council, city councilman, taking brides on the side.

You may be working in a barbershop. You may know how to cut hair. You may be somebody's mistress. You may be somebody's heir. But you're going to serve somebody. Yes, indeed, you're going to serve somebody. Birds fly in the air.

Fish swim in the sea. And human beings serve some sort of master. Some sort of God. Every single one of us.

Now, here is what we would have never figured out on our own. Jesus says, no one can serve two masters. Two gods. You cannot serve God and mammon.

[20:13] Notice the word cannot. Jesus does not say you should not serve two masters. Jesus does not say you must not serve two masters.

He says you cannot. He's telling us that it is impossible to do. Now, this is brought out in the word that he uses.

The word master. Master. Not employers. But masters. Because we can serve one, two, three employers at the same time. But we can only serve one master.

We can only be slave of one master at a time. Single ownership and full-time service is of the essence of slavery, says one New Testament scholar. Or, as God puts it in the first of the Ten Commandments, I am Yahweh your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall have no other God between us. The implication being that we can only have one God at a time.

[21:16] Either the true and living God or another God that we bring that ends up between us and the true and living God. You cannot serve two masters. You cannot serve God and mammon.

We try more than we dare to admit. But it does not work, says Jesus, because it cannot work. Mammon. I understand why this word is often translated money.

And that's in the version we read today. That's because most of the Bibles that we have are translated in the part of the world where mammon is in fact money. Hugely so.

It's a master. It takes up huge amounts of our time. And it takes up huge spaces in our brains. I've been working on the taxes the last weeks.

And discover again. See if you have this experience as you're working through your taxes. This money is not neutral. It's not an inanimate object.

[22:23] It takes on a life of its own. It becomes a God. A real spiritual God. And the more we have it.

The greater the potential that it will have us. That we will be it certain. So I understand why many render the word mammon as money.

But mammon does not refer only to money. The word mammon is derived from the word aman. A-M-O-N. Aman is related to the word amen.

Now, aman means that in which we trust. Amen means you can trust this. When Jesus ends the saying, saying, amen, amen.

He's saying, you can trust this. You can trust this. Aman, that in which we trust. So mammon is anything or anyone other than the living God in which and in whom we put our trust.

[ 23 : 29 ] Or more specifically, mammon is anyone or anything in which or in whom we think we have hope for the future.

Now, for some, mammon is money. For others, mammon is marriage. For others, it's children or grandchildren.

Which is the great temptation when you become a grandfather. Or mammon is career. Or ministry. Or giftedness. Or personality. On and on it goes.

Now, most mammons are in and of themselves good. In fact, most of them that I can list are very good. They have to be good.

Or at least appear to be good. Or we would not put our trust in them. So Jesus is not judging or condemning the mammons we could name. Indeed, he himself has given some of them to us.

[ 24 : 34 ] Spouses, homes, careers, jobs. It's just that he's telling us something about our hearts that we would have never figured out on our own. It is impossible to serve.

It is impossible to give total allegiance to the living God and one of these other mammons at the same time. I've been struggling all week to figure out how to make this as clear as possible.

So think about it this way. Think about our hearts as a circle. A circle has only one center. A circle cannot have two, three, four centers.

A circle can be full, all kinds of other wonderful things. But it can only have one center. And so too are hearts.

Jesus is telling us that our hearts can only have one center. Only one central devotion. Our hearts can then love many other people and many other things.

[ 25 : 36 ] But our hearts can only have one all-encompassing allegiance. I think you can see that Jesus is paying us a great compliment here.

He's telling us that we are the creatures who were created in such a way that the only center that works for us is the living God. We are such grand creatures that the only way the circle works is if the center is the crucified and risen Savior.

He's telling us that every other candidate for the center of our lives is beneath our dignity. I think you can also tell that Jesus is telling us that all of us are always on the verge of idolatry.

Shifting the center to an idol. Idols, you know, are not made just of wood and stone and gold and silver. They're made of values and systems and ideologies.

Most idols in our lives are not visible. Which makes it so hard. So I find that I periodically have to sit myself down and ask myself a number of questions.

[ 27 : 01 ] And these questions I call mammon detectors. Or idle sniffers. Five searching questions that I pass on to you. Question one.

What gives me a sense of security? When I look at a turbulent world and an uncertain future, what is it that gives me a sense of security?

Anything other than Jesus Christ is a potential mammon or idol. Question two.

What is my greatest delight? What brings me greatest joy? Any other answer than Jesus Christ is a potential mammon or idol.

That is not to say, it is not to say that we are not to find joy in other things and in other people.

Hardly. For again, many of these things and many of these people were given to us by God.

[ 28 : 05 ] It's just that those other things and those other people cannot finally satisfy our hearts. And if we put those other things at the center.

If we put those other people at the center of our lives. We will try to squeeze out of them what they cannot deliver. We can't do that to one another.

We can't do that to a spouse. Or a child. Or a grandchild. Or a pension fund. Because it cannot deliver. What you're looking for.

No one but the living God can bear the human quest for joy. Don't put that on other people.

Question three.

What do I fear? Fear is always a good clue to an idol. Primitive peoples would project their fears and make them into gods.

[ 29 : 12 ] What do you fear? Follow that fear all the way down. It will lead to a potential idol or mammon. It's because we've given this thing or this person too much authority.

That's all we do when we fear something. We put it at the center. Question four. Where do I resist the word of God?

What sections of the Bible will I not read? What themes of the Bible will I avoid? What I resist in scripture just may lead me to a potential idol or mammon that I feel threatened by in the book. And then a fifth question, which is really a sensitive question. So I wish I could sit down and just do this with each of you one at a time. What is it? Which if God took it away, I would walk away. What is it in my life? Which if God took it away, I would say, forget you.

[ 30 : 19 ] Okay. Three movements of the heart all intertwined. Now, does Jesus bring them up in the order he does to make a point?

Treasures, vision, master? I think so. Treasure, vision, master. The decisions we make about treasure come out of our vision. And our vision emerges out of the God we serve.

Now, we all know that we can easily deceive ourselves, right? We can think we're treasuring treasures in heaven, but actually be treasuring treasures in earth. We can think that we're seeing clearly, but actually we're missing the really real.

We can think that we are centered in God, in Jesus, but actually centered in some other kind of man. So how can we know which it is? Well, the main point of Matthew 6, 19 to 34.

The decisions we make relative to these movements of the heart set up certain states of being. And these states of being then foster particular preoccupations of heart.

[ 31 : 35 ] The state of being that results from treasury treasures on earth and from focusing on other than the living God at the center and serving some sort of mammon, the state of being is anxiety.

We are worrying because we have tethered ourselves to treasures which our hearts implicitly know are insecure.

We are worrying because our vision is clouded by lesser and false gods, and so we can't see the rock of ages right there in the middle of time.

Our vision doesn't see this one who holds all things together. We are worrying because the mammon we are serving is unstable, and our hearts know it.

Every form of mammon is unstable, no matter how good, no matter how strong. It's not good enough, and it's not strong enough to take away the fear of the future.

[ 32 : 39 ] And so, our state of being is marked by anxiety. And our preoccupation of heart is with what people call the world's trinity.

What will I eat? What will I drink? What will I wear? If, however, our hearts are tethered to heavenly treasure, treasures which cannot be destroyed by nature's times and humanity's corrosion, if our focus is on the eternal one in the midst of time, if the focus is on the one who holds all things together, if we are centered in the true and living God, banking it all on his goodness and faithfulness, then our state of being will be peace.

And we find ourselves breathing. And our hearts are preoccupied with the only things that finally stand, namely, the kingdom and righteousness of God.

And we do not worry, because our hearts know that nothing can overcome this God. Nothing can take us out of his hand.

The center holds. Jesus commands my destiny. Now, as you can see in the text, Jesus has some more to say to us, which we'll listen to next week.

[ 34 : 18 ] At the beginning of the service, we sang the line, prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to lead the God I love.

Here's my heart. Oh, take and seal it. Seal it for that courts above. Prone to wander. And therefore, prone to worry.

Here, Jesus. Here's my heart. Heal it.