

Do Not Be Anxious

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 July 2024

Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 0 0] Please turn with me to Luke chapter 12. Luke chapter 12, this is page 871.

Now, I freely admit to making a mistake today in that I was supposed to preach from Luke chapter 12 verses 13 to 21, but I have prepared a sermon for Luke chapter 12 verses 22 through 34.

So, next time I'm preaching, it'll be back in Luke chapter 12 verses 13 to 21, but today we're going to be looking at Luke chapter 12 from verse 22 to 34.

So, none of the overheads will work, Sophia. My fault, but I honestly don't believe God ever makes a mistake. So, there's probably someone here today who really needs to hear this message.

Luke 12 verses 22 through 34. And he said to his disciples, Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, not about your body, what you will put on.

[1 : 1 7] For life is more than food and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens. They neither sow nor reap. They have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them.

Of how much more value are you than the birds? And which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to the span of his life? If then you're not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?

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

But if God so clothes the grass which is alive in the field today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you little faith? And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried.

For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

[2 : 1 8] Fear not, little flock. It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the needy.

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

Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory our supreme concern, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. Anxiety is a fact of life in today's world. It is estimated that one out of every six people in England in any given week will report struggling with either depression or anxiety.

And that translates to 25 people here in Crow Road on any given Sunday. Struggling with depression, anxiety, or both.

[3 : 3 4] Now, no one's sure why anxiety is such an issue today, but it would seem that it was probably underreported in the past. We didn't talk of someone having a depression or anxiety.

We just said about them they had nerves or they were highly strung. But anxiety has always been an issue. Imagine you were a Christian in the first century.

You faced persecution from the Romans, exclusion from your community on account of your faith, and economic hardship because you were a Christian. The early Christians had every reason to be anxious, which is why Jesus addresses this subject in Luke chapter 12, verses 22 through 34.

In this passage, Jesus is speaking not to the crowds, but to his disciples. And through them, he's speaking to us today and saying, therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life.

Do not be anxious. Now, before we get into the meat of this passage, I want to take a minute to define our terms. The word used for anxiety can also be translated as concern and is often used in a positive sense in the New Testament.

[4 : 55] For example, in Philippians 2, the apostle Paul commends Timothy's love for the Christians in Philippi. He says, I have no one else like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.

We must be very careful not to read modern medical diagnoses into biblical texts. The reason I'm saying this is because Jesus' prohibition on anxiety can be problematic for those who struggle with clinical anxiety or depression.

We feel guilty for being anxious, thinking that somehow we must be sinning. And this guilt causes more anxiety, and so the cycle spirals downward.

For those of us who do not struggle with anxiety, we must be very sympathetic towards others who do. For those of us who do struggle with anxiety, we must also be sympathetic to ourselves, recognizing that sometimes having anxiety is just a function of living in a fallen world and maybe the result more of imbalanced chemicals than personal sin.

Well, we can't blame an ex-soldier for having PTSD after all he has seen and after all he has done. There are many, many reasons for anxiety, and Jesus in this passage is focusing on just one.

[6 : 23] He begins this passage, you'll see in verse 22, with the word, therefore. And this word, therefore, draws us back to the previous passage, which is dominated by the phrase, one's life does not consist in the abundance of one's possessions.

One's life does not consist in the abundance of one's possession. Luke 12, 15. Jesus tells the parable of the rich fool, we'll look at that in two weeks' time, we should have been looking at it today, who, without reference to God, concentrates all his energies in life on trying to build a secure future for himself, but who dies before he can enjoy any of it.

Immediately after that parable, Jesus says, therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, what you will, about your body, what you'll put on. If there are many types of anxiety, the type against which Jesus is speaking here is anxiety about God's ability to provide for us either now or in the future.

Anxiety about God's ability to provide for us either now or in the future. Remember, Christians in the early years had many reasons to be anxious in this regard.

They were, after all, the particular targets of persecution on account of their faith. Just like in verses 11 and 12, we saw this last week, Jesus calls his people not to be anxious about how to defend themselves when they're brought up in front of the authorities to give account of their faith.

[8 : 06] Now in our passage, he's calling them not to be anxious about their physical, economic, and social well-being. Just as God will give them the words to say to their persecutors in verse 12, so he will care for all their needs.

There is no need to be anxious about our lives. In this passage, Jesus is challenging us, do not be anxious about God's provision.

He is your Father. He loves you and cares for all your physical, social, and economic needs. If today, we are anxious about whether God can look after us, Jesus is speaking directly to us.

None of us are being persecuted in the same way as the early Christians were, and yet whatever the shape and contours of our anxiety, God cares and will provide for us.

Are we single and anxious about finding a partner? Are we unemployed and anxious about making ends meet? Are we anxious about the future of the church?

[9 : 20] As Jesus will say in verse 32, fear not, little flock. With respect to all these things we worry about, in verse 30, Jesus says, your Father knows you need them.

Jesus is not referring to clinical anxiety, but to the anxiety we feel over God's provision today and in the future. And if this is our particular form of anxiety today, let's not view it as an obstacle to living life to the full, but as an opportunity to grow in our faith in Christ.

Now, these are very difficult words to swallow. This sermon took me three months to write, real thinking and researching. But when we're anxious about whether God can provide for us, it gives us a new opportunity to learn how to trust in our Father and experience His grace.

Well, in our passage, we want to view anxiety in three ways. Anxiety is an opportunity to consider, first of all, in verses 22 through 28, to consider.

Then it's an opportunity to seek, verses 29 through 31. And then it's an opportunity to focus, in verses 32 through 34.

[10 : 45] You know, the teaching of Jesus can be piercingly direct. His message is that beleaguered and anxious disciples can find in Him all they need for all their todays and all their tomorrows.

So, first of all then, from verse 22 to 28, anxiety is an opportunity to consider, to consider.

Our passage begins with Jesus speaking to His disciples and saying, therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you'll eat, not about your body, what you'll put on, for life is more than food and the body more than clothing.

Now, these are things we pray for every time we take the Lord's Prayer on our lips, give us this day our daily bread. But these are the things we worry about. We might need them, but we don't need to worry about them, both because our Heavenly Father will feed and clothe us, and that our lives consist in more than is merely physical.

If we're worrying about these things today, then Jesus is presenting us with an opportunity to consider. Consider. Both in verses 24 and 27.

[12 : 00] Consider the ravens. Consider the lilies. The word translated as consider means contemplate. It's more than just seeing with our eyes, but on reflecting with our minds the lessons from what we can see from our eyes.

Jesus isn't just saying look carefully, he's saying think deeply. Anxiety gives us an opportunity to learn spiritual lessons from what our eyes can see.

So in verse 24, consider the ravens. They neither sow nor reap. They have neither storehouse nor barn, yet God feeds them. Ravens were unclean animals in the Israel of Jesus' day.

They're unlike the foolish man who we should have looked at today, who stores his harvest in great barns, yet God feeds the ravens. I've seen ravens at the top of Monroe's and wondered, with the exception of scraps hill walkers leave behind them, what did the ravens eat?

Ravens were the least of the birds in Jesus' day, and yet Jesus says, God feeds them. From what our eyes can see here, Jesus asks three rhetorical questions.

[13 : 20] Of how much more value are you than the birds, he asks. Answer, of immeasurably more value. If we are worth more than the birds, even the ugliest of which God cares for and feeds, he will more carefully, far more carefully, attend to our needs and provide for us.

Second is this. Which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to his span of life? Medics tell us that excessive anxiety shortens life, that gives us ulcers, increases our chances of a vascular event.

The birds live for as long as God gives them. Being anxious does not add to the quantity or quality of our lives. The length of our days is in the hands of the God who cares for us immeasurably more than he does for an ugly raven.

The third is, if you're not able to do such a small thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? God cares for us immeasurably more than he does for the birds and by worrying we can't increase the quantity or quality of our lives.

So why are we anxious about everything else? The point is this, the God who loves us is in sovereign control of every aspect of our lives.

[14 : 40] He is carefully providing for us, so why worry about everything else? Our times and needs are in his hands. And then in verse 27, Jesus calls us again to consider this time the flowers of the field, such beautiful flowers.

In my mother-in-law's back garden, there's a plant she calls lambslugs. These two have seen it. It's got leathery leaves. It's really very ugly.

So I took a cutting of this plant because I like ugly things and planted it in my garden. This summer, the lambslugs flowered. The flowers of the lambslug are deep pink, delicate and small, but so very beautiful.

I've since discovered that the plant my mother-in-law disparagingly calls lambslugs is actually called rose campion. It might not be the most attractive plant, but the flower is bright, fragile, and beautifully symmetrical.

Walk through a summer meadow. Open your eyes and see the beauty of the flowers produced by all the grasses of the plants. There is a greater splendor in a summer meadow than in all the palaces of the world.

[16 : 02] Yes, not even King Solomon in all his finery was not, he wasn't clothed like one of these flowers. So beautiful. Now, these grasses and plants, they're not working at industrial looms, spinning prettier flowers.

God clothes them with the most fabulous beauty. And Jesus says to us, if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into a fire, how much more will he clothe you, oh, you little faith?

We live for so much longer than the grass. We're of so much worth to God. Do we not think that God will provide for our needs, our clothing, what we will wear?

Open your eyes, Jesus is telling us. Look at the world around you. Draw spiritual lessons from how God provides for his creatures. Psychologists tell us that a walk in nature calms a sufferer from anxiety.

For the Christian, in the light of Jesus' teaching here, we can see why. It's not just what our eyes see, but the way in which we process that information in our minds.

[17 : 16] If God cares so much for what we can see, God provides for all that we can see, and God bedecks with beauty even the most fleeting of creatures, a blade of grass, there's no need to be anxious about his provision for us today or tomorrow or the next day.

Anxiety may even give way to joy as God gives us a new opportunity to consider. Second, anxiety is an opportunity to seek, verses 29 through 31.

An opportunity to seek. These verses are dominated by the word seek, verses 29 through 31. That word can also be translated as, I like this translation, to devote serious effort to realize one's desire or objective.

To devote serious effort to realizing one's desire or objective. It's about the objectives we set for ourselves in life and the desires we want to satisfy.

Jesus says, don't make what you will eat your ultimate objective and don't make what you will wear your ultimate desire in life. That's what the rich fool did in the previous passage.

[18 : 38] His whole life consisted in pursuing the delights of eating, drinking, and making merry. Jesus is probing our hearts.

Matthias, would you mind getting me some more water, please? Sorry about this. Thanks. What are your primary desires and objectives in life?

What are they? As he'll go on to say in verse 34, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. If our lives and self-worth are wrapped up in eating, drinking, and making merry in the temporary needs and pleasures of this world, we will always be anxious.

Thank you. Because we'll never have enough. We'll never have enough. The pursuit of these things, as Jesus says in verse 30, characterizes the nations of the world.

That's what everyone does in our society. Their highest needs and deepest objectives are found in the pursuit of the needs and pleasures of this temporary and fleeting world.

[19 : 47] But we as disciples of Jesus are different for no other reason than this. We have a heavenly Father who knows we need all these things. Listen, without being disrespectful, Prince Louis, son of William and Kate, doesn't worry about where this next meal is going to come from.

His parents, after all, are royal and rich. Our Father is even richer and He'll provide for us. There's no need for us to make the pursuit of our needs and pleasures the ultimate objectives and desires of our lives.

Instead, verse 31, the first word, look at it. Instead, Jesus says, this is the strongest word He could possibly have used to express contrast.

White instead of black. Light instead of darkness. Seeking after the kingdom of God instead of our needs and pleasures. They are opposite positions. One cannot do both.

One does either one or the other. You cannot have as your highest desire and objective both the needs and pleasures of this world and the kingdom of God at the same time.

[20 : 59] It's either one or the other but not both. Many Christians in the West have syncretized these two positions and tried to make them fit in with one another but they can't, they won't fit.

You cannot have two ultimate objectives and desires in life. You can have only one. Which of the two are you ultimately seeking? Which objective and desire comes first such that if you did not have the other it wouldn't really matter?

For the vast majority of people in our society they've chosen to meet their needs and pleasures rather than have anything to do with God. But for us as Christians we'd rather have God and go hungry and naked instead.

After all we know believe and have experienced for ourselves what the hymn says. I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold.

I'd rather have him than riches untold. Let's not pretend we can mix these two positions. We can't. What comes first? We've made syncretism respectable in our Christian piety but what must come first for the disciple of Jesus is the kingdom of God.

[22 : 15] And if that means for the sake of Christ and his church we can't we don't have enough money to do all we could do in this world. We don't have as big a house as we could have. We can't go on such fancy holidays as we'd like.

So be it. because we'd rather have Jesus and his kingdom. Anxiety about God's provision is an opportunity to reassess what our highest priorities in life really are.

are we devoting too much effort to realizing the wrong desires and objectives in life or are our highest priorities wrapped up in Christ and his kingdom instead?

anxiety is an opportunity anxiety about God's provision rather is an opportunity for us to realize as someone once said that Jesus is all we need when Jesus is all we have.

Jesus is all we need when Jesus is all we have. When our minds are working against us we fall back on Jesus and we find in him the certainty and the satisfaction we've always needed desired and craved.

[23 : 34] Anxiety is a new opportunity to pursue God and his kingdom. Well lastly from verses 32 through 34 anxiety is an opportunity to focus.

anxiety and depression are strange creatures. If you want to know more ask Paul because he is a psychotherapist after all and he knows far more about this than I do. Often caused by caring more for others than for oneself it leads to a person turning almost entirely in upon himself and being almost wholly consumed with himself.

It curves a person in upon himself so that the focus becomes the self. It becomes almost impossible for a sufferer to change an inward focus.

But with God nothing is impossible. God's spirit working through God's word and God's people changes the focus of an anxious man whose life is consumed with the temporary needs and pleasures of this world or lack thereof.

in this last section from verse 32 through 34 we see how anxiety is an opportunity to refocus our attention in the first instance to gain a new focus on God to gain a new focus on others and to gain a new focus on heaven.

[25 : 04] Anxious strugglers today of whom I'm pretty sure there are many among us let's not waste our anxiety but let's use it to refocus on these three things and you focus on God first of all.

Behind the type of anxiety Jesus is addressing lies the fear that God will not provide for our needs. We've forgotten what Jesus tells us in verse 31 that the God in whom we trust is our Father verse 30 rather the God in whom we trust is our Father and He delights to give us the kingdom.

Sorry, verse 32. The important words in verse 32 are Father and give. Father and give. When we're caught up in a vicious cycle of fear and anxiety Jesus breaks it by reminding us to focus on the generous fatherhood of God.

The Father who delights in giving to His children the fullness of His kingdom blessings. Anxiety is a new opportunity to focus on God as the generous Father.

All that anxious busyness has achieved is fear, guilt, and anxiety. It hasn't added one single hour to our lives. Anxiety presents us with a new opportunity to rest in the fatherhood of our lavishly generous God.

[26 : 31] Again, to go back to Prince Louis, he doesn't fear for his next meal because he knows that his royally rich and exceedingly loving parents will provide it for him.

In an even greater way, our heavenly Father is richer than William and Kate and loves us far more. How much more will he as a father provide for us?

Anxiety is a new opportunity to rest in the fatherhood of our lavishly generous God. Anxiety gives us an opportunity, secondly, to have a new focus on others.

A new focus on others. One of the very unfortunate symptoms of anxiety is that it causes us to turn in upon ourselves and become horribly self-centered.

It's not what the sufferer wants to be, but it's how it is. In verse 33, Jesus challenges our self-centeredness by calling us to turn our backs on ourselves and to begin to engage with the needs of others.

[27 : 38] For however needy we might think we are, there are always others worse off than us. So Jesus says, sell your possessions and give to the needy. Psychologists tell us that getting out into nature relieves anxiety, but they also tell us that getting out of ourselves and giving to others also relieves anxiety.

Jesus told us the same thing only 2,000 years earlier. When we're tempted to curve in upon ourselves, let's force ourselves upright and outward to focus on the needs of others.

There are always grieving people we can comfort. There are always lonely people we can befriend. There are always broken people we can listen to.

Rather than be self-centered, Jesus is telling us anxiety is a new opportunity to focus on the needs of others, just like God has focused on our needs by sending Jesus to die for us.

And then lastly, anxiety gives us an opportunity to focus on heaven, to focus on heaven. in verse 33, Jesus contrasts the pleasures and possessions of what we now have with the pursuit of what he calls a treasure in the heavens.

[29 : 01] For the Christian, life is about so much more than what we have here on earth. In heaven, the things we have destroyed our lives worrying about here and now, they'll mean nothing.

Time doesn't permit us to go more fully into this. We'll get there in future studies in Luke's gospel. But anxiety gives us an opportunity to focus on the heaven in which there will be nothing to worry about.

Nothing to worry about. But also, looking back from the perspective of heaven, we'll realize that all the things we've fretted about here and now were really of very little consequence in the light of God's supreme glory.

As we close, we do so with the words of Jesus in our ears, challenging our anxious thoughts and giving us a fresh opportunity to reprioritize. He says, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Where's your heart today? On what is the central, motivating, controlling center of your life and being fixated? What do you value most?

[30 : 22] Is it the things of this passing and fleeting world, its comfort, its pleasures, its satisfactions, or is it Jesus Christ and His kingdom? A kingdom, yes, which promises suffering here and now, but promises glory hereafter.

It promises a deeper satisfaction than this world can give now. And it promises a greater pleasure than this world can promise hereafter. Where your treasure is there, your heart will be also.

Anxiety is an opportunity to challenge oneself and what one values the most in life. Although perhaps we wouldn't wish anxiety on our worst enemies, yet, yet, if at all, it brings us to our spiritual senses and forces us to put God first in our lives just as He put us first in His by sending His Son to die for us.

It may well be the greatest gift God can give us. Let us pray. Lord, we thank You that the Bible doesn't gloss over the painful experiences of our lives.

It doesn't just say, oh, don't be anxious. as if to say, okay then, I won't be. But not only do You give us instruction, graciously telling us what a loving Father You are to us, who will provide for all our needs, but You give us Your Holy Spirit who, as we listen to the Word and try and put it into practice in our lives, will progressively change us, taking our eyes away from self, fixing them on You and on others and on the heaven You promised for us.

[32 : 24] We pray today for any here among us who are struggling in particular from this mental health challenge. We ask, oh Father, that in some small way what's been said today would bring them closer to the Jesus who loves them and gave Himself for them.

To You as Father who graciously and love comprising for them. We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.■