

The Anxiety-Free Life

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[0 : 00] Gracious God, we pray that you would help us understand your word this morning and that you'd be at work in us in order that we might put our faith and our trust in you and in your son.

We pray this in Jesus name. Amen. Friends, I want to start today by thinking, getting you to think upon this assertion. My assertion is that we live our lives in this world full of fear and that fear is a driving force in our lives.

Let me explain what I mean. For a moment, I want you to think about the things you have done this week. Your work, your visiting of your family, your visiting of doctors, perhaps what you put in your stomach or didn't put in your stomach, what medication you might have taken, what you put in the bank or perhaps what you've taken out of the bank and how you felt when you did either, what you felt when you watched television or a movie.

Friends, so much of what we do, I think, springs from fear or is motivated by fear. Think about it for a moment. I think we fear losing safety and security. We fear losing control or being controlled by others.

We fear losing face. We fear financial, feeling helpless, financial insecurity, relational insecurity. We fear losing freedom or the means by which freedom can be maintained.

[1 : 27] Illness locks at our door. We find ourselves being concerned that it might be serious or that we or we hurt a relationship and we fear that there might be aloneness springing from that. Or we feel abandoned or the loss of the one we love or even death.

Friends, I think our lives are dominated by fear. I think there's nothing new. I think this has been true for most of human history. Fear causes many of our actions. Fear drives us to do what we do or to not do what we think is right even.

And living this way, let me say, diminishes us as people. It makes us lesser persons than we are and lesser persons than God wants us to be. However, the great news about our passage today is that we will find some help here.

You see, Jesus wants to tell us this morning that there's a far more powerful motivation in life than fear. You can find this in the Old Testament.

You can find it in the teaching of Jesus. You see, this motivation is not fear. It is much stronger, much more dominant, much more reliable. And let me show you. I want you to open your Bibles.

[2 : 33] My first example comes from the Old Testament. It is the last Psalm of David in the book of Psalms. It is my favorite Psalm. So you'll hear me coming back to it every now and then. Let me read to you bits of it.

We read it earlier on, but I would encourage you to have it open and follow with me. And as we read these bits of this Psalm, I want you to ask yourself what David thinks God is like.

What David thinks God is like. Here we go. Psalm 145. I will extol you, my God, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever.

Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised. And his greatness is unsearchable. Verse 8. The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love.

The Lord is good to all and his mercy is over all that he has made. The Lord upholds all who are falling and raises up those who are bowed down. This is verse 14. Verse 15.

[3 : 34] The eyes of all look to you and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. The Lord is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works.

The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth. He fulfills the desire of those who fear him. He also hears their cry and saves them. Friends, if this is a sort of character

assessment of God by David, and what do you think might be the dominant characteristics of God? Did you hear them? What is God like according to David? Well, David, I think, is very clear. This is what God is like. He is good. He is gracious. He satisfies the desire of every living thing. He is near to all who call upon him. He fulfills the desire of those who fear him. He hears their cry. He saves them. Now, let me tell you, in one half verse, in 22 verses, he also says that he punishes the wicked.

However, you can see from that country that his overwhelming disposition is to be generous, good, kind, and to hear the cry of his people and to save them.

[4 : 41] Friends, when you live before this God, you need not fear. He is there. He is available. He is rich in goodness and grace and love. That's the background I want you to bring to our Bible talk today.

This is God, rich in goodness, rich in grace, rich in love. Now, Jesus knew this background. He knew this God, his Father.

And we will look at this as we look at our passage today. And you'll hear it just reeking from the words that he says. But before we look at it, I want to remind you of what we saw last week. Perhaps you remember, Jesus was speaking about possessions and money. And he said, look, we shouldn't lay up for ourselves treasures on earth where moth and vermin destroy and where thieves break in and steal.

He said, where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. And he also said that we couldn't serve two masters. Now, friends, let me tell you that serving money is what you do if you live by fear.

[5 : 47] If you fear the future, you'll make money, your master, because you think it will give you security. And if you make money, your master, you're going to be disappointed.

But some of us can't let our fears go. We fear that if we trust God and don't fear money, we'll be left without, don't we? And that's why Jesus says these words in our passage.

That's why his first word in verse 25 is, Therefore, you see, he knows the fear that will arise out of the things that have just been said in the preceding verses. He wants to meet our fear.

He wants to assure us. So let's see what he's got to say. Now, first thing I want you to notice is that Jesus speaks to people who are fearful, worrying and anxious.

We know that because he used the word for worrying six times. So, you know, you distinctly get the message that this is who he's addressing. Look at verse 25. I tell you, do not worry. Verse 27.

[6 : 44] He asked, can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? And then verse 28. He asked people, and why do you worry? And verse 31.

He says, so don't worry. Verse 34. He says it again twice. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow. We'll worry about itself. Jesus knows how fearful humans are.

He knows that their lives often express their worry in anxiety and concern and so on. And so he tells them, don't be anxious.

Do not worry. But Jesus does more than this. Not only does he tell people not to worry, he also isolates, identifies the cause of their anxiety. Can you see it in the passage?

Have a look at it. In verse 25, they're worried about their life. That is about what they'll eat and drink. They're worried about food, the body, clothing, all the things that we human beings do worry about.

[7 : 43] Now look at verse 28. We hear about clothing again. But there's more. Look at verse 31.

They're worried about whether they'll have enough to eat or enough to drink or enough to wear. In other words, they're worried about the essentials of life.

And mind you, even if we have the essentials of life, we then get to worry about all the other things that are extras, don't we? Friends, they're worrying about things to put in their mouth and things to wear over their bodies.

And you can be sure if they're worried about those essentials, then they'll be worried about bigger things as well. That's just human nature. We worry. Friends, Jesus knows the fear people have.

They fear that following the teaching of Jesus will leave them bereft. They know that if they follow 19 to 24, they fear that they're going to be in trouble.

They'll lack things. And without those things, life will be under threat. Even the very basics of life will be under threat. And Jesus knows humans and he knows the people listening to him.

[8 : 44] And he knows the answer to their questions and he knows the answer to our questions.

Let's see how he answers them. What assurances can Jesus give us that if we love God and don't

love money, we'll still be okay?

That's the issue. So here are the answers of Jesus for anxious people. His first answer is to look out at the created order. After all, you see, the created order does tell us some things about God.

We hear that from Romans 1. As the Apostle Paul tells us, it testifies to God's eternal power and divine nature. So we can read some things from the created order.

It also, though, testifies to God's great compassion and providence. You see, it's clear, isn't it, that the birds are much lesser beings than the disciples of Jesus. And yet God cares for them.

He supplies them with what they need. He feeds them. He gives even birds the things that the disciples Jesus feared God will not give them. Friends, if we're disciples of Jesus, we don't need to live in fear.

[9 : 51] As Jesus says in verse 26, We, the disciples of Jesus, are God's beloved children. We are of much more value than birds of the air and they do all right. Being anxious won't help us.

It won't add a single hour to our span of life. In fact, my guess is, it's probably more likely to shorten our lives worrying than to lengthen it.

So there's the first argument from the created order that Jesus gives. But he has another. Look at verse 28. This time he speaks about the lilies of the field. Now, what he's probably talking about, when you think, when you hear of lilies, I often think, you know, of, you know, one stemmed plants with, you know, perhaps one flower and so on.

But he's probably talking about wild flowers. And when I think of wild flowers, I think of Western Australia. And probably it's a bit like that in Palestine. You know, lovely flowers just all over the place.

And they were abundant in Galilee. This time he doesn't speak about worrying, though. After all, you see, flowers don't worry, do they? At least not the ones I've seen.

[10 : 56] Instead, Jesus speaks of them not having to put in any effort. You see, they don't toil or spin. They are more abundantly clothed, though, than Solomon. If you've been to Western Australia in September, October, and you've seen them, it is just remarkable.

Because if you had been there, in fact, once we were travelling across from Perth to Central Australia, and on one direction we travelled, the rain hadn't fallen.

But on the other direction, it was only a week later, the rain had fallen. And the difference between the landscape was enormous. And if you've ever been to Western Australia and you've seen just the carpets upon carpet upon carpet of flowers, it is spectacular.

And they don't toil or spin. But let me tell you, they are more abundantly clothed than Solomon. They are richer in their attire than the wealthiest king of Israel ever had been.

And he had to work for it. Jesus has, you see, but look at verse 30. Jesus has just spoken about the wonderful wildflowers and their attire. But notice what he calls them in verse 30.

[12 : 03] He says they're grass of the field. The term grass of the field is standard biblical imagery. It refers to something worthless. Something that's thrown away, burnt up. You see, flowers may be glorious.

And again, if you've been to Western Australia, they will spring up. And then when the summer heat begins to come, they will burn up. And they will pass away. In the large scheme of things, though, beside the children of God, flowers are worthless.

They're something that will be consumed. And yet God, out in the middle there, which no, of Western Australia, for example, where no one often sees them, God lavishes care upon them and endows them with splendor and beauty that perhaps only he can see.

Though their end is destruction, he cares for them. Well, how much more will he care for humans and particularly his people?

Look at what that verse says again. Hear what Jesus says. Soak it in verse 30. Hear what Jesus is saying.

[13 : 21] He's saying that David had it right in Psalm 145. Both arguments confirm what David said. God is the gracious and kind creator and redeemer. He opens his hand and fills it with good things for his people.

God loves his people. And he gives good things to them. He's the kind, generous, benevolent father. And with a father like this, we should not be filled with fear, but with hope and confidence.

Friends, in our rearing of our children, I wanted our children to go through life knowing that their father and their mother were gracious and kind. So that throughout their life, they might keep

coming back to us.

Now, we didn't always do it well. But that's what God wants us to know. You see, if we know God, our father, to be gracious and kind, we'll keep coming back, won't we? We'll keep coming to him, keep asking him.

But look at what Jesus says in the second half of verse 30 again. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

[14 : 30] Can you hear the rebuke in Jesus? He rebukes fear, worry and anxiety and calls it lack of faith in his disciples, who think God is not like this. And I bet there are people here this morning who think God is not like this, that he's stingy and hard.

You see, Jesus says, if you have fear and worry about God and his love for you, you are people of little faith. So what is the alternative to fear?

How are the disciples of Jesus to respond? Jesus told us not to focus on things that perish, such as food and drink and clothing. But what should we focus on if we're not focusing on those things?

Well, we've seen part of the answer. We should focus on God who's generous and benevolent. But there's more. Look at verse 33. Jesus said, but, or if you like, so. In other words, he gives an alternative to being anxious.

Instead of retreating into fear and anxiety, disciples of Jesus are to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. You see, anxiety and worry and fear is to be replaced by a positive seeking of the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

[15 : 37] Now, we need to just pause for a moment and consider what Jesus is saying. You see, the term righteousness is very important in the Sermon on the Mount. It occurs five times. Let me show you. Flip back in your Bibles to chapter 5, verse 6.

This is the first time Jesus mentions righteousness in his sermon. He says, Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

There's a generous God. Now look at 5:10. Jesus says, Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Verse 20. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, you'll certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. Now, chapter 6, verse 1.

Jesus presses on and he talks about a false righteousness. It was a public righteousness that focused on being done before an audience of people and being seen by them. A public righteousness.

[16 : 36] A righteousness that was ours, not God's. A righteousness that isn't rewarded by God because its focus is on humans and not God. See it there? Verse 1. Be careful.

Not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. Because if you do so, you'll have no reward in heaven from your Father in heaven. And now, with all that background of righteousness, we get to verse 33.

And he speaks about a true righteousness. That is to characterize the disciples of Jesus. And it is linked with the pursuit of the kingdom. For Jesus says, But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Friends, Andrew Price explored what this meant a number of times ago as he preached through the earlier part of the sermon. And I think he's hit the nail on the head. The righteousness Jesus is talking about is total God-centeredness.

And love of others-centeredness. It is about people seeking that God is at the center of their lives. It's all about people hungering and thirsting that they may wholly do God's will from their hearts.

[17 : 48] It's about loving their neighbor as God loves them in Christ. It's about wanting God and his will to invade their lives and his world. Friends, it's that sort of God-centeredness that bursts from the Lord's Prayer in the earlier part of chapter 6.

Remember the Lord's Prayer? I mean, we say it very often here. But do you remember what's prayed for? God's honor, God's kingdom, God's glory. And you put those things up front. That's the things you pray for first.

You pray for his will. Oh, there are some prayers for our daily needs, for daily bread, and they're entirely right. But the focus of the Lord's Prayer is on God and his kingdom and his glory.

And even when you pray for forgiveness, righteousness surfaces. For you not only pray that God would forgive you, but you pray that you would forgive others. You pray that you will not be led into

temptation in the wiles of the evil one, for that would not bring glory to God.

Friends, seeking first God's kingdom and his righteousness is saying putting God first. It's about submitting first and foremost to God's will in every area of life. And that means not being like the pagans.

[18 : 59] For they put temporal things first. They put themselves first. The Christian does not. The Christian puts eternal things of God first. And they pursue the focus of the Lord's Prayer.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done. On earth as it is in heaven.

Friends, listen to Jesus. Don't be focused on the things of this world. They are temporal.

Unpredictable. They'll be taken away with you. I know.

I bury lots of people. And they can't take anything with them. It's either burnt or it rots. They can't take those physical things with them.

The focus of our being is to be on God. Those things are eternal, predictable, can never be taken away. There's a great glory in burying someone who has loved God all their life. Because when I bury them, I know that the things they are before God will last into eternity.

[20 : 10] And though their bodies should rot in the grave or be consumed by the flame, those things will remain. And remain forever. And as you hear this, as you store away eternal things, remember, God loves you.

He is benevolent. He's kind. He's generous. He'll care for you. And if that's your attitude, then you'll understand verse 34. Therefore, don't worry about tomorrow. For tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. The worry of each day is sufficient for its own. Friends, I want to close this Bible talk by looking at three possible applications of this passage.

Now, the number of possible applications is enormous. And I cannot possibly give you every one of them. So let me just take up three. They are all fictitious, so don't worry about it.

I'm not singling anyone out. But I want you to imagine three scenarios. Scenario one imagines a rich person. Now, let me tell you that by the world's standards, that means most of us here gathered today.

[21 : 15] However, let's imagine a definition of wealth that says that a rich person can afford unnecessary luxuries. Okay?

If that's a definition of rich. It's about not having to worry unduly about your future financial security. Friends, if that's you, then I want you to think, as we did at the beginning of this Bible talk, I want you to consider the things that you're fearful of.

Family relationships. Wealth failing. Health. The well-being of your family. The things that consume your waking hours. And let me ask you, are those things, the things that consume your waking hours, the things of God or not?

Or are they the things of this world? Well, friends, if that is you, then I want to urge you today to listen to Jesus. Shift your focus. Shift it away from shifting sands. Shift it towards eternal values. Focus on God and the things of God. Find your security in Him and Him alone. Trust in God who loves His children and only has good in mind for them. And let Him tell you what to do with your wealth.

[22 : 23] And don't overly trust in your earthly treasures and your earthly financial advisors. No, be generous as God Himself has been to you. Focus on Him and your values and His values.

Make Him the centre of your existence and not temporal things. Find, feed on His generosity and open-handedness and be generous and open-handed yourself as He is.

After all, you see, you cannot serve God in money. But let's move to another scenario. I want you to imagine an aged Christian couple. The youth of life has gone. They are not overly wealthy.

They are not mobile much anymore. One of them has had one bout with cancer already and they know that illness could easily come again and terminate their lives. They have children and grandchildren.

However, for one reason or another, the relationship with those children is not good. How would the words of Jesus come to them, do you think? Well, in the first instance, they should remember the great goodness of God.

[23 : 27] In and through and because of the death of Jesus for them, they know they are loved by God. A remarkable thing. They know that God's hand is filled with good things. So they should shun worry about the future.

Instead, they should actively seek God's kingdom and His righteousness. And what might that mean for them? Well, it may mean for them devoting themselves to prayer for ministry around the world and ministry in the local church.

It might mean shifting focus away from complaining about the way things are and thanking God for His kindness and generosity. It may mean seeking reconciliation with their fragmented and distant children.

It might mean focusing on God and His goodness. Confident in God and His goodness. Their focus will shift away from being centred on themselves and their rights. Their focus will rather be on the priority of God, His love, His rule, His benevolence.

And knowing this, they will face whatever the future will bring with hope. But let's paint a third and last scenario. This time, we find a young couple.

[24 : 32] They've got young children. They have a mortgage. And they've got hungry mouths to feed. But the main breadwinner of the family has just lost the job which was sustaining them as a family.

What might this passage say to a couple in that situation? Well, first, the great temptation for them may be to blame God, mightn't it? It might be to doubt His kindness and His generosity.

It might even be to turn against Him. But friends, I want to tell you that God loves His people more than anything. He loves His children. And He wants good things for them.

And He doesn't like it when they are destitute. He knows their need of daily bread and sustenance and encourages His people to ask Him for those things. He is a God whose hand is filled with good things.

By all means, this couple should then look hard for work. By all means, pursue all avenues for that. But they should make sure that they do not think that work and money will give them identity.

[25 : 35] For they don't. God does. They should pursue His kingdom, His righteousness, depend upon Him to supply their need, and not fear. For they have a God who loves them so much that He sent His Son.

They ought to turn to Him and call upon Him to fulfill His words in this passage. And in doing so, recognize that the display, and display that they know and trust Him. They should recognize what Jesus says here, which is that God loves them.

And they should cling to that. And call upon Him to fulfill the words of His Son uttered here, that they don't need to worry, for He will be generous and kind. Friends, whoever you are, whatever your situation in life, being anxious cannot help you.

Focusing on it reduces you to a pagan and not a Christian. Focus instead on God, Christ, the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness. For God is good, He is generous, and He fills His hand with good things for His people.

We know this because He sent His Son into the world to die, and if He gives His Son, He'll give anything. Go to Him, serve Him, and depend upon Him. Let's pray.

[26 : 51] Gracious God, thank you that you are generous. We know this because you sent your Son. Thank you that you are overwhelming in your kindness.

Please help us, Father, to seek first your Kingdom and your righteousness, and not to worry about these other things. Father, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.