

Matthew 6:25-34 "Where to Start..."

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Preacher: Will Spink

[0:00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us. Amen. Thank you, Danita.

! I want you to stay right there in that place where your heart's at while you're listening to that song for a minute.

The way you're feeling as you think about God watching the sparrow and watching you, what I want you to know this morning is that you can live with God like that and be constantly experiencing peace and appreciating the beauty and wonder of God in every moment, serving the people God puts in your life rather than serving yourself. You can. You can live right there. In fact, Jesus wants you there, constantly experiencing peace, appreciating God's beauty and wonder and serving other people. In fact, you can live like that calm place and taking everything in and slowly moving through life and living sacrificially and you can still have a joyful, fulfilling, successful year. Would you sign up for that? Would you sign up for that if you could have that sense of peace and that fulfilled of a life?

My guess is you might have enjoyed it during the song. But when I tell you you can live like that all the time, it probably seems a bit far-fetched to most of us.

As you consider your world, as you consider your own life. Probably a lot of reasons, a lot of things going on in your life that might make you wonder and think, yeah, well, that was nice for that song, but I'm going to leave here in a little bit and it's not going to feel like that anymore.

[2:16] Some of you probably, like me, have been enjoying the last few days of summer vacation. You don't really like me calling them the last few days of summer vacation. I've been in the mountains this week celebrating my parents' 50th anniversary. As I was driving home last night, I started to think, for the first time, I've got a kid who's not coming home with us.

How do I stay in touch with her, love her, support her? Well, but school starts this week. There's new teachers to meet, supplies to purchase, emotions to manage.

We still haven't fixed those sinks in our bathroom, says what I'm writing down as we're driving back. I've fallen behind on that work project during vacation, right? Better get ready for Revelation next week.

What about that new grace group we're starting? Probably we should have the neighbors over first. We need to get them in our home sometime. But no way can all that happen in just seven days a week, right?

Are we adding some? But we have kids. Some of our kids live at home. Grandkids, maybe you have activities. Swim, soccer, band.

[3:33] Maybe they need a sport, an academic group, an art, and a service project for their resume, right? Better be well-rounded by the time they finish high school. She's going to need a ride to all of those things.

Oh, no, one of them still doesn't drive. Oh, honey, yes, also date night. Yeah, I'm sorry. That's important. Let's make that a priority. And let's see, October?

Is that our next open night on the calendar? Put that on there for then. I don't know what your last few days have been like.

That's where I was last night. Everybody has different things and different seasons. But I want to ask you this morning, have the things on your calendar or in your heart or on your list, have they been making your heart rate rise at all lately?

Would you say you're more anxious or calm recently if you had to pick one? Do you ever get to a place where you wonder if you can really handle it all?

[4:41] Or where to start if you were going to try? Where would you start? I thought before we jump into Revelation next Sunday, not just to delay a week for my own sake, although partially, before we jump into a busy fall, school year, ministry year, I want us to listen to the words of Jesus as He orients our hearts, our lives.

Turn with me to Matthew 6 this morning. I'm going to read some words of Jesus where He's speaking in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount. He sat down with people gathered around Him to tell them and us how to live with God's values and priorities.

Here, in these verses, He tells us where to start, right? What's first? I want to ask you to listen really carefully to the words that I'm about to read.

They are the most important of the whole sermon. See, this is God's Word. It is, in a rapidly changing world, something eternally unchanging.

In a world of disappointing people and promises, something you can completely count on. In a world of confusion and chaos, it's something that is absolutely true.

[6:18] Matthew 6 and verse 25, Jesus says, Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on.

Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

Are you not of more value than they? And which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing?

Consider the lilies of the field, 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 of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear?

[7:29] For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself, sufficient for the day is its own trouble. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for your word. Jesus, you know what we need to hear. Father, and you've spoken clearly. Holy Spirit, you know how each of us this morning needs to have this truth applied to our hearts and lives, and so help us.

Give us ears to hear. Give us hearts to respond joyfully, even. To have your priorities, to live with your values, to know and love you, Jesus.

Help us with that, we ask even now, in your name. Amen. Amen. The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.

[8:54] Most of you have heard me say that before, often around this time of year. But I need to hear it. In the midst of an array of activities, of potential priorities, how do we know where to start?

Well, Jesus tells us in this passage about the life that he's made us for, where we keep our eye on the ball, this is what he wants for us, where we don't miss the important things, the main thing.

And so that's my heart for us this morning is to slow down. It's the beginning of a new year, so to speak. Whatever season you're in and walking into, slow down and see clearly.

That seems simple. That would be neat and easy. Get our priorities in line quickly if it weren't for our universal problem. Jesus knows that we are all prone to anxious distraction.

He has to tell us this over and over, right? Verse 25, don't be anxious. Verse 28, why are you anxious? Verse 31, don't be anxious.

[10:15] Verse 34, don't be anxious. You getting the idea? Your Bible may say don't worry or something similar to that. but the word that's being used there, it refers to being distracted or divided, right?

Pulled in two directions. Like Martha in Luke 10, she was distracted with much serving.

Many good things, so many important things to do when Mary is sitting where? At Jesus' feet.

Maybe you feel multiple relationships, multiple screens that you're watching at one time, multiple problems, multiple distractions.

I'm anxious. Some of us are distracted with the stressors of the present moment. Always, that's where we are. Others of us tend to spin up our anxiety worrying about future possibilities, how

things might go, what might happen, how it could go wrong if we don't get things under control, right?

But regardless of how that works in your heart, we're all easily distracted from the main thing. we may be anxious about food or clothing.

[11:49] Just based on what I know of sermons, someone has already started making a grocery list since I started a few minutes ago. That's the truth.

Somebody else is worried about what to wear the first day of school. That's what you've been thinking about. Verse 25 says, don't be anxious about that. The length of your life, verse 27, somebody's probably been wondering about your health already.

Or what I'm doing tomorrow, verse 34, somebody's been planning your schedule for the week. I know, I've done that. What's next? Listen, we're doing all of those things just right now and God is speaking to you.

And yet we're distracted. There's so much we feel like we have to worry about. And Jesus says that's a problem. Not that we care about those things, of course, but that we're relying on ourselves to take care of them to the point that they distract us from what is most important.

see, there's a problem beneath the problem. When we realize we're anxiously distracted, it's not that you get bored by this preacher, that's not the problem.

[13:20] We can see the problem in verse 30. But if God so clothes the grass of the field which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

That Jesus is talking here to people who are expressing some faith in him. These are warnings for the people of God, for us, people who do have faith.

But like Jesus' disciples, we often have little faith. We have perhaps believed in Jesus to save us from our sins one day, someday, but we are not believing Jesus for today.

In other words, the problem beneath the problem is a neglected relationship with God. Isn't that at the root of our problems here?

Let me tease it out for you. See, I'm anxiously distracted by obsessing over my health and my weight because I've not been nurturing a relationship with the great physician who made me fearfully and wonderfully and promises no hair falls from my head without his good care.

[14:44] I've decided I like controlling my life better. Or I'm anxiously distracted by obsessing over my kids and their current and future success in life because I've not been talking about them to the God who promises to be a God to me and to my children after me and has been faithful generation after generation.

I've decided I like controlling my kids' lives better. money. Or I'm anxiously distracted by obsessing over my bank account and my budget because I've not been remembering and thanking God who owns the cattle on a thousand hills for entrusting some of his resources to me to steward.

Even though he promises to meet all my needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus, I've decided I like controlling my financial security better.

Just confessing. Do you see how that's little faith? God, I believe you exist but I don't believe it's best to trust you in this area.

God, I believe you created the world but I don't believe you know better than I do how it works. God, I believe you sent your son to rescue me forever and I'll sing about it but I don't believe you will care for me when I'm alone or hungry or hurting.

[16:27] Little faith. Jesus is telling us over and over here don't live like that. Don't have small thoughts of me.

Don't neglect your relationship with God. Now, yes, be a faithful planner like the ant. Yes, work hard as God tells you to but don't leave God behind to make a run at life on your own for even one busy season.

Don't do it. Don't make a run at a season when I'm just going to live by the things I see for now rather than by faith. For so many reasons Jesus says don't be anxious.

Don't be distracted. Don't miss what's most important. That's so easy to do. I want us to hear Jesus' solution to these problems and then talk about how his solution transforms our lives to be the peaceful, marveling servants that I talked about a minute ago.

You know how Jesus often teaches. He's making a point and he looks around for examples that are right there in front of the people he's teaching.

[17:47] And what he's wanting to teach right here, he wants to show these anxiously distracted followers a focus on God, who he is, his character, in particular God's commitment to provide.

Provide. So he makes two arguments from lesser things to greater things. Verse 26, birds.

Look at the birds of the air. Open your eyes, he says. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

Are you not of more value than they? Look, if God feeds the bird, his eye is on the sparrow, right? Then can't you trust him to feed you?

How much more is he going to feed you, right? And by the way, birds don't have Costco to buy food. They don't have freezers to stockpile food.

[18:51] They don't have a garden to grow food, except the one in your backyard they think is theirs. They don't rely on themselves, do they? That's not how it works.

They rely on their creator to provide, and how well does he do? Marvelously well. Imagine how much more he will do for you. Then Jesus says, another example, verse 28, flowers, the lilies of the field.

Verse 28, why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin. They're not working hard. Yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Look at how beautiful these flowers are. Picture a beautiful flower in your mind. God really put some unique design into gorgeous plants all around us. And did you know, not a single flower woke up this morning and thought, I better put on a nicer dress, or get to a tanning bed before anyone sees me.

Or if I don't improve my skin care routine, or start hitting the gym harder, I won't look beautiful in ten years. Not one flower bought that. And yet they're so beautiful that we stop to take pictures of them.

[20:15] If God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you?

Oh, you of little faith, you're an eternal soul. Will not your creator make you beautiful? Forever beautiful?

Beautiful? Deep beauty from the inside out in every way? Won't he do that for you? That's what Romans 8:32 reminds us of.

That if God did not withhold his own son, but loved us so much that he gave us that greatest of all gifts, how will he not also along with him graciously give us all things?

He saved you from your sins. He's not leaving you consistently without lunch. He's given you his most precious gift. He's not withholding the good life that you're chasing somewhere else, right?

[21:22] He's brought you into relationship with him forever. He's not leaving you alone right now, is he? No way. See, if there's a problem beneath the problem, there's a solution beneath the solution.

It's the relationship, right? We must focus on our relationship with God. Now, we've been talking about that a lot this year. You've heard me use the phrase, a faith priority.

Owning your own faith, not just coasting spiritually while investing all your time and energy elsewhere. Where, but even though we hear that, there are a lot of things competing for our time and attention, aren't there?

Notice how Jesus points out this underlying solution here. Verse 26, your heavenly father feeds the birds.

father, not their father, but yours. You have a special relationship with him. Verse 32, your heavenly father knows that you need them all, everything you need.

[22:39] So you focus on your relationship with God. You want to know where to start? First, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

That relationship. Seek that first. And he is such a generous provider, such a gracious father, that as long as you have him, you'll have all those other things that you obsess over and get anxiously distracted by.

You'll have all of them except perhaps the ones that he knows you don't need. There's one thing, the main thing, it's your relationship with God, your faith priority.

Jesus says you don't have to rush around wondering where to start. You don't even have to find a new book that tells you how to do it better, which activity is most important, what needs to land on your calendar first to make you successful this year.

He says seek first God's kingdom, his righteousness. These are words for life in relationship with the one who made you, remember, for himself.

[23 : 57] That's why he made you. That's why you exist. See, Jesus is heading to the cross to secure not merely the forgiveness of our sins, but ultimately our adoption into the family of God.

We have a father who cares for us as his children even more than he does for birds and grass and flowers and he cares for them really well.

And he is calling us to enjoy him, to obey him, to get to know him more, to live with him in every moment and to trust him with the many things that might otherwise distract us from the best thing. Jesus says you can slow down, you can breathe, because you have a good and gracious father. A pastor friend of mine tells the story of a young boy who was adopted into a family after spending his early years as an orphan, where he was mistreated, malnourished, often went extended periods of time without getting any food.

Not long after being adopted into his new family, the parents began to notice that food was missing from the pantry and the fridge more and more.

[25 : 24] And one day the father went into his son's room and he found him underneath his bed with a stockpile of food. The boy explained, of course, that he was afraid that the food would run out, that he wouldn't be given anymore.

So in his anxiety over those possibilities, he had attempted to provide for himself by stashing food under his bed. You can understand that.

The father understood, but it broke his heart, right? And it gave him the chance to reassure his son, you're my son.

All the food in this house belongs to me and it is yours because you're my son. I will always make sure that you get fed.

You don't have to provide for yourself. You don't have to be anxious. I hope you can hear your father saying that to you this morning because there's more of us than we'd like to admit approaching this next season like the boy under the bed.

[26 : 39] Have you been neglecting your relationship with your father and trying in any number of ways to provide for yourself? Is it leading to anxiety, to frantic attempts at self-reliance, desperate efforts to provide what you need and maybe what you're feeling is very little peace and very little rest?

Slow down, Jesus says. One thing, just one thing, seek ye first. Focus on your relationship with God.

I know it may seem like you won't get cared for, but trust me, he says, all these things will be added to you as well. You just focus on the one thing first.

Actually live like you have a good father. Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life at peace with God, learning more about how good and gracious your father is, rejoicing more in his kindness to you, simple gifts.

Now you may hear me describe a life like that and you think, oh, that's some super spiritual kind of life. I want to suggest it's super practical.

[28 : 04] It doesn't need to feel weird. See, the result of God's solution to the problem we all struggle with is that because he has solved your biggest problems, he has met your deepest needs, you can live that kind of focused life and find that it's still a fulfilled life at the same time that all these things are added unto you.

And his kingdom, when we talk about seeking first his kingdom, that's huge. That touches every area of life. That's not merely some churchy thing that's confined to this building or this day of the week or this hour of the day.

I want to give you some suggestions of what it can look like to seek first his kingdom and righteousness. Your relationship with him focused on his rule everywhere and his way in everything.

That's what that means. His rule everywhere, his way in everything. These, to be clear, are just suggestions, okay? Not biblical directives.

You can think of your own. Perhaps just to be merciful to yourself, just pick one or two areas that you want to focus on for now.

[29 : 31] How could your life change as you focus on the main thing? Perhaps start family worship or devotionals, discussions again this week.

I cannot count how many times I've stopped and started. There's no limit. But spend time together focusing on God.

Not just so you can feel more spiritual, but so your kids get to know their heavenly father more and actually know that he's more important to you than algebra.

They'll be delighted to know that. Maybe even more delighted to know that you know that. Seek first God's kingdom at work.

I say that specifically because it's a place where we're really tempted to build our own kingdoms rather than God's kingdom.

[30 : 34] Perhaps by prioritizing Sabbath rest for yourself or your company. Perhaps by pursuing prophets in God honoring ways that care for the needy.

Perhaps by carving out time in your calendar to meet with God on your busiest days. Just block it off before you get there. Another idea.

Do something sacrificial with your time or your money. Like perhaps instead of committing to the gym every night, commit one or two nights a week to partnering with a neighbor in a faith and finances class.

Like using your discretionary money to bless someone else. Start looking at your life through the lens of abundance because, listen, you have a father who has given you the kingdom and he's given you eternity to enjoy it.

Can you believe that? Everything you need and all the time you could imagine to enjoy it. So you are freed up to sacrifice and find yourself not empty but full again and again.

[31 : 52] Consider your grace group intentionally as you reconnect this fall. If you're not in one, maybe that makes the calendar before some other things you're about to fill in.

But when you are in one, prioritize engaging in those relationships beyond just meetings. Ask others in the group, how are they doing with Jesus?

How God's growing or teaching them lately? How you can pray for their spiritual good? If it feels weird to you and awkward, just blame it on me. Pastor Will told me to ask, how can I pray for your spiritual good?

Fine. But do it and pray. And watch God deepen those relationships. How could you seek first God's kingdom with your words?

The tongue has so much power to build up, to tear down, but a heart seeking first God's kingdom is looking for fellow travelers on that road to encourage with a note, with a word, evaluating how my social media comments are pointing to Jesus or may need to be left unsaid.

[33 : 02] Maybe starting to pray every Sunday afternoon about someone I saw this morning or someone I missed this morning. Someone who would benefit from hearing from me. One last thought.

This one probably more of a biblical directive than the others. Commit to praying daily, to talking with God. If that's what he made you for, it's a great place to start this exploration of what it means in your life to seek first his kingdom.

Because if you use the Lord's prayer we prayed together earlier, you're going to pray, thy kingdom come. And you could say, God, I'm not even sure what that means, but would you show me what that means in my life today?

You could ask him that every morning. You could pray for people who don't yet know the king and for boldness to share the good news with them. Just slow down and talk with your father.

I'm not trying to tell you exactly how to live your life. I certainly am not trying to have you leave here with a longer list of to-dos heaped on you. That's not my goal.

[34 : 14] I don't know what seek ye first God's kingdom needs to look like in each of our lives specifically. I do know that Jesus is telling us where to start.

And unless we are so pridefully self-confident that we think we know better than he does how to run our lives, then we start with him.

I'm listening in relationship. We ought to receive his direction to us today from his word as a gift because we don't have to guess the organizing principle of life or the top priority we should have this fall or any other time.

He doesn't leave us there wondering. Do you ever feel like you're trying to hold about a dozen different things at once? Do you ever not feel that way? Do you ever feel like you just keep dropping more and more of them?

God is saying to you this morning, just you hold one. Can you hold one? And he has big and strong, capable arms to hold all the rest.

[35:28] He's saying, hand them off. Bring them with you. Give them to me. If we're willing to start there, to slow down, to avoid all the potential distractions and be with him and follow his path, Jesus is saying, there, right there is true abundant life.

There really is a peace that your heavenly father knows what you need and delights to provide.

There's a wonder, a love living with wonder that God has placed you in a glorious creation to enjoy more of his glory and he doesn't want you to miss the small things this week.

There's a purpose. There's a driving purpose that you can live for and you can love others and you can find as you do that someone is looking out for your needs while you're focused elsewhere.

Jesus says, don't worry, you of little faith. Watch your faith grow big in your big God who cares for you, his child.

He says, this is going to be great. Trust me. Keep your eye on the ball. Seek first his kingdom and righteousness. Let's ask for his help.

[36:50] Jesus, you know how much we struggle with this. You tell us over and over because you love us and you want what's best for us and forgive us for not listening, for not listening in a way that intends to have our lives be any different because we're pretty sure we already know what our priorities should be.

Father, forgive me for that. You do know best. You are trustworthy. You care for a lot of sparrows really well.

How much do you love us? How much more have you invited us into your family to be the objects of your great provision, your divine affection, your tender mercy?

We need it. And help us not to go somewhere else looking for it this week. Might we live with you and for you because we trust you.

We ask in your name, Jesus. Amen. For more information, visit us online at [southwood.org](https://yetanothersermon.host).