

"Worry"

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. It's good to see you all this morning. I'm going to begin by asking for the Lord's help as we look in His Word this morning. So, please pray with me.

Lord, how sweet it is to trust in Jesus. How sweet it is to know, Lord, that in Jesus we have ultimately all that we need, the forgiveness of sins, the promise of eternal life, a renewed relationship with You both now and forever, and Lord, the redemption of our lives from sin and darkness, from brokenness and death. Oh, Lord, we pray this morning that Your Holy Spirit would help us as we look at this passage. Lord, we pray that our hearts would submit to Your Word, Lord, that the truth of Your Word would capture our thoughts and move, Lord, us to obedience and to joyful devotion to You. Lord, I ask for Your help this morning. Help me to speak as I ought, speak the words that You desire me to say, and may the truth of Your Word be clear as I speak this morning. Oh, Lord, be my strength, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

In May 1st of 2024, the American Psychiatric Association released a report. Among its findings, it said that the United States adults are feeling increasingly anxious. In 2024, 43% of adults say they feel more anxious than they did in the previous year, up from 37% in 2023 and 32% in 2022. Later, last year, on November 7th, 2024, the U.S. News & World Report released a report that said that more than a quarter, that is 26.6% of people ages 18 through 29 said they had struggled with anxiety symptoms over the prior two weeks. Anxiety is a reality in our world. When we look around, the way we talk about it and the way we think about it, it's complex, right? Because anxiety is both an inner reality of our soul and our heart and how we are feeling, but it is also a reaction to things that are external, to stressors and challenges, to future desires and fears. It's a mental state, it's an emotional state, but it also expresses itself physically as well. Anxiety is in the air of our culture. I don't know if it's more now than before, but we certainly talk about it a lot. And I would wager that all of us know something of what anxiety feels like. I found this on a Christian counseling website. It uses the word worry rather than anxiety, but I think it's addressing the same thing. See if this describes you at all. Worry can feel out of control. These thoughts do not come and go. They seem to stay and run in circles through your mind. It's not as simple as a light switch where we can turn off our anxiety. Sometimes it can feel like it has a mind of its own. Worrying brings with it stress and a lot of unwanted tension into your mind and body. Worry seems to come a lot easier during a time when it feels like you cannot escape the negative information being thrown at you. Anyone identify with that besides me?

There are lots of opportunities for anxiety in our world. We live with much uncertainty and insecurity, whether it relates to our relationships, our finances, our careers, our health, our families.

Not only are those normal things, we also live in a world where we have increasingly more and more information about the things that we get to be anxious about. And isn't that a wonderful blessing of being in an internet-connected worldwide world where we know far more about things that we can be anxious about?

[4 : 59] So, what does Jesus have to say to us this morning? We're continuing in our sermon, in our sermon series in Matthew, chapters 5 through 7, normally called the Sermon on the Mount. And we're looking at Matthew 6, verses 25 through 34. If you want to turn there in the Pew Bible, I believe it's 762. We're still on 761. Okay, 761.

So, if you want to turn with me there. And as you're turning there, just remember what the Sermon on the Mount is about. This is the first teaching section in Matthew, and Jesus is saying...has come proclaiming the kingdom of God is at hand. And then He gives this sermon to say, this is what it looks like when God's kingdom is active, when God's kingdom is operative in the world. These are the kinds of things that it looks like. And it's particularly saying, this is how God's people are, how they are to live distinctly because they know God and live in His kingdom in increasing measures.

Last week, Pastor Nick preached in the passage before, challenging us to think in kingdom ways and to live with kingdom perspectives on money and how we deal with that. And today, we're going to deal with anxiety. So, I'm going to read the passage, and then we'll dive in and see what Jesus has to say for us today. So, Matthew chapter 6, verse 25, let's look at it together.

Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, 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 the barns, 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 should we eat, or what should we drink, or what should we wear? For the Gentiles seek after 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."

So, what does Jesus have to say to us about anxiety? He says, don't be anxious. Well, there we go. Have a great day. That's... my sermon is done. No, this is what... right? Jesus says, do not be anxious. But then He goes on to explain how is it that we could do this? How could we imagine this? And so, we're going to look at this in three steps. If you're an outline taker, here are your three points. We're going to look at the kingdom understanding of anxiety. We're going to look at a kingdom antidote to anxiety, and we're going to look at a kingdom alternative to anxiety. So, that's where we're going to go.

[8 : 50] And if we're... hopefully at the end, you will feel a little more encouraged as you face anxiety. So, first thing is, a kingdom understanding of anxiety, right? Jesus begins, right? He says in verse 25, he repeats it in verse 31. He repeats it again in verse 34. Therefore, do not be anxious, right? Or do not worry in many... in some translations, right? And what He's saying is... it's remarkable because He's telling people... remember, He's in the context. He's out in the fields. He's preaching to a crowd that has followed Him out, and He's saying to them, don't worry about your life, what you will eat, what you will drink, what you will wear. He's not talking about your desires or your hopes or your plans. He's talking about the things you actually need to live. And He's saying, don't worry about even the very necessities of life. Don't be anxious about them. Now, what does this word anxious mean? Well, the exegetical dictionary of the New Testament says that this word refers to that which is existentially important and which monopolizes the heart's concerns, right? So, in this context, these are things that we existentially need, and they're capturing our hearts and controlling our thoughts and our actions.

It's often a normal response to uncertainties and insecurity, but Jesus says we're not to be anxious. Now, it's interesting too, when you look broadly at this word in the New Testament, most of the time it is used negatively. So, in Matthew 13, in the parable of the sower, right, the weeds that grow up and choke out some of the seed are the cares of the world, that is the anxieties of the world, can choke out the seed so that it doesn't bear good fruit.

Or the well-known story in Luke 10 about Mary and Martha where Jesus comes to visit their home, and Mary comes and sits at Jesus' feet listening to His teaching. Martha is consumed with the cares of hospitality in that moment, and Jesus rebukes her and says, Mary has chosen a better thing because you are all worried about this in a way that is not good. And we see other places in the New Testament where, particularly we see in Philippians 4-6, the passage that was read earlier, do not be anxious about anything but with prayer and supplication, right? So, we see that this is often used and we see it in a negative way. Now, there are some places where it seems to be used in a more positive sense. So, in 1 Corinthians 12, as it's talking about the body of Christ that is the people of God as they relate to one another like parts of the body, they are to care for one another. That is, they are to have care or have anxiety, if we translate the word the same, have anxiety for one another. And in 2 Corinthians 11, when Paul talks about his trials and his sufferings, he includes them, and above all these,

I have my concern for the church, his anxiety for them. And I think that in these last two examples, this is a positive thing. And this is where we need to recognize that it is right for us to care, right?

Jesus is not saying by saying, do not be anxious that we are to be Stoics and not care about anything. No, of course not. We're meant to care. We're meant to have responsibility for and to love one another and to think about how do we bless and do good to others. But we can have care without being anxious. One of the distinctions that I might make is that care is productive and anxiety is not.

[13:05] Care produces things. It produces warm feelings. It produces action to actually serve or to solve or to provide. It says that we're... often that this care can drive us to deeper spiritual trust in God and prayer in seeking someone's good, whereas anxiety is almost always negative. Anxiety is when we are living in fear that we won't get what we think we need. It often comes from an unbelief, and we'll see that, or that God is involved in these circumstances. Anxiety often drives us to want to try to control situations so that we can resolve the uncertainty through our own power and our own strength. And we all know that, as a description we heard, anxiety is something that gets rooted in our brains and then it just... we can't get it out, and it just eats at us, and it circles around, and we try to push it out, and it comes back, and it comes back, and it comes back again. So, we need to have a clear picture of what anxiety is. And I want to say something briefly too about, you know, the rise of anxiety as a medical diagnosis, because it feels unfair for Jesus to say, don't be anxious, when it feels like He's saying, don't have a broken arm, or don't have high blood pressure, right? It just feels like, wait a minute, what are we talking about here? So, we need to step back really briefly and think about the psychosocial, somatic world that we are as human beings, right? What that means is that we are body, mind, heart, soul, and God meant us to work together. And we have... and one of the things that modern medicine has done is identify how anxiety expresses itself and affects us physiologically, right? And there are times when we have real anxiety disorders, because there are times when anxiety can be imprinted into our body, our neurology, and how we work through things like trauma, or through stress, or through patterned behavior where this becomes an unthinking, unconscious reaction. And when we do that, medicine is a great thing for us to respond to that. It is a good thing for us to think, how does medicine help control this unhealthy, broken, physical response, right?

But we also need to recognize that anxiety often is rooted in more deep emotional and mental patterns and thoughts. And so, we want to see that God's view of the fallenness of humanity is that we could have anxiety across this whole spectrum, and we need to address it across the whole spectrum. And so, if you're here and you've been on anxiety medication, then I say, may the Lord bless you and may it help you to create space in your life for you to do hard work of addressing some of those traumas and some of those emotional patterns that you probably also have that may be producing some of these effects.

And listen, our redemption, some of it will happen now, and some of it happens in eternity, right? And we know that one day when Jesus remakes us in our resurrected bodies, you know what we're going to be free of above everything else? Not above everything else. One of the things we'll be free of? Anxiety. It won't be there anymore. We won't be anxious. We won't be afraid. We won't try to control. We won't try to do any of these things because our minds will be filled with the glory of God and the blessing of knowing Him and be free from sin and fallenness. And what a glorious thing it is. And God's work now is wanting us to experience increasing steps towards that, knowing that we'll never be free fully between now and eternity. So, we just need to recognize that there's a spectrum of anxiety that we might understand. We need to see it through biblical lenses that we're integrated beings, that God's redemptive help may include medication as well as counseling and other kinds of... and spiritual help. And this ultimately is what Jesus is saying. I want to get at a core reason why we experience and give you something to help you with it. And this is what the rest of the passage does. So, let's look together at the rest of the passage to help us understand how it is that Jesus can say, don't be anxious. Here's some spiritual help for us to address anxiety. So, in 25 through 32, Jesus gives us the kingdom antidote. And fundamentally, it is this. This is point two for your outline. The kingdom antidote to anxiety is a renewed view of God.

As we work through 25 through 32, one of the things that Jesus is asking us rhetorically, and He uses rhetorical questions a ton in this, so I'm going to do it this way too, is, will not God care for you in the things that you are anxious about? That's what Jesus is asking us to consider. So, let's work through these rhetorical questions because it's such a powerful thing. Jesus, in His first question, right, at the end of verse 25, He says, is not life more than food and body more than clothing? And you know how rhetorical questions work, right? Everybody knows the answer. What's the answer to

this one? Yes, life is more than food and clothing. Now, if you're not sure where your next meal is going to come from, it doesn't necessarily feel like that in the moment. But the reality is, as we look at the biblical picture, your life is more than that because God made you for more than just survival. He made you for life with Him, right?

Jesus then goes on and gives an illustration about the birds of the air and how they are fed, right? They don't build barns. They don't reap. They don't sow and reap. And yet, God feeds them. And then He asks this question in verse 26, are you not more value than they? Doesn't God care more for you than He does for the birds? And what's the answer again? Of course He does. You were made in His image in a unique way. And as glorious as God's natural kingdom and world is, the pinnacle of it was the creation of human beings. And so, of course He's going to care for you because He made you to know Him. If He feeds the birds who He does care for, how much more will He care for you? He will provide for you. You are worth more than Him. Jesus then follows this up with another rhetorical question about the effectiveness and fruitfulness of anxiety. Which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to the span of His life? The answer is no one. We all know this, right? Anxiety does not help us. It does not produce good things in us, right? But God has the power to do what you do not actually have to provide for you.

[21 : 19] This is the implication as we go along because the fourth question picks up kind of like the second one, an illustration about the flowers of the field and how they are dressed, right? It says they neither toil nor spin. And I always had this funny vision of this because I was thinking of like daffodils with the flowers spinning in a circle like this because that's what I thought it meant. And then I realized, no, He's talking about spinning cloth in order to make clothing so that you have something to wear. So that's what it means when it says toil or spin, in case you misread it like I did. So, He's saying, right, and He asked the question, will He not much more clothe you? If He clothes the flowers with glory greater than the glory of Solomon who was the richest man who ever lived, won't He clothe you?

Will He? And of course, the answer to this rhetorical question is, of course He will. Of course He will take care of you. And listen, this clothing is not merely physical clothing, but it's also glory. Just like the flowers have a beauty, He will adorn you with a... and that would be a whole other sermon to just explore being clothed with glory and what that looks like. But what a beautiful picture it is. And so, Jesus says through all these rhetorical questions, won't God take care of you? Of course He will. And so, He ends it with this little condemnation, if I might say it so. Oh, you of little faith, have you forgotten that there is a God in heaven who loves you and who cares for you and who has promised to provide for you.

This is really clear as we keep going in this section, because when you look at verses 31 and 32, Jesus repeats the command and then He gives us a contrast. He says, the Gentiles run after these things, but your heavenly Father knows what you need.

Now, I was a historian, not an economist, so I'm not great at this, but I think that Jesus is pointing out there are two different economies in our thoughts and our hearts that's at work here, and Jesus is saying one of them is not good and one of them is good. The Gentile economy, and a Gentile merely means someone who doesn't know God, someone who doesn't live as if there's a loving heavenly Father who's sovereignly overseeing the whole universe. They seek after, that is, they run after, they grasp on, they seek for control in order to provide for themselves. And this is the economy of the Gentile. It's a cause and effect. What I get, I earn. What I have, I have amassed for myself through my own hard work. Right? And He says, this is the way Gentiles think. We have what we have because of what we have done. Now, this resonates with our New England, pull us up by our own bootstraps mentality. It also resonates with our Protestant work ethic mentality. And there's nothing wrong with hard work, but the economy is, it is up to me. I must do this, and I have to be in control of this process and to run after these things and make them my primary and controlling concern in my life.

And when we think like this, is it any wonder why anxiety is so prevalent in our hearts and in our world? When we forget God, of course this would work. Of course this makes sense. But Jesus says, your heavenly Father knows what you need. There is another economy at work in the world, and it is a better one. And He starts by calling Him your heavenly Father. And I don't know if you've picked this up, but I want to point it out. In chapter 6 of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is referred to God as a heavenly Father over and over and over again. He is a heavenly Father who delights to reward in secret those who give, those who pray, those who fast. So, in verses 1 and 4 and 6 and

18, He refers to Him in those ways. He is also a heavenly Father who knows what you need. You see this in verse 8. You see it in this verse. You also see it implicitly in the very center of the Lord's Prayer where, give us this day our daily bread. We pray to our heavenly Father because we know that He is able to provide. And so, in verse 32, He says, your heavenly Father knows you need them all.

[26 : 34] Now, how does a loving parent provide for his children? When that child is newborn, does a parent say, well, if you work hard enough, I'm going to change your diaper today. If you do the right thing, then, yeah, I'll feed you today, you know, and I might even walk you and burp you and, you know.

But if you don't, sorry, you are on your own. Does any parent treat their children that way? Right? Now, look, there's...when they're 25 and living in your basement, it's okay to have some rules about, okay, you got to get a job and figure some of this stuff out. But the fundamental love underneath that is still real, right? It is not based on you have to earn it and it is up to you to achieve these things, right? The love of a heavenly Father is a gracious love. It is a giving love. And this is what we see in God. If you want to hear, I preached a whole sermon on it at the beginning of January on our loving heavenly Father. But what I want you to see here is that Jesus is referring to having a loving heavenly Father means that we don't live in a cause-effect economy where I only get what I deserve, but we live in a grace economy, which is we get what we don't deserve. We get positive supportive support, not because we have earned it, but because the giver is willing to give it to us.

And friends, why do I say this is true? Because this is the gospel. This is the very heart of Christianity. John 3.16, for God so loved the world, the world in rebellion against Him, the world that had rejected Him.

God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. Friends, humanly in our sin, we deserve alienation from God, rejection, even punishment from Him, because in our sin we have rejected Him. But God in His grace has come to us, He has given us, and He has given us undeserving people, His very own Son whose life and death and resurrection worked for us, salvation, the forgiveness of sins, the renewal of spiritual life, a restored relationship with Him, not because we had ever earned it, not because of works so that any of us could boast. But by grace alone are we saved. And this grace economy doesn't just enter us into the Christian life, but it continues as well. Romans 8.32,

[29 : 37] Romans 8.32, He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?

Romans 9.32 Now look, we all know, we all know that there are times when God doesn't work on our time frame.

He doesn't provide in the ways that we like to. There are times when we have to work through the disappointment or the patience or the waiting on God for His provision.

But the testimony of the church is that my God is faithful and true, and He loves us, and He will provide for us. And this is what Jesus is saying in this passage.

This is the antidote. And when we find ourselves fighting with anxiety, your heavenly Father knows what you need. He knows before you ask Him. Your heavenly Father is able to care for you. He sees you in secret. These truths are able to cut through some of the lies and the patterns of worrying that we feel and the anxiety that we fall into, and to reframe how we think about this situation where we see God in the center of it.

[31 : 29] And this then leads us to not just the antidote. The antidote is like an anti-venom that we shoot into our arm when we need to fight against this poison of anxiety in our hearts, right?

The alternative is a whole new way to live, right? It's a whole new way to work. So, this is our third and final point. It's based in verse 33. And this, again, could be a whole other sermon. I promise you I'm not going to keep you that much longer.

But in verse 33, let's look at it together. The Gentiles seek after these things, but your heavenly Father knows what you need. Therefore, verse 23, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you. One of my favorite stories in reading through the history of missions in America is the story of a young man who sat in a lecture hall in Ithaca, New York in the 1880s. He heard a traveling preacher speak of the call of God for people to follow Him, and this man, John Mott, remembers distinctly the words that burned onto his soul that night by the Holy Spirit, seekest thou great things?

Seek them not. Seek first my kingdom. He had thought he might go into a career in business, but God reoriented his life that night and said, there is an alternative thing that is worth your whole life to live for. Serve my kingdom. Serve my righteousness. Serve to see me glorified in the world. This is what Jesus gives us as a reorientation. It's easy for us to worry about what we will eat, what we will drink, what we will wear, our schedules, our budgets, our plans, all those sorts of things. And Jesus says that there is an alternative way to think about our lives, which is we want to care about God, to seek Him, to grasp after Him, to run after Him in everything we do. So, we wake up in the morning and we ask ourselves the question, what does God value? What does God care about? How do I please God today? How do I serve Him today? If you're wondering, what does this look like? Well, this is the whole sermon that I can't preach. But the Sermon on the Mount gives us some ideas.

[34 : 22] What do I want to care about today? What has the Sermon on the Mount told us to care about? Being poor in spirit, being humble and meek, merciful, pure in heart, seeking God even when persecuted with joyful endurance, bringing the light of revelation and truth to the world with love and grace, trusting Christ to transform us and free us from anger and lust, to allow God to shape our relationships and our words so that they bless others and glorify Him, giving us a love even for our enemies, practicing spiritual disciplines of giving and prayer and fasting so that we might make God the center of our lives every day. Friends, when we are so consumed with these things, anxiety falls away. It doesn't disappear altogether. It's still going to nibble at the edges, but suddenly we have something so worth spending our care and our energy and our thought on that these things become less, and they don't capture our hearts. Now, I want to be careful here because some people...John Mott ended up spending his whole life and career in vocational Christian ministry, right? And some people hear this verse, seek first the kingdom of God as righteousness, and think, oh, so I need to leave my family, leave my job, and go and do missionary work somewhere far away because that's...and look, if God's speaking that to you this morning, hey, talk to me about it. Let's see if that's what actually God is saying. But the verse itself is not about replacing everyday life with something super spiritual. That's what the monks tried, and it didn't work that great.

It wasn't the fullness of the kingdom of God, right? Instead, God may be calling us to a harder thing, which is to be transformed in the middle of everything we do every day.

As you balance accounts, wash diapers, walk dogs, read manuscripts, whatever the work of your day is, how do you seek God in the middle of it? It's not what we do most often. There are times when it is.

There are times when seeking first His kingdom will mean laying other things aside, laying other priorities or desires that are clearly not God's plan for you. But for many of us, it's just about saying, God, how do I do these things in a way that please and honor and glorify You? And friends, this is a glorious call. This is not a burdensome call. Because when we do this, when we begin to see all of our lives as sacred moments that we get to offer up to the Lord, as we see the conflict with our worker and the late night trying to get our kid to go to bed and the walking through midterm exams or whatever it is, we see each of these circumstances as opportunities to please God, to trust Him and not be consumed by anxiety, but rather to say, my heavenly Father knows what I need. How do I do this in a way that brings honor to Him?

This makes life a great adventure. It gives everything we do, even the most mundane thing, purpose and meaning in our kingdom of God. And when we live those lives, I believe it is true that the power of anxiety is sapped in our lives by having this glorious purpose that God has called us to live for Him and for His kingdom and for His righteousness. And notice that there is a promise He's wrapped into this, right? He does care about these things, these things that you feel like, okay, but if I don't pay attention to those things, like, what's going to happen? There's a promise, God is going to take care of you. I have to close with a story. I had this really annoying friend in high school. She was a Christian. I wasn't. She would be like, oh, we have this calc exam tomorrow.

[39 : 08] We got to study really hard. I went home. I studied really hard. She went home, and then she's like, yeah, my friend called. She's going through a hard time. I spent like three hours on the phone with her last night, and I only studied for like an hour. I was like, oh, well, I hope it goes well.

And she'd do just as well as I would. It was so annoying. I was so frustrated because I put in all this work, and I expected that...and God provided for her, right? Now, sometimes we make that cost, and we get a C on the exam, and that's a part of the cost of loving people well. But I have seen over

and over and over again God provide in ways that don't make sense when we actually set our hearts and minds on seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. And that annoyance became curiosity that became ultimately faith for me as I'm trying to figure out what in the world is going on with this person's life. So, God used that in my life in powerful ways. And maybe if we could seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, God might use us in that way in the lives of others around us as well, that they might see a great God, a loving Heavenly Father who provides, and a people who know and worship that loving Heavenly Father and seek Him first. So, friends, let's fight against anxiety with the antidote of God's loving Heavenly Father care, seeking His first... His kingdom first.

Let's pray together. Lord, thank You for this time. Thank You for this Word. Lord, we pray that You would encourage us and help us, Lord, this morning. Lord, we confess that we are prone to worry and prone to be anxious. Lord, help us. Help us to grow in faith. Lord, help us to see Your character and Your loving Heavenly Father provision for us. And Lord, help us to set our hearts on Your kingdom in all that we do.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.