

## “The Cure for Anxiety and Stress”

Matthew 6:25-34

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We're going to be looking at a passage of Scripture and the Gospel of Matthew 6 in this season of Stewardship. In this Thanksgiving season, we're thinking about stewarding those things that God has given us so we look at Matthew 6, which speaks to us of who we are as God's people in this Sermon on the Mount that Jesus preaches. He teaches us that we are to not be like the Gentiles. We are to remember that what we have as His people is a Kingdom ultimately that cannot be shaken and that we belong to Him as we live in a way that shows that we are servants of that King.

This is the Word of God. It is holy and inerrant. Matthew 6:25-34 says [25] *“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? [26] 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? [27] And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? [28] And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, [29] yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. [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? [31] Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ [32] For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. [33] But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

[34] *“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

For the better portion of her married life, a woman had been having trouble getting to sleep at night because of one thing; worry. This woman's particular worry was of burglars. One night, her husband heard a noise in the house and didn't even wait for his wife to say, ‘Would you go check?’ He did what he always does. He went downstairs to investigate, and his investigation ended with finding himself face to face with a burglar. He gathered himself for a moment, took a deep breath and said, “Well, you better come upstairs and meet my wife. She's been waiting ten years to meet you, just get it over with.”

We all know how worry and anxiety can dominate our lives. I'm not really sure how this information was gathered, but I came across a statistic that states that the average person's anxiety is focused accordingly – 40% is on things that will never happen. That's almost 50% on things that won't happen. After the first service, someone came up and said, ‘I heard that 95% of the things we worry about don't happen and my wife said, ‘See where he works?’ then I said, ‘I don't think that's what that statistic means.’ 30% are on things about the past that can't be changed. 12% is on criticism by others, which is mostly untrue. 10% is on health which, by the way, gets worse with anxiety. 8% is on real problems that are actually faced, only 8%. Today, it seems as though stress and anxiety has replaced mom and apple pie as the essence of describing who we are as Americans. And all I need to say here for you to immediately begin to identify with what I'm talking about is just to say ‘life.’

Life is filled with anxiety – so many places to have to be, so many things to have to do, so many people to remember, so many to plan for – so many things and never enough time when all the modern conveniences of technology are supposed to give us more time and make life less stressful. Anxiety has always been with us, even before technology, even before we said life got stressed anxiety has always been a part. Worry has always been a part of the human condition witnessed by Jesus' words here in Matthew 6. Statistics indicate that anxiety has, however, exploded in our culture. One of the most frequently diagnosed ailments today is panic attacks. It is the sudden sense of loss of safety and control, coupled with an almost parallel sense of fear. It's likely that even if you haven't personally experienced this, you know someone who has and it is really impossible for us to judge someone for experiencing that because probably everyone has been on the verge of some sense of that reality. We are not in control, but we need to be in control. The things are out of our reach but must be within our reach and we can't control it.

“Anxiety is a thin stream of fear,” one author said, “trickling through the mind. If encouraged, it cuts a channel into which all other thoughts are drained.” Think about that. You may be worried about the state of the world right now and the conflicts all about us with the possibility of war looming. You may be worried about the state of our culture, about our nation, about the presidential election, about the economy or your job. You may be worried about your EMC pledge. You may be worried about Briarwood and the future that we face as a church. And an untold number of so many other things that are unique and particular to your own setting that maybe nobody else knows about that caused you to worry.

It's remarkable how things that are so out of our control can dominate our lives. It's telling that our English word worry comes from an old German word that means to strangle, because that's precisely what worry does. It strangles us, choking out contentment and joy, spiritually asphyxiating us and depriving us of satisfaction in the goodness of God's gracious providence here and now, today. We as Christians know this because we have read the text. We know that we're not to worry and yet we worry about that.

Jesus' exhortations in these verses are negative for they start, ‘Do not worry about... but they are based upon a positive reality in an amazing, immense truth about the Kingdom that we belong to, about the wealth of that Kingdom and of the King who gives us those things that we need. This is part of the Sermon on the Mount, and He has started off talking about what the servants of the Kingdom look like and then what life in the Kingdom looks like. Then He shows us how to pray and then He talks about those treasures that we tend to stockpile on Earth and put our trust in. Then He says, “no, those are not the things that are ultimately valuable but you must lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven.” So His exhortations here are the result of that positive reality of who we are and who supplies for us what is truly valuable.

It isn't that we cannot have or even seek possessions. What matters is that we do not put our trust in them. We must have proper vision. Jesus says we should have a proper perspective of heaven so that we will properly value what is eternal and lasting over what is temporary and being eaten away, literally or rusting away and not lose sight of what is true and good. We must realize the potential power that our treasures have to consume us and rule over us. Jesus says, ‘where your treasure is, there your heart will be also’ which means that we must submit ourselves and treasure the only Master worthy of our allegiance and that is God. Therefore, with God as our Master, we need never worry. So, there you go, that's the sermon. Let's pray so we can go home but no that's not it.

It's very simple and so easily said, but so terribly difficult for us to put into practice because of our vision and because of the fact that we are surrounded by the cares that are around

us. So Jesus wants our perspective to be clear of who is your Master and what is the Kingdom that He has given us? Jesus emphasizes this idea of fruitlessness because worry is fruitless in Matthew 6:27 which says *[27] And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?* What has worried done for you lately? What has it accomplished for you lately? It's a simple, critical question, really, it's a rebuke, a gentle rebuke and it follows two illustrations from the lesser to the greater.

Jesus loves those illustrations from the lesser to the greater to show that God has ordained our daily care. Saying that God is our Master, is the One who has created all things, supplies all things and sustains all things, who has given us salvation. As we'll see in a moment, the very righteousness that we are seeking that we cannot attain for ourselves He gives to us. 'How will He not also,' as Paul says in Romans 8:32 along those lines, 'provide us all things.' God has ordained our daily care.

Matthew 6:25-30 says *[25] "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? [26] 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? [27] And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? [28] And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, [29] yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. [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?"*

Now we're going to look a little more closely at these verses in a moment but the big picture here is obvious. All things that concern us are under the providential care of God. If He gives the birds of the air their daily care, how much more of us? If He provides the grass of the field with the beautiful dress of these wildflowers, how much more will He not clothe us, cover us, give us with what we need? It's worth remembering that Jesus has just instructed His disciples to remember that God is the One who supplies their daily bread – give us this day our daily bread and praying for God to supply it, precisely demonstrates that He is the One who has ordained our daily supply of care.

I think one of the most profound places that this is demonstrated is in Psalm 139. Psalm 139 is amazing to me. As David says in this Psalm, 'they're just too great for me, I cannot attain to them' doesn't mean they're not true, it just means they're beyond my full comprehension. Psalm 139:14-17 says *[14] I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. [15] My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. [16] Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. [17] How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!* That's a God who cares and supplies our daily care. If God has written down every one of the days that are formed for me, then He has also ordained all that is necessary in those days for me, for my daily provision and daily care. It's easy to forget that. I can't think of a day in which I didn't have what I didn't need. I can think of plenty of days, which I didn't get what I wanted, but what I needed? No.

We'll look again at the birds and flowers in a moment. It's always nice to look at birds and flowers, especially when we have lessons to teach us as Martin Luther says, that they are some of the best preachers of all, but let's move on to see that worry is not only fruitless because it forgets the providential care of God, but because it steals our focus from the present moment.

Matthew 6:34 says [34] *Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.* Or as some translations say ‘tomorrow will have enough trouble of its own.’ We must not be tempted to think that Jesus is a hyper realist or an Eeyore and simply saying, ‘Well, you know, you might as well just worry about today because tomorrow, well, it's going to be just as bad or maybe worse.’ That's not what He's saying. Jesus is saying that being anxious keeps us from being present minded and therefore keeps us from being fruitful and trusting God for the responsibilities He gives us today. Stay focused. Right now, worrying about the day that has not yet come will rob you of the faith that is necessary to do what today requires. The only fruit that it will yield is anxiety and paralysis.

One author even said, ‘What does your anxiety do? It does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, but it does empty today of its strength. It does not make you escape the evil. It makes you unfit to cope with it when it comes.’ Worry for tomorrow is fruitless in so many ways because one of the things that I've noticed that it will often do is lead to procrastination, which is a weird fruit. It's not that it doesn't have fruit, it's just not the right kind of fruit. When I was in seminary, one of the things that began to develop as I began to study and begin to have tests, I began to become stressed about making sure I did them well because I had to keep my scholarship. I thought, “What if I bombed the test or my paper is really bad?” I can only rewrite it so many times and I'll have a minimum grade and then I don't know what's going to happen. The paper is due next week. So, I'm going to clean my room. This is going to be a tough paper, but these files need to be reorganized. And as I'm worrying about these things, I start doing all these things that need to be done but they are taking me away from the present thing that I needed to be doing, which was studying or writing. Then I wash my car. What does that have to do with anything? It was keeping me away from the present day's responsibilities. What would happen when I would sit down and actually get to work? Finally, I had to do it.

One of the great things about ministry is that you realize you can't live that way once you have to write a sermon every week for you just have to make it happen. So, I was cured of that. But then I would write the paper, take the exam, and I did fine. All that worry for nothing. I did have a clean room and a clean car, but it robbed me in the moment and gave me such distress as it steals our focus from the present moment. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Jesus says “Stay there and trust Me for that day.” Now, if we faithfully tend to what God has called us to do and put before us in this day, He will take care of tomorrow. By the way, tomorrow will be what? Today. Then you can trust Him for that tomorrow, because it'll be today. God will take care of it. Don't borrow trouble.

There were many things that people really did need legitimately to worry about in first century Judea. Real worries about food. If there was not enough winter snow in the mountains, there would not be enough water from spring melting, the runoff to the streams to feed the valleys and the food supply would be affected. Clothing was also an issue as we'll look at that in a moment. Most people had only one or two garments, and these were usually self-sewn. They made their own clothes with whatever fabric was available and they were worn until they could be worn no more. But it was not the case that most of these people went around with no clothes. They had clothes that day and they knew that they would be able to be clothed. They were not to be anxious about that.

The obvious question to ask, is it our affluent culture? How many of us have truly had to worry about where their next meal is coming from? I know that there are those who do in this city but in our circles, how many of us has really had to worry about our next meal? Most of us are sitting in here thinking about our next meal and where we're going to go. Most of us have

choices of where we want to go. How many among us have truly worried about whether or not we have sufficient clothing? Even men who say I hate to shop have plenty of clothes. It might look like the same uniform every day but we have plenty. Jesus' point is this; what the world worries about, don't worry about. Jesus knows what you need and He will supply it. It must go deeper to realize who I am and what I really am supplying you transcends those physical needs and worry as a result of that is also faithless and for that reason, it loses sight of what is most valuable.

Matthew 6:25 says [25] *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?* That sounds like a rhetorical philosophical statement. Is not life more than the body? Yes, but a pizza sure is good. But does that define us? Yes. We were told when we were little, you are what you eat, but it goes obviously much deeper than that for the word that Jesus uses for life here is often translated soul. It's where we get our word psychology from. It's a comprehensive term that delineates all of who we are. It includes the physical but Jesus says that our life is more than the body. So it is that, but more. By using this word, He is intentionally emphasizing the non-material of the essence of who we are as humans, emotionally, mentally, and most significantly spiritually.

So, what Jesus means to say is that life transcends physical reality, true life. In other words, it's not at all true that all you touch and all you see is all your life will ever be. No, worry being anxious about life's specifically the physical things of life, causes us to lose sight of what is not just valuable, but ultimately is really real – spiritual truths that life is more than food and the body more than clothing, peace of mind, security, identity, knowing who we are, forgiveness of sins, knowing that we in fact have had our debt paid before God, to know that there is meaning in life. These are the values that are true and values of the Kingdom that belong to us.

It is important to clarify what Jesus is not saying here. Sometimes you'll hear people draw the conclusion that Jesus is saying these physical things are not important. The body is more than this. So, it's not really important or maybe even physical things and material things are evil, sort of a call to asceticism, to deny physical things and to not want nice things. That's not it at all. It's not that we're more spiritual if we kind of eschew physical things and say, 'I'm above that. I don't have a nice car, nice house, nice clothes.' It's of course, that those things are not our identity and not ultimately our treasures. Jesus says in Matthew 6:31-32, [31] *Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'* [32] *For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.* They're important. They're just not your full identity. They are not who you are. They are the things that cover you. They're the things that animate you physically but they are not ultimately who you are. Jesus, your Father knows what you need. You don't have to seek after them in desperation.

Jesus goes on further to explain that worry is a faithless endeavor by drawing attention to another significant way in which it causes us to lose sight of reality – what is most valuable, and that is that it forgets that we have a Father. I know not everyone has had a good father. Some have not even known their fathers but I believe because we are made in the image of God and because God has made the family the primary unit of civilization from creation on, that we're hardwired to understand the importance of a father. We wouldn't know what a bad father was if we didn't have some concept of a good father. It's in us to know that. Many of us have sought to be good fathers because of the way that we were fathered, either by good example or saying, 'I'm not going to do that, for sure' but we're not perfect. We have within us this understanding I think

intuitively that there is such a thing as a good father, and that is because there is one Father who is the perfect Father. When we are born again, we have a Father at last who knows our needs without any misunderstanding, who knows what our needs are without any indulgence, and who supplies for us exactly what we need in all wisdom and care. That's a value of the kingdom that we must not forget.

Matthew 6:26 says [26] *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?* It's a very simple point, for they're just animals, just creatures and we must not miss these words. If these creatures are fed and fine your Heavenly Father knows what you need, are you not of more value than them?

The second illustration is with clothing and back to the flowers. Matthew 6:28-31 says [28] *And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, [29] yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. [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?* Using the term lilies of the field, Jesus is probably referring to several varieties of wildflowers that would bloom for short periods of time on the grassy hills, probably where He was preaching. These flowers are of delicate beauty and completely not their own doing, but God's. They neither toil or gather raw material. They don't spin it to make thread. They just grow and they're glorious and not even Solomon, who spent, to gather and hired, to toil and wore luxurious clothing, was not as glorious as these.

Then He drives His point home with God who so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow thrown into the oven. Here He is talking about that most Jewish households at the time had a special clay oven that was designed for baking bread, and the fire was kindled inside the oven under another little oven like compartment where the bread was placed. When the baker needed to quickly intensify the heat, maybe to put a nice, hard crust on that bread, he would take these bundles of dried grass gathered from the fields, throw them in for that flash of fire and He says, 'If God so clothes that grass, which is alive today and then burned tomorrow, how much more will He clothe? O you of little faith.' It's an apt term, 'you of little faith' for I think it's an endearing rebuke, really. He's saying you have so much, why is your faith so small? It is a faithless endeavor that makes us behave as if we are of less value than both birds and grass to think that we will not have what we need, more than that, that we forget that we have a Father who cares for us, not just a King, not just a master, but he's our Father.

When I was in seminary, I heard the story from one of my professors, Dr. Raymond, about his son Jeff, when they were living in Illinois, and he was a pastor of a church there. He wanted to plant a tree in the yard so he asked his son, Jeff, if he would go out and dig up the rock that was where he wanted to plant the tree. Jeff went out in the yard and Dr. Raymond was watching through the window to see what Jeff would do because he knew the rock was too big. Jeff dug around it and he took a board to try to pry it out, and he dug around it a little bit more. He got a wheelbarrow out, even tried to put the wheelbarrow underneath it and pull it out and he came in and said, 'Dad, I can't move this rock. I've tried everything.' He said, "Son, are you sure you've tried everything?" 'Yes, Dad, I'm sure.' "I don't think you have." Now, we'd love as a son to hear your dad say that for you're the one out there busting your can to try to move this rock. He said "I think you should go out there and try again, because I know you've not tried everything." So he went back out and watched him. He just stood there and looked at the rock and at one point, he thought he was going to go and get the truck and tie a chain around the rock

but he would have to stop that before that happened. He came back and he said, ‘Dad, I have tried everything.’ He said, “No, son, you haven’t. You didn’t ask your father.” I have a Father who is ready to provide to help. Give us this day our daily bread, provide for us. Give us those things that we truly need. We are not orphans. We are servants of a master who is our Father. He has given us the Kingdom and that’s really the ultimate reason why worry is less is because it loses sight of the Kingdom to which we belong.

Matthew 6:32-33 says [32] *For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. [33] But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.* It’s a matter of what we set as our priority. He says don’t make the material your priority. You’ll get that. Don’t value it to the end that it is absolutely what is obsessing you and causing you to seek, above all things, the things that are most valuable is this; These treasures that I’ve already spoken of, laid up in heaven, the Kingdom and all those things that belong to the Kingdom that are yours now. He makes this contrast between the mindset of the world, the things that the Gentiles value and seek, and the mindset of the Kingdom and the things that its servants value and seek. Because there are two things that human beings search for; the material and the spiritual and by God’s grace, those of us who have entered into the Kingdom by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone, have found that spiritual truth and reality that is worth seeking and having. So, we don’t have to worry about all those other things. We don’t have to worry because we belong to a Kingdom as the writer of Hebrews says, that cannot be shaken.

Psalms 46:1-3 says [1] *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. [2] Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, [3] though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.* Though the mountains give way to the sea, we will not be moved because we belong to this Kingdom. I love what John Stott says about what it means to seek the Kingdom. He says ‘It’s not like it’s something that’s lost. We have it. What does it mean to seek it? It means to put it in a place of priority, the Kingdom and its values, its priorities. To seek first this Kingdom is to desire as of first importance the spread of the reign of Jesus Christ. Such a desire will start with oneself until every single department of our life – home, marriage, family, lifestyle, personal morality, professional life, business ethics, bank balance, tax returns, citizenship – is joyfully and freely submissive to Christ. It will continue in our immediate environment with the acceptance of evangelistic responsibility towards our relatives, colleagues, neighbors and friends and it will also reach out in global concern for the missionary witness of the church.’

It simply means that if we belong to the Kingdom, we will seek out all the things of the Kingdom to prioritize in our life above all things else. We must not lose sight of that Kingdom to which we belong otherwise we will dissolve into anxiety and worry because we will be caught up in this kingdom, which will dissolve itself one day under the hand of God.

Last time that I was in England, I had a passport problem. When I came through, they pulled me aside. I thought, ‘they’re going to send me home.’ They didn’t, but they said, ‘Before you leave, you have to go to the embassy and get this fixed or you will not be able to get home.’ We were on a mission trip and we did our work and I worried all week about going to the embassy. I heard someone say ‘I was down there the other day, and you should have seen the line. It wrapped around the embassy and around the block and it was that way all day.’ I was able to get an appointment on the last full day we were there. If it didn’t happen then, I would have to reschedule my flight. Everybody else took that day to do sightseeing, and I went down to the embassy and saw the line. I was standing there and I was worrying. I thought, “Lord, I just I just

want to get back to the States.” Then I realized up ahead there was a little door that said US citizens. Way ahead if the long line it said, non-U.S. citizens. I'm in the wrong line. I ended up walking right in.

The person inside the door said, ‘How can I help you?’ They told me where all I needed to go and what to do. I had forgotten that was an American citizen. I belong to America. I could just walk right in. I'd lost sight of that. I worried all week. Surely, it's the American embassy. I should have remembered. That's my embassy. That's my country. It's where I belong. I'd lost sight of that. That's what we do in this world. Yes, this is a world with difficulties and anxieties and things that there might be little of that we want to have but our Heavenly Father has said the Kingdom belongs to you – so much more. You have this world and the world to come with all that's in it and if people are truly more valuable than birds and flowers, then for us seeking the Kingdom at least means bringing them to the King and sharing the Gospel of the Kingdom with them because there are waiting servants, the waiting elect for us to gather in who are filled and riddled with anxieties they don't need to have because they have a Father in heaven and they have a Kingdom that belongs to them.

Perhaps you're reading this today and you have not come to know the King. You don't know Jesus Christ as your Savior. He is taking care of the most important need we have – the payment of our sin. God the Father has given Jesus and Jesus willingly went to the cross so that He would die in His righteousness, so that our sins would be paid for and we would get His righteousness. Seeking His righteousness is the only righteousness that matters and it can't be done by what we do with our hands or any kind of work. It is done by Christ alone and offered in freeness to be received by grace through faith. If you are seeking that righteousness, you will find it in Jesus and in Jesus alone. If you have found it in Jesus, then you and I belong to a Kingdom again that cannot be shaken and because of that, we need never worry again but we will. And so where do we go? Back to our Father who loves us and who will never leave us and forsake us and says, ‘I will give you all you need.’ Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word and thank You for all that You have done in giving us this Kingdom, making us your servants and being our Father. Forgive us for how we lose sight of these things and help us to remember whose we are in the Kingdom to which we belong, so that we would live out of the wealth of that resource, of knowing that You will supply all that truly matters, because our life is more than food, clothing and drink, but is righteousness which You have given us in Jesus. Lord Jesus, will You cause us to pray like you taught us to pray? And Father, we ask that Your Kingdom would come and that You would get glory in all things for we pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.