

## Worry Matthew 6:25-34

Anxiety in our culture is almost an epidemic; many people are chronic worriers. Psychiatrists prescribe anti-anxiety medication and consumers deal their worries through alcohol, drugs, and attempts to escape reality. Stress can put us at risk for obesity, heart disease, cancer, and a variety of other illnesses. Chronic anxiety can lead to depression and other serious psychological conditions. Worry is a major problem in the world and even in the church.

I read recently that 28%—that’s more than 1 of every 4 adults—experiences at least one anxiety disorder in their lifetime. The total annual cost of anxiety disorders has been estimated to be between \$42 and \$46 billion. Americans spend around \$12B per year on antipsychotic drugs to help them deal with anxiety.<sup>1</sup>

The word *worry* comes from an Old English term (*wyrgan*), meaning “to choke” or “strangle.”<sup>2</sup> Do you ever feel like you are almost choked or strangled by worry? Many people feel that way.

Christians should not be choked or strangled by worry.

**Quote:** “Worry is practical atheism and an affront to God.” (Robert Mounce)

Christians may have many concerns in this world and experience great tribulations, but we should not be chronic worriers. Worry is one of those sins of the spirit that we may struggle to control. Others may have no idea that we are chronic worriers; but worry may be, for some of us, a constant battle in our own minds. Perhaps some of you are worried right now.

Jesus provides an antidote to worry. We don’t need more anti-psychotic *medication*; we need biblical *meditation*, i.e., more exposure to God’s promises and more trust in God. If God provides for the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, He will certainly care for His people.

What does Jesus say about this sin of the spirit?

I. Jesus commands us to stop worrying.

Jesus commands us not to worry about three things:

A. .25 Don’t worry about “your life” .25

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ajmc.com/view/oct05-2158ps344-s353>

<sup>2</sup> John MacArthur, *Anxiety Attacked*, MacArthur Study Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), 15.

1. “take thought” (μεριμνάω) – to be anxious, troubled; to care for. The grammar here suggests stopping an action already in progress. The command is, “Stop worrying.”

If Jesus commands us to stop it, we can conclude that worry is sin. If we are continually worrying instead of trusting in God, that is sin.

2. “for your life”
  - a) “Life” could refer to virtually everything in your life.
  - b) Life was much less secure for Jesus’ original audience than it is for us. Death for them was a very present reality, something they were very familiar with. They had good reason to worry about whether life would continue for them.
  - c) Jesus goes on to tell us why we don’t need to worry about life. His main point is that our lives are ultimately in God’s hands. God gave us life, and the span of our life is in God’s control. God will provide for the necessities of life.
3. When Jesus says “take no thought,” he is not advocating a reckless, neglectful attitude about life, but an attitude that trusts God with all the details of life.
4. We can do all kinds of things to protect our life, make it more pleasant and potentially even to extend our lives. E.g., eat right, exercise, avoid destructive and risky behaviors, protect yourself, etc. That’s not sinful; it’s prudent/wise.
5. But no matter what we might do to extend our lives or make them more pleasant, the length of our lives is ultimately in God’s hands, under his control. All the details of our lives are under God’s control.
6. So we should not worry about how long we are going to live. We should be careful and seek to protect and extend our lives, but we should not worry about our lives. Ultimately, God is in control of all the details of our lives, and we can trust God.

“We are indestructible until God is finished with us.”

- B. .31 Don’t worry about daily necessities—food, drink, or clothing. .31

1. Many of Jesus' original audience were likely very poor, and they struggled to provide for their basic daily needs—food, clothing, and shelter.
2. Jesus urges us not to worry about such things. If God created us and gave us life, it makes sense that we trust him to sustain that life.
3. Again, the point is not that we sit around passively and do nothing to provide for food, drink, clothing, or shelter. Most of us have to work to make a living and provide for our families. The point is that we trust that God will provide these daily necessities through the normal providential means—i.e., through work.
4. These necessities are not going to fall out of heaven for us or magically appear. But God provides them to us through normal means.

C. .34 Don't worry about tomorrow.

For the third time, Jesus demands that we cease worrying, this time focusing on future events.

I would guess that worrying about the future is the most common form of worry. We often worry about what could happen in the future, and we usually focus on the worst outcome, the worst scenario. And thankfully, the worst does not happen.

We must admit that, occasionally, the worst does happen. In some cases, what we worry about comes true—people suffer and die, things fall apart, people lose everything. We must admit that.

But we must not lie in bed worrying that such tragedies may strike us. We have to trust in God instead of worrying about potential tragedies. We trust that God will provide for us through the trials and tribulations of life.

Further, “Take no thought for tomorrow” obviously does *not* mean that we don't plan for the future or fail to protect ourselves. Providing for future uncertainties is biblical; worrying about the future is not.

**Trans:** So the thrice-repeated command here is to stop worrying. We don't need to worry about life, daily needs, or what's going to happen in the future. We fulfill our responsibilities in these areas and trust that God will provide what we need through normal means.

II. Jesus gives us good reasons not to worry. .25-30

A. .25end Life is more than physical necessities.

1. For many today, life consists of material things like food, clothing, housing, and things they've bought. That's what they are primarily concerned about.
2. The inner, spiritual life has no bearing for them. Many such people don't believe in God or in the spiritual realm. So everything is here and now; live for today; there is no eternal realm, so everything is oriented around the physical objects of life. "He who dies with the most toys wins."

**Illus.:** I imagine that some people who lost everything in the fires in Maui are totally devastated by this tragedy. Everything they were living for went up in smoke—all their material possessions are gone. When life consists of material things only, the loss of those things is truly devastating.

3. Christians obviously take a different approach to life. Life is *not* merely the accumulation of things. We might indeed accumulate a lot of things and enjoy them, but that's not what life is all about.
4. Our highest values are eternal and spiritual, not physical. In fact, God commands us to set our affections on things above, not on things of the earth (Col 3:1-3).

Job 1:21 *And he said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD."*

Only someone who has a proper view of life—a biblical value system—can say that.

B. God provides for nature.

1. He provides for the "fowls of the air": .26
  - a) The birds don't worry about planning, reaping or storage of food, yet God feeds them.
  - b) .26end People are worth far more than birds. Birds are valuable, but not as valuable as humans are. If God takes care of the *lesser* in value, he'll take care of the *greater* in value.

An important principle here is that human life is “better” than animal life. That is, it has more value, more significance. Humans, not animals, are made in the image of God, and this is the basis of their value. Animals have value, but not as much as humans.

Sadly, many today deny this truth, claiming that humans are mere animals and thus have no more inherent value than any other animal. Some allege that human life is the problem with the world. Humans are less valuable than animals, they claim.

Jesus clearly asserts that human life is far *more* valuable than animal life. This, of course, does not imply that we can abuse or neglect animals under our care (Prov 12:10), but it does mean that we must prioritize human life over animal life. We should be more concerned about human flourishing than animal welfare.

- c) .26 Implication: God will take care of us. If God cares for the birds, He’ll certainly care for us.

Note: God “feeds” the birds, yet the birds are responsible to actively pursue each meal. Birds don’t sit idly by and wait for worms or bugs to crawl their way. “The early bird gets the worm” by getting up and going to work. Birds work harder to earn their living than many other animals. Many birds prepare for the future by gathering and storing food or by migrating. Birds are usually busy, active creatures.

Likewise, God provides for His people as they earn their living through work. The birds provide an example of vigorous labor, not lazy inactivity. Jesus is not discouraging *work*; He’s discouraging *worry*.

2. He provides for the lilies of the field. .28-30

- a) Jesus again gives another vivid illustration from nature. Wild flowers grow without toiling or spinning.
- b) Spinning was the common household task of making yarn by spinning wool or flax on a spindle. Spinning was required to make clothing by hand, a job normally done by women.

- c) Even Solomon in all his glory could not compare with the beauty of fields “arrayed” (clothed) in wild flowers. Solomon had fantastic wealth and power, but he could not attain the same level of beauty achieved by a lowly wildflower. No amount of wealth can do that.
3. .30 If God is able to “clothe” the fields in that manner, He is much more capable of clothing his people. .30
- a) Grass and other low-value combustible materials were burned in ovens. Grass and wild flowers would be growing one day and cut down to be burned the next.
  - b) Grass and wild flowers are not high-value materials. They are perishable and common. Yet they are beautiful and God cares for them.
  - c) God’s interest in His own people far exceeds His concern about materials like flowers and animals. If God takes care of them, he will certainly take care of his own people.
  - d) If God cares for the *lesser* in value, he will certainly care for the *greater* in value.

**Note:** Before we go on, we should recognize that these promises are for Jesus’ followers, those who know the Lord—saved people—especially for those who follow vs. 33.

God has *not* made any such promises to those who do not follow or know him. God has made an entirely different set of promises to unbelievers. If you are an unbeliever, you have good reason to worry.

C. .27 Worry does not accomplish anything.

No one by worrying can add a cubit to his stature. .27

- 1. A cubit is a unit of measure spanning the distance from the point of the elbow to the end of the little finger, typically about 18 inches.
- 2. What would it mean to add a cubit to one’s “stature”?
  - a) The term “stature” (KJV) can mean “height” (see Luke 19:3), but it also can signify maturity, age, or length of life. It seems likely that Jesus is referring to length of time here rather than the length of one’s body.

b) He's likely saying something like, "Who can add a single hour to his lifetime by worrying?" That is, worrying does not add any time to your allotment of life. Worry does not promote long life; you don't gain a single hour of life from worrying.

3. On the contrary, obsessive anxiety can lead to all sorts of medical conditions that can shorten your life. Anxiety can cause or aggravate disease. A person really can "worry himself to death."

4. Further, God has appointed the length of our lives, and that measure cannot be changed by worrying.

*Ps 39:4 LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.*

D. .32a Worry/anxiety is characteristic of unbelievers.

1. For many non-Christians today, "life" can be reduced to things like food, drink, and clothing. Without a commitment to God, human life amounts to little more than "eat, drink, and be smartly clothed." That's what life revolves around; that's the focus for many. Food and fashion often become idols of the heart and take the place of God for many people.

**Quote:** The Gentiles, the secular world, seek material things because they overestimate their significance. The characteristic tendency of those without Christ is to be bound by the horizons of earth. Everything is crammed into the visible. This, in turn, promotes worry about secondary matters such as food and clothes.<sup>3</sup>

2. Let's not be like unbelievers in their worrying over things that God has promised to provide for us.

E. .32b God knows what you need. God is aware of your daily needs and he will take care of you. He's been faithful in the past and will continue to care for us.

**Trans:** We should keep in mind these reason why we don't need to worry. If you tend to worry, re-read these verses to remind yourself that you don't need to worry.

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<sup>3</sup>R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the*, 223.

III. .33 Replace worry with trust in God.

When we focus on Jesus and his kingdom, we tend not to worry. Faith replaces fear when we put God first.

- A. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. When we put God first and pursue his program, we can trust that he will provide everything we need.
- B. God's interests must have priority even over our concern for the daily necessities of life. Our supreme concern ought to be things above, not the things of this world (Col 3:1-3).
- C. Instead of worrying about daily needs, believers should focus on God, His kingdom, and righteous living. Replace worry with positive action. Adopt God's perspective on things—eternal and spiritual, not temporary.
- D. How does one “seek” the kingdom and his righteousness?<sup>4</sup>
  - 1. To seek God's kingdom is basically the same as 1 Cor 10:31—do all for the glory of God. I.e., deny self, take up cross, follow him.
  - 2. To seek his righteousness is striving to live a righteous lifestyle. Pursue righteous living—godliness, holiness.
- E. .33end Result: God will provide “all these things,” i.e., food, drink, clothing, and shelter.
  - 1. God has promised to provide the essentials of life for those who know him and live for his glory.
  - 2. He's promising to meet our needs, not give us everything we might want. Often, God does provide luxuries. But that's not a promise.
  - 3. Our responsibility is to put God first. When we do that, God's responsibility is to take care of our daily needs—through normal means, not miraculously.

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<sup>4</sup>William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 9, *New Testament Commentary*.



- F. When we focus on God’s program and agenda, we tend not to concern ourselves with the mundane matters. When we focus our attention on our spiritual responsibilities, the minor inconveniences of daily life merit little thought. I.e., we don’t worry about them. Greater things are occupying our minds.
- G. Tomorrow will take care of itself. Enjoy the blessings God has given today. Don’t worry about future problems; focus on honoring God and obeying his word today.
- H. The evil of each day is sufficient for itself. Every day has a new set of problems. It’s counter-productive to worry about tomorrow’s problems today. Worry will not dissolve or reduce tomorrow’s problems. God will give strength to bear the problems when they arrive, not before. Don’t “borrow trouble” from a day that has not yet arrived—and maybe never will.

Lam 3:22 ... *the LORD’S mercies ... are new every morning:* ...

Before finishing up, I’d like to address two common questions:

Question #1: Is there a proper, acceptable form of concern? Yes, as Paul mentions in 2 Corinthians 11:28–29 – “my deep concern (μέριμνα) for all the churches.” We may well be concerned about spiritual things without descending into worry. It’s proper to be concerned about our own spiritual state and that of others (Prov 4:23; 2 Tim 2:15). We naturally have concerns about our families, our church, our nation, our jobs, etc. Jesus is not calling us to a life of carelessness, neglect, or indifference.

However, in all our concerns, we must keep in mind that God is sovereign, that God is good, that God knows our needs, and that God has promised to meet our needs when we put Him first. Underlying all our concerns must remain a deep-seated trust in God’s Person and providence.

We may be “concerned” about things, but we should never descend into a pagan form of worry—as if this life is all there is. A steady confidence in God is the solution for worry. At root, worry demonstrates a lack of trust in God.

Question #2: Have godly, sincere Christians ever lacked food, drink, clothing, and shelter? Has God *always* guaranteed that *every* single sincere Christian *always* had the essentials of life? History has demonstrated that Christians have at times lacked the daily essentials of life, especially when suffering persecution. Many Christians have been starved to death; many have lacked food, clothing, and housing; we can’t deny that.

Jesus' words here relate a general principle, not an iron-clad guarantee without any exceptions. Remember that this passage of Scripture—the Sermon on the Mount—has much in common with wisdom literature (like Proverbs) in that these statements generally pertain, but may have exceptions in rare cases.

Also, Jesus is arguing that life is *more than* physical necessities. What happens in this life is not as important as is eternal spiritual life. An eternal perspective can help us retain our faith during the tough times of life when we might lack food, clothing, and shelter.

A final poem:

*Said the robin to the sparrow: "I should really like to know  
Why these anxious human beings rush about and worry so."  
Said the sparrow to the robin: "Friend, I think that it must be  
That they have no heavenly Father, such as cares for you and me."<sup>5</sup>*

Phil 4:6-7 *Be careful* (μεριμνάω—same word for “take thought” or “be anxious”) *for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

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<sup>5</sup>John R. W. Stott, *Christian Counter-Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978). Quoted in Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*.

Blame-Shifting – Rejecting