

INTRODUCTION

Worry. It is one of the most common yet destructive habits. And I think it's fair to say we all struggle with it and find it to be debilitating. Yet we do it anyway. Jesus was well aware of this human tendency and warned often about it, including in the very center of His Sermon on the Mount.

Today we begin a three week consideration of the final 10 verses of Matthew, Chapter 6 which I have titled “The Angst of Anxiety.” “Angst” is a word that comes to us from the Danish, Norwegian, Dutch and German, which describes an intense feeling of apprehension and inner turmoil. So my title, “The Angst of Anxiety,” indicates that there is an intense feeling of apprehension and turmoil that comes from worry. Sometimes we feel as though worry is our privilege and even that it can be a path to solving our problems. But God teaches us in Scripture that this is a myth and a fiendish lie of the enemy. Worry is never helpful. Anxiety always brings unnecessary angst. And ultimately, we will see that worry is the enemy of trusting in God.

Before we launch into a consideration of the Scripture, let me share with you some thought provoking quotations I found on the subject of worry.

“Worry never robs tomorrow of its sorrow, it only saps today of its joy.” **Leo Buscaglia**

“Worry often gives a small thing a big shadow.” **Swedish Proverb**

“Worry is like a rocking chair: it gives you something to do but never gets you anywhere.”
Erma Bombeck

“Rule number one is, don’t sweat the small stuff. Rule number two is, it’s mostly all small stuff.”
Robert Eliot

“When I look back on all these worries, I remember the story of the old man who said on his deathbed that he had had a lot of trouble in his life, most of which had never happened.”
Winston Churchill

Now let's see what Jesus has to say about worry.

Luke 6:25-29 *For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?*

And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!

VERSE 25

Part one of our lessons on anxiety is “Take A Lesson!” And Jesus’ lesson revolves around thoughtfully observing the birds of the air and the lilies of the field.

But initially, let's note from verse 25 that the general principle is that we are not to worry about provision – specifically about food, drink or clothing. And we are to realize that life is more than about personal concerns. Yes, we have needs. But (1) God will provide what we need. And (2) God wants us to have concerns that go beyond our own interests. This is basic, but don't miss the critical importance of this overarching principle for the kingdom citizen. God wants us, his chosen children, to be living our lives mostly outside of ourselves – being His ambassadors of love and grace to others. Yes, there are personal needs to be met and activities that will be about tending our own little kingdoms, but Jesus reminds us here that our life is to be about far more than this.

VERSE 26

Then in illustration of this principle, Jesus urges His listeners to note that birds don't sow, reap or gather for their food, yet God provides their need. This is essential truth, and what is typically remembered about this illustration. And yet it is not the "kicker" of the lesson. We get that in the next statement, taught as a question to be pondered: *"Are you not worth much more than they?"* The critical truth that Jesus wants us to remember about this illustration is that we are of far greater value than birds – of eternal value and "made in the image of God" value. And therefore we are to ponder that God will surely take better care of His human children than He does the birds of the air.

You are never forgotten or forsaken by your loving Heavenly Father. To be anxious about His care for you is an exercise in futility. And further, anxiety is questioning his Fatherly love and care.

VERSE 27

Then Jesus adds an additional consideration in verse 27. He says that worry can't add a single hour to life. Now of course, we know that literally this is true. Worry will never help the situation in giving more time for the solution. And yet it could be said that worry does steal or negate time, in the sense that it wastes time that could be better spent in trusting and strategizing through the problem.

This verse could just as accurately be translated in this way: "And who of you be being worried can add a single cubit to his stature?" That makes a lot more sense to me, for the goal of worry is to benefit one's state – but worry will never accomplish this.

Dale Carnegie said it in this way: *"If you can't sleep, then get up and do something instead of lying there worrying. It's the worry that gets you, not the lack of sleep."* The practical lesson: do something to alleviate the anxiety rather than dwell on the anxiety. And sometime the very best thing we can do is to *"be still and know that I am God."* (Psalm 46:10) Or to quote the translation I like the best (NASB): *"Cease striving and know that I am God."* Quit stressing over it and let God do His thing!

VERSES 28-30

Jesus continues his illustration from nature asking us to carefully observe the beauty of flowers – using specifically the lily of the field – a common flower, almost like a weed, yet one with exceptional beauty. His point is that even the most common flower, or blade of grass, is clothed by God as beautifully as king Solomon was ever clothed. And what am I supposed to learn from this consideration? Again – my worth is far greater to God than flowers, and He will surely take care of my need of clothing or any other need for which I am worried.

Note that Jesus does not say how this need will be met. He simply assures us that it will be met. It might be met by a pure miracle provision from His hand. But most likely He will meet the need either through our own self-effort or through a friend or agency being led by God to assist and provide, or by some combination of both. Either way, the provision will be from the Lord.

Note also that Jesus is not speaking to all mankind, but to His own – to those who are His faithful kingdom citizens. We cannot expect that all in the world will have every need provided for. The promise is for God's own. Just as God provided for and protected His own in Egypt while the plagues raged, He will care for His own in their need as the storms of life rage on.

YOU OF LITTLE FAITH!

The very last of verse 30 has Jesus saying, "[Oh] you of little faith!" And this will be our primary consideration of next week's lesson. But suffice it for now to know that we must bolster our faith to trust our God more and wait on His provision patiently. Remember, He loves you and cares for you more than the birds of the air and flowers of the field. And as surely as they are provided for, He will surely provide for you. Trust Him, believing He is at work on your behalf.

A FINAL THOUGHT

Worry breeds impatience. When we worry our mind darts about from here to there trying to figure out how to fix whatever situation we're worrying about. And the sin in this is that we're trying to fix the

problem rather than trusting God to do it. We get impatient and are prone to rush into a solution that is not led of the Lord.

Worry and its subsequent impatience robs us of at least 3 important treasures:

1. **The joy of the present.** Worry can't change our past or future, but it can rob us of enjoying the present. Worry makes us think that being somewhere else or being with someone else is more important, and we lose the joy of the present. How many precious moments are lost with our loved ones because we are so preoccupied with worry and impatience and want to be doing something else. Worry can rob us of the joy of the present.
2. **Growing in the Lord.** Worry at its core is sin, because it is essentially lack of trust in God. Difficult situations can become a stepping stone to deeper spiritual maturity if we trust and allow God to work through our struggle. But when we worry and get impatient we rob ourselves of the benefit of growing closer to God.
3. **Trust in the Lord.** If you think about it, worry is questioning whether God is running His universe well at that moment. And it is questioning whether God is giving me the attention I deserve at that moment. Worry is the enemy of trusting in God. And sincere trusting in God chases away worry. They are mutually exclusive.

SO DON'T LET WORRY ROB YOU of the (1) joy of the moment, of (2) growing in the Lord and (3) trusting God. You can make a choice to TRUST and not be anxious.

"That the birds of worry and care fly over your head, this you cannot change, but that they build nests in your hair, this you can prevent."

Chinese Proverb

"Come to Me, all who are weary [= anxious] and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

Jesus (Matthew 11:28)