

## Consider the Birds

We are so glad that you have joined us as we start a new three-part series called "Anxious About Nothing."

For the next three weeks we are going to explore what the God in the Bible has to say about America's favorite pastime... worry. **Worry**

This is a good topic because many of us are perhaps more worried than we have ever been before. With all the things going on in the world with Covid, rising inflation, the global economy, global warming, the supply chain, politics and the normal stuff that happens: floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, crime, drugs, etc. there are a lot of things that can cause uncertainty, concern, anxiety, stress and worry.

So we thought it might be interesting to see what God had to say about worry and to see if there are life lessons that we can learn from His word on this topic. Fortunately, as we are going to see, worry is not a new concern. It concerned the people of Jesus' day too and Jesus had a lot to tell us about worry.

In fact, over the next three weeks, we are going to learn that Jesus has a solution to worry that you will not find in any of the self-help books, relaxation seminars, meditation groups, self-discovery escape weekends, or fidget toys.

Jesus, we will see, took a radical and yet life changing approach to the subject of worry. We are excited that our church over the next few weeks can learn together to face the future God's way.

We are going to be in the 6th chapter of Matthew if you want to turn there with me. Also, I by no means have this topic mastered. This is not me telling you how the great lessons that I have learned about worry and passing them on to you. This is about me joining all of you and saying, "let's learn together what Jesus teaches about worry."

What are you afraid of? Fear acts on the mind to create a physiological response that we call stress or anxiety. It is the fight or flight response. It is a normal response to a perceived or real threat. Everyone fears. Fear is not always sinful. You send your son off to war, your child gets their drivers license, your daughter goes out on a date. There are real fears there. Everyone has them.

Fear is our response to danger that is real or perceived. There is no such thing as an irrational fear....to the person who experiences it.

### **Fear is vision without optimism**

So what are some perceived fears? **(I will tell you when to show the slides)**

**Coulrophobia-** fear of clowns

**Iatrophobia-** Fear of Doctors

**Gemophobia** fear of knees

**Astraphobia** fear of thunder and lightening

**Ephelaphobia** fear of teenagers

**Homilophobia**- fear of sermons

One of the most common repeated instructions to us in the Bible is "fear not." "Fear not" can sound like a command. It can seem harsh and insensitive.

**"Fear Not" is actually an invitation.**

It is God's way of saying that there is a choice and He is inviting you to choose to not fear. It is God's way of looking you in the eye in love and saying "Fear Not. I am your Dad. I love you. I am here. You are not alone. I am with you. It is going to be alright." Jesus invites us to look to the future and fear not.

Some take 'Fear Not' as a command to be lazy. Scriptures clearly instruct us to prepare for the future. But some of us are lazy or irresponsible or immature and thus we don't plan, we don't do our best, we don't work hard, or we don't honor God because we figure that if Jesus said fear not then we will not plan or prepare. If that is you, you need to fear.

No follower of Jesus is to have a lazy, unprepared, passive, or half-hearted approach to the future. It seems that the entire book of Proverbs and numerous other passages in Scripture instruct us about working hard, giving God your best effort, planning for the future, managing your resources, storing up, preparing, anticipating your future, and getting ready for it.

Nowhere in the Bible are we told to just sit around and let God take care of everything. We are told to plan and prepare, but we are also told not to freak out about it. Do all that you can and then trust God with the part that only God can do. The goal is to be ready for the future and to trust God in it, not to be preoccupied with it and worry about it.

**Every fear is an opportunity to either run to or run from God as the source of our comfort and hope.**

How cool is it that Jesus is talking about these issues that are so pertinent to our lives? The most commonly prescribed drugs are anti-depressants and anxiety meds. Also in the top ten are medications for a related condition- insomnia. People are anxious and stressed out. They are freaked out and struggling. Jesus loves us so he wants to help us with fear and worry. The Great American Pastime is worry.

He understands because He walked on this planet. We don't pray to a God who can't identify with our fears and worries. Jesus tries to lead us in a new way of life because it is good for us and He loves us. It saddens Him to see us worried.

At one point Jesus looked over a crowd and the Bible said He had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus loves us and wants us to stop worrying.

But fear manifests itself as anxiety or worry. It is the emotion that is behind the action of worry. There are many different definitions of worry so let me give you mine.

**Worry is a preoccupation with both predicting and trying to control the future.**

Now there are all different kinds of worriers and many of you are represented in our audience. Some of you we need to check your pulse to make sure that you are alive because you don't worry about anything.

In fact, your wife or husband or others are worried about you because they can't get you to worry. So if you are in that group you can probably check out for a while and we will all join you later. Just chill out...I don't even have to tell you that do I?

Then there are those at the opposite extreme of the spectrum where you worry about everything. Your friends are arranging interventions to keep you from worrying. You carry around the burdens of the world and you worry, worry, worry. It is as if you feel like God had just given you worry as a spiritual gift.

Other people don't have to worry as much because you have it covered for them. So you worry about everything and it drives you crazy. You have tried to worry less but that is like trying not to think about something. It just makes you do it more.

You are actually a false prophet- you predict the future but you are usually wrong. Your future is bleak and then you will freak out until it doesn't happen.

Then the rest of us are somewhere in the middle, but with all that has been happening in our world we find ourselves more worried than we have ever been before. We start to play the "what if" game and then our thoughts begin to escalate.

Research shows that only 8% of the things people worry about are legitimate matters of concern. The other 92% were either imaginary, never happened, or involved things that people had no control over anyway.

Walt Whitman said this, **"I have experienced many horrible things in my life....some of which actually happened."** Does that describe you?

Jesus asked if you think that you can add a single hour to your life by worrying. Then He goes on to explain that if worrying doesn't extend your life, if worrying has the potential to shorten your life, and if worrying doesn't enhance or improve whatever you consider more important than your life, then why in the world would we worry?

It does not make any sense at all. It is totally illogical. So as your pastor, I just want to say this to you. STOP IT. Let's close in prayer.

It could almost be that simple, couldn't it? We all know that rationally it makes no sense at all and yet the topic of worry fills bookshelves, talk shows, Internet sites, and drives a huge part of our consumption mentality in advertising.

Even though we have all of these resources to help us with worry, we still haven't solved the problem. Why is that? Because worry is not the problem it is the symptom. A symptom of a much bigger problem. Please make sure you tune in here.

The problem is the focus of our devotion. In other words, the disease that we have is that we are focused the wrong things and the symptom of that disease is worry. That is what we want to explore over the next three weeks.

We are going to look at what Jesus has to say about worry. We try to deal with worry in the emotional or physical realm- calm down, take deep breaths, get some sleep, meditate, relax, and pamper yourself.

But Jesus says, that he wants to take away the mystery of worry, move it out of the emotional realm and deal with it as a devotion issue- a spiritual devotion issue. Jesus is always using the physical to make a spiritual point.

### **Worry identifies your greatest devotion.**

If you want to know what is the thing you are most devoted to, examine what you worry about. Jesus is going to teach us that the things you worry about reflect your core devotion. Then He is going to give us the key to resolving worry and it is reflected in this question.

What would happen in your life with your worry if you shifted your devotion? Now that is an amazing thought. The Bible is awesome and Jesus is brilliant and this is where He is going to take us over the next few weeks.

Let's jump into this discussion that Jesus launches on the topic of worry. It is interesting that when Jesus decided to teach on worry, He did so in the context of a topic. Guess which topic he launched it with? Let's read.

**Matthew 6:24 (ESV) 24 "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.**

Can you believe it? Jesus is going after your stuff! You need to learn about worry and anxiety and Jesus goes to your stuff. Jesus are you kidding me? I am freaking out. What does my stuff have to do with my stress? Is this just another sermon where you take my stuff?

Jesus would say, I am not trying to take your stuff, I am trying to take your stress and a lot of your stress is connected to your stuff.

Interesting, if you ask people today what they are most worried about...money. What an amazing coincidence. Boy was Jesus lucky that what He taught on is still important to us today. Whodathunk it?

The latest poll says that 70% of Americans are most concerned about their personal finances and the finances of the country. So Jesus is looking to the future, to us, and says, lets launch a discussion about worry around the topic of money.

This is unexpected. I have never read a self-help book on stress reduction that focuses on my stuff. Also, do you see that word "devoted"? That is going to come up over and over in this discussion. You can't be fully devoted to God and be fully devoted to your stuff.

You have to decide which one you will be most devoted to. You are going to be forced to make decisions where you have to place your God values over your stuff values. When it comes down to it, you have to know which one you are most devoted to.

**Matthew 6:25 (ESV) 25 "Therefore I tell you,**

Whenever you see the word "therefore" in the Bible, ask yourself what is it there for? It connects two thoughts. What Jesus is doing is connecting what He just spoke about, that you can't serve both God and your stuff, with what He is about to say next. What do you expect Him to say next? He just said you can't serve God and Money. You might expect Him to say give away everything so that you will be fully devoted to God.

But most likely, we would just worry about how to get it all back. The problem is not having money, the problem is money having you. It is a problem with your devotion. So Jesus continues.

**Matthew 6:25 (ESV) 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.**

Don't be anxious about life? Wow Jesus that is broad. What do you mean? He says I know what you think about every day. You wake up and wonder what you are going to eat. They lived in a different time. They did not have food stored up. They had clothes that wore out and clothes were extremely expensive to weave in their day. What are we going to wear?

Jesus would say to his audience, I don't want you to worry about that stuff. Today it would sound different. He might say don't worry about if you are going to be able to retire, don't worry about whether or not your kids are going to get into the school of their choice, don't worry about whether or not you are going to be single the rest of your life, don't worry about what will happen if you get Covid.....

Don't worry about who is President or who is not....don't worry about whether or not you will be able to find a job that you love, Don't worry about what the doctor said or didn't say....don't worry about keeping your job, don't worry about your industry, don't worry about your prodigal son or your prodigal daughter, don't worry about your health, don't worry about if you will ever have children...don't get mad at me... I didn't say this. Jesus did. Jesus said, Don't worry about your ...LIFE. Worry is a completely worthless activity. It steals your today and chokes you emotionally.

**The problem of worrying about your future is that it steals your present.**

Ok...Jesus are you saying that those things are not important? We have to eat. It is better that we wear clothes. No one wants cancer. No one embraces infertility.....No Jesus would say, all of them

are very important. Your retirement, academics, jobs, industries, children, bank account, and health, Jesus would say, are very important.

As Christ followers we are to consider and have concern about the future but we are not to worry or obsess over what will happen. And He would say that there is a great deal of uncertainty in the future of those things. In some areas, it is not going to all work out perfect and fine. But you still don't have to worry about it.

Jesus taught them and He wants to teach us that there is a way to face the uncertainty of *tomorrow* but not worry about it *today*.

Jesus says that when it comes to your life...stop worrying. Jesus then you have to help us out. So Jesus goes on and asks a big question.

**Matthew 6:25 (ESV) 25 Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?**

Now truthfully, this sounds like hippie talk doesn't it? Don't worry. Look at the birds. Look at the flowers. Don't worry about food. Don't worry about what you will drink. Don't worry about clothes. Life is not about food. Life is not about clothing. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Hippie talk.

Jesus are you serious? I am stressing out and you are starting to sound like Tiny Tim tiptoeing through the tulips. But do you see what Jesus is doing? It is so wise and so incredible.

He is trying to pull us out of our hyper-focus on ourselves. Jesus is asking you to pull back a bit and look at life from a different perspective. There are components of our life that are important: retirement, kid's success, health, getting married, having kids, those are all very important things worthy of our consideration but Jesus would ask, are any of those components more important than life?

If those things don't go well are you going to end it all? He just indicates that we should just pull back from our focus on ourselves and get a more realistic perspective. Then He goes to what seems like an insensitive suggestion.

**Matthew 6:26 (ESV) 26 Look at the birds of the air:**

What?! Are you kidding me Jesus? I don't have time to look at the birds of the air- I need a job. I don't have time to look at the birds of the air, my son is failing the 8th grade, I don't have time to look at the birds of the air, I have no transportation. I don't have time to look at the birds of the air, I have cancer. I don't have time to look at the birds of the air, my husband says he is not coming back. No offense Jesus, look at the birds of the air...are you kidding me?

You said don't worry. Am I just supposed to get a surfboard and a latte and hang out in Key West? Don't Worry? Look at the Birds? Are you kidding me? I think Jesus would say, let me know when you are done..... Are you finished?

Then He would say, I am not discounting the importance of any of those things. But the reason you are so worried is that you are so hyper-focused on those things and your devotion goes where your focus is. Then your emotion follows your devotion and it is a big mess and you are in a tailspin.

So Jesus would say, I just want to give you some advice. So Jesus what is your advice?  
Change your focus and your devotion and emotion will change too. In other words, ...  
look at the birds of the air. Move your focus from your circumstances to the birds.

**Matthew 6:26 (ESV) 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns,**

Ok Jesus, birds are not farmers. They don't combines or barns. I get that part. They take care of business but they don't worry about it. They don't store up food but God cares for them.

He is addressing their culture and here is what He would say to us. They don't have a 401K, they don't get a college education, they don't make their kids wear helmets so they never get hurt, and they don't buy their kids a tank to drive in so they will be safe.

In fact, they build their nests as high in the tree as they can and then they take their kids and just...push them out. Good luck. Ok? There is a parenting model for you.

Birds of the air just go with the flow. They don't even know what they are doing. They live by instinct and live in the moment. Head south, fly in formation, build a nest- they do those things in the moment. They don't know why they do it. And the bird you cannot change. Lord knows they can't change....Lord help them they can't change. Won't you fly high free bird?

**Matthew 6:26 (ESV) 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?**

Jesus says that they don't even know what they are doing and God takes care of them. Do you think God is more concerned about you, who were made in His image, than a bird? In the story of creation God made a lot of cool stuff, but when He got to man, He said this is different. I am making man and woman in my image. They bear my imprint. When I see them I think about me. They are a reflection of me.

When they see me I want them to know how much I love them. In fact, I am going to send a Savior into the world, but not as a bird, a flower, a goat, a cow, no I am going to send my Son into this world in the form of a human being.

So before you jump back into worrying about what is going to happen tomorrow, do you believe that God loves you more than He loves a bird?

Jesus teaches something that I have never seen in any self-help book and it is simple, significant and powerful. It seems that all self-help books focus on what you need to do internally. They are about paying attention to yourself, get to know yourself, loving yourself, finding your center, changing your self-talk, pamper yourself, create "me" time, get a massage, take a vacation, or do something just for you.

But Jesus redirects all of your focus away from yourself. Jesus teaches that the problem is that **all you have been** doing is focusing on yourself. You are hopelessly devoted to you. He wants us to redirect our focus away from us. He says that if all you do is focus on yourself you are going to be worried and stressed out. Focusing on yourself does not work.



Jesus is right. If focusing on you worked, the bookshelves would not be full of books on stress management and Prozac, Xanax, Ambien and all their friends would not be flying off the pharmacy shelves.

Jesus is saying look I told you not to worry and now I want to share with you *why* you can live your life without worry. I want to tell you why you can face uncertainty without worry.

I am telling you why you cannot know where your next job is going to come from and not worry. I am telling you why you cannot know if your kids are going to graduate from high school and not worry. I am telling you why if you are single and don't now if you will ever get married you don't have to worry. I am telling you that you can have cancer and you don't have to worry.

Jesus is saying, I am not asking you to go into denial. I know and understand the uncertainty of the future but I am teaching you that you can live in uncertainty and not worry all at the same time. Jesus wants to take us somewhere.

His point is not to be irresponsible and hope that it all works out. That is fatalism. This isn't trusting in fate that it will all work out.

Jesus is inviting us to trust in the Heavenly Father. Jesus wants you to sow and reap, fill out applications, study as hard as you can, learn all that you can learn, work as hard as you know how, go knock on doors, ask people out, do your best in every situation, set goals, make plans, make sacrifices, push yourself...go to the doctor...go to the specialists.....do all that stuff.

But once you have done all that you can do today....I want you to relax and embrace the truth that God loves you more than the birds. You do your very best in every circumstance and then once you know that you have done what you can do, you remember that you don't have to worry about tomorrow. Do all that you possibly can do in this day...and then let it go...give the rest to God and He will give you rest.

Then Jesus says that if you don't like that idea or you think it is too simplistic to work let me remind you of the alternative.

**Matthew 6:27 (ESV) 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?**

Answer...No one. But being anxious can make your life miserable...maybe that will make it seem longer. I don't know. Jesus is saying, ok if you think my plan is too simple. Then go ahead and keep worrying about what if..what if.. what if.. or what about...what about ...what about.

What if I don't...What if they can't...what if she won't ...what if ...what if...Go ahead and get super high focused on those things and then ask yourself if what you are doing is helping yourself.

Jesus would ask, Can you by worrying today, bring certainty to the next day? No! Jesus says, if your worry isn't going to get you anywhere, I have an idea.....Look at the birds of the air and focus on this revolutionary idea.

**God loves you more than He loves the birds.**



And if God loves me that much and I have done all that I know to do. I sow, I reap, I store away in barns. If I have done all that I can do today... that I do have some control over, can God be trusted in tomorrow that I have no control over?

And if so.....sigh....I am not going to worry. And I am not, not going to worry because I know what is going to happen in the future. I am not going to worry because I know and trust in the only One who can do anything about the future.

**I don't now what the future holds but I can relax because I know the only One who holds the future.**

Matthew 6:28-30 (ESV) 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?

Matthew 6:30 (ESV) 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?

You see worry is a devotion issue. Worry is a faith issue. Worry is an indication of a lack of faith.

Our emotions get attached to the things that we are most devoted to. Jesus says that you are so wrapped up in your emotions that you have missed your primary devotion. Also notice that they things they worried about and the things we worry about are important things: what to eat, what to wear, what job to take, who to marry, what school to go to...Jesus doesn't say, don't worry about that stuff because it is not important. No just the opposite.

He says those things are very important. His point is not that these are things you shouldn't be concerned about. His point is that these are things you don't need to worry about.

Jesus says the issue is do you trust your Father in heaven? You worry because you really deep down don't trust God with your future. It is not that you can't. It is that you won't. It is clearly your choice. This is so powerful. Oh you of little...faith.

Failing to trust Jesus is a choice. It is not "I can't" it is "I won't." We have chosen worry. You don't have to worry, you just choose it as your best option. As Christ followers it is irrational and illogical.

The God of the universe holds our future in His hands. He knows the plans that He has for us they are for good not for disaster, to give us a future and a hope. He is the only one who can do anything about our future. Whatever He decides is what we will experience.

Worriers are expressing little or no confidence in God's willingness and ability to take care of them. They doubt God's providence, doubt that God is in complete control.

It is failing to realize that nothing touches us that didn't first go through His hands. Jesus is telling us that there is far more out of our control than we could ever imagine.

I know where we get stuck. We say, I know God can but I don't know if God will. I know God can find me the perfect spouse, but I don't know if God will. I know God can

heal my cancer, but I don't know if God will. I know God can get me a perfect job, but I don't know if God will.

Jesus says....well....maybe you don't know what God will do because....you have never really trusted Him. Break free from your worry and just trust Him.

**Worry is a choice.**

We have made the choice to not trust God with our future and we have decided that we would rather worry. When we try to predict the future and control it, we are trying to be God.

It is not a sin to anticipate the future, plan for it, and be prepared for it. But when we try to control it and when we are fearful of it and when we are anxious about it then we are in the position that is reserved for God. We have made the choice to focus our devotion on ourself and our circumstances rather than choosing devotion to God. I think what Jesus is telling us is this....

**If it is out of your hands and you have done what you can do, don't be fearful but rather be faithful.**

What if you could wake up every day and know that God is your Heavenly Father and that He can be trusted? How would your life change? What if you woke up every day totally confident that God loves you more than the birds and the flowers and that He could and would take care of you after you have done all that you know to do to prepare for the future? What would you worry about?

You wouldn't stop worrying because the future is now certain, it most certainly is not. You wouldn't stop worrying because you now knew exactly what was going to happen in the future because you most certainly do not. You would stop worrying because you trust and place your future in the only one who can do anything about it.

Next week we will explore the solution that Jesus offers to those of us who are in bondage to worry. He is going to teach us how to shift our devotion as we continue to explore this passage in Matthew. Let's pray.