

Seek First

Well how are we doing? Have you found yourself a little less worried this week? **PHOTO 1** Did you spend some time with the lilies and birds? Or maybe I should ask it this way did you spend more time praying or more time worrying this week? Last week we kind of exposed the beast of worry and hinted at the solution.

I suspect you may have felt like I did when I got to this point in my studies, ok Jesus I get it but what is the solution? Fortunately we don't serve a God that leaves us hanging. I am glad you have returned today because that is where we are going today.

This is not something I have come close to mastering. I am a fellow traveler on Christ's path, who struggles with worry, and now joins you to learn together what Jesus has to teach us about this topic.

This is the second week of our three part series on worry. We learned last week that everyone worries and we have been doing so for at least 2000 years ago because Jesus had a lot to say about it. We mentioned last week that worry is a preoccupation with the future and trying to control it.

Worry is essentially, I am ok right at this moment, but it is the future minutes and days that I am not sure about. Worry is trying to control tomorrow or to obtain certainty for tomorrow.

But the truth is that you have never at any point of your life or in any category of your life been able to control the future. There has never been any certainty about the future and at times we are just reminded of how uncertain things really are.

That is when worry kicks in. Worry is about in this moment trying to capture the attention of God or somehow being able to harness power to where there is certainty about tomorrow. What Jesus said was absolutely incredible

For those who were not here last week, I want to make three quick comments to bring you up to speed so that we can explore what Jesus wants to teach us today. In the part of the passage that we studied last week, Jesus made three amazing points that I want to review.

You cannot add anything to your life by worrying.

You have never been able to harness the future, or reach into the future, or manipulate the future by worrying. You don't add any time to your life and your don't impact anything that will happen to you by worrying so basically, Jesus reminds us, it is a waste of time. Which means it is a waste of your life since your life= your time.

By saying don't worry, Jesus is not saying don't care.

One of our problems is that when we read the verses where Jesus says don't worry, we interpret that as Jesus saying "well don't care." In other words, I want a job. Jesus says don't worry so I won't fill out any applications, won't go on interviews, and won't chase leads because Jesus said don't worry.

So you say that you will not worry about it or care about it. That is not what Jesus is teaching. In fact, if you follow the life of Jesus you never find a shred of irresponsibility, you will never find a shred of Jesus saying that it will all just work out, and you will never find a shred of evidence of Jesus saying “who cares?” Don’t worry is not the same as saying don’t care.

Last week we learned that Jesus taught the opposite. Jesus is not advocating irresponsibility. Don’t worry does not mean get a surfboard, a latte, and hang out in Key West. It means that you don’t have to have a pile of anxiety over something that you have no control over which is the future.

Jesus said that God expects us to do all that we can do today to the best of our ability, but once we have done all that we can do we do not need to worry about tomorrow because your Heavenly Father cares for you. In fact, look at how He cares for the birds and you are far more important than the birds.

The things that you are most devoted to are the things that you worry about the most.

If you want to know what you are really most devoted to, track your worries. Because your worries lead you to the point of your greatest devotion.

So one of the best questions that we can ask as we think about the things that we worry about is this: If the things that I worry about reflect my devotions, what am I most devoted to?

That is where Jesus picks up the thought and then takes us to a solution. Because if what we are devoted to determines what we worry about then if we could redirect our devotion we would conquer in many cases our incessant need to worry about the future.

So let’s pick up where we left off last week. Matthew 6:28

Matthew 6:28–29 (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.

Remember that we discussed that Jesus instructed us to take a lesson from nature in order to pull back from our hyper focus on ourselves.

Remember that He told us to look at the birds and lilies and we said we don’t have time to look at the birds and lilies because we have to pay our mortgage, work on our 401K, and all the other stuff that we have to do.

Jesus said, “No wait, I am trying to help you. So just back up a little bit because I want you to consider what I have done, have been doing, and what you have taught your children that I have done, and grew up believing that I did.

Jesus says, “Don’t lose sight of all that you have believed your whole life about me because this is part of helping you overcome your worry.” So Jesus continues in verse 30.

Matthew 6:29–30 (ESV) 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,

Again Jesus is taking us back. “Do you think God is God?” Yes. “Do you think God is in control?” Well yes. “Do you think God started this whole thing?” Well yes. “Do you think God is behind it and keeps everything in order?” Well yes.

Then Jesus says, “Ok if you are that far along in your faith, why would you stop short of the next step?” Then this is the part where He kind of twists the knife a bit. This is where we ended last week.

Matthew 6:30b (ESV) 30...O you of little faith?

This is huge. Even if you stop here and don’t get anything else, get your doggie bag and take this home.

There is a relationship between the size of your faith and the size of your worry.

Jesus says that the reason your worries are so big is that your faith is so little.

It is interesting that Jesus takes two Greek words and combines them together. It is almost as if he is playing with them and sort of poking fun at them. This word does not show up in any other Greek literature. It is a compound word that Jesus made up his own word here that literally means “you little faith wimp”

I think He is poking fun at them. He is saying that you have already believed the harder to believe part why don’t you just let your faith go to the next step and say “You know what, I don’t know how it is going to work out but I know I can’t control the future, I have spun and I have sowed and I have reaped and saved and I have done all that I know to do.

I worked hard, filled out the application, showed up at the interview, followed every lead and have done everything that I know to do. I can trust God with tomorrow. Jesus says that the reason that you are so worried is that your faith is so small. You little faither you.

Jesus teaches that there is a relationship between your faith and your worry. People with huge faith don’t worry much. In fact they bother you because they have the same set of circumstances as you do and they are not worried.

Some of you have had the privilege of interfacing with people who really don’t worry. In fact their circumstances are worse, their future is darker, their future is far more unsure; they have done all that they can do but they don’t seem to worry. They don’t seem to be afraid.

You think what I think when I meet those people. Wow I don’t know how I would handle that. I am glad that is not me. If that happened to me I would be a nervous wreck. I don’t know how I would get out of bed each morning if I was going through all of that and yet they just seem to be not fine but just not worried. What is that?

You have just met someone with big faith because the bigger your faith, the smaller your worry.

Jesus says we need to talk about faith. You don't stop worrying by trying to stop worrying. Jesus says ok I am going to tell you how, but you have to first see the connection here. If you don't understand the problem, you will never embrace the solution.

It is a faith problem. Your faith is small. You have not allowed your faith to go to the next step. You haven't even followed your faith to its logical conclusions. God did all of that...do I think God can handle this? Oh you of little faith...Jesus moves on.

Matthew 6:31 (ESV) 31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

As we said last week, those were the worry points of the people in His culture. In His culture, it was day to day and hand to mouth. Today, we have different worry points and Jesus might say something like this, don't worry saying, where am I going to find a job in this economy,

how am I going to sell my house in this economy, how am I going to pay for my kids college, how am I going to apply for the scholarship, how am I going to get into that school, how can I ensure a future for myself? How can I control the outcome of these things? How can I somehow harness God's power for my future plans?

Jesus says don't spend your time stressing out over those things. Listen carefully, it is not because they are not important. They are very important. Not because you should be care less and not care. That is not His point at all.

Don't worry about those things after you have done all you can do. Don't sit around worrying about the future. Then Jesus really kind of twists the knife. He is still just kind of playing with them. He still hasn't given us a solution.

Matthew 6:32a (ESV) 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things,

Ouch! The Gentiles, the pagans. These are the people who don't even believe that there is a God. Jesus is going look, come on look, you guys believe that there is a God, that He is actively involved in your life, and that He has been caring for you in your past? Yes.

Jesus is saying that you believe all that and you are getting bent out of shape over your future...you are acting like people who don't even know there is a God. You are living your life practically as an atheist.

You are saying yes I believe but that is irrelevant...I have to worry...stress out....overmedicate...I have to take the edge off. Jesus says that if you do that you are acting like a person who doesn't even believe that there is a God.

Now we live in a culture where everyone has concerns about the future. Jesus is saying, look, when you -share your story with people in the marketplace, who have the same worries that you do, your response should be so different that they are amazed.

In other words, they should be able to look at your circumstances and say, "Wow you don't seem worried. You seem to care. You seem to be a responsible person. But aren't you worried? Aren't you afraid? How do you sleep at night? Aren't you freaked out? What are you going to do? How are you going to get through this?"

Why don't you seem to be as out of control as my other friends who have the same situation?" Jesus says this is your opportunity to shine brighter than ever before.

We believe that we exist as a church to shine a light on Jesus so that our community can see Him clearly. This little light of mine, I am going to let it shine

I think as a church, as a culture, as a Christian this is our opportunity. We are at a place as a nation where there is more concern and uncertainties than we have ever faced before.

Those of us who face the same circumstances but refuse to be bound by worry- shine our light brighter.

Jesus says that if you get sucked into or distracted by worry there might as well not even be a God for you. You are acting like an atheist. This is your opportunity to shine brighter for me than ever before.

The difference is not the circumstances that you find yourself in, the difference is your response.

Don't worry, get bent out of shape, or freak out about the future. That is what people who don't think that there is a Heavenly Father worry about.

You should be different. Still though Jesus has not given us an answer to the worry problem. But listen to how Jesus finishes out this thought.

Matthew 6:32 (ESV) 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

Do you believe that your Heavenly Father knows that you need these things? Do you really believe that? Wouldn't it make a huge difference if you were to live your life as if you really believed your Heavenly Father knew?

Imagine if an angel came to you tonight and just told you...Hey God knows....He knows. That's all he said...He knows. Would that be extraordinarily comforting?

If you just knew for certain that God knows. Even if nothing changes, even if you don't know what God is going to do, even if you had no idea about tomorrow, isn't there comfort in those words...He knows?

Because if ...HE...knows and He is not worried about it. If He knows and He is on it, then I don't really have to be as worried.

So Jesus reminds us and says, ok so by the way, in case you were not paying attention or missed it, please hear this.....your Heavenly Father knows that you need them.

Which means that they are important. The good news is that your heavenly Father knows and because He knows, you don't have to worry. That is why the bigger your faith the smaller your worry.

IF you could come to the conclusion that I really believe that God knows what I need, God knows about my loneliness, God knows about the stress, God knows about the marriage, God knows about the house, God knows about my industry, God knows about my cancer...

If I really were confident that God knew all of that, what would happen to my stress level? What would happen to my worry level?

Jesus says I know what would happen. It would shrink big time and so Jesus says "your heavenly Father knows that you need them all."

And now...drumroll.....Jesus comes to the solution. He has poked fun at us and told us that we don't have as much faith as a bird or a flower, you are as bad as the pagans, you don't have any faith, and you are a bunch of little faith wimps.

Now he tells us that there is something that we can do other than trying not to worry. Jesus says I am going to tell you what it is. He then goes back to this idea that He introduced at the beginning of the passage when He said that you cannot serve both God and your stuff. The issue is your devotion.

Jesus says that the solution to worry is to redirect your devotion.

The solution to worry is not to try to stop worrying or to try to convince yourself that it doesn't matter. The solution Jesus tells us is to redirect your devotion. Listen to how He opens the statement that gives us the solution. You have probably heard this before.

Matthew 6:33a (ESV) 33 But seek first

That is a big but, a big contrast to all that we have said so far. But seek first. In other words, what you have been seeking first is the wrong thing.

What you have been extraordinarily devoted to is leading you to the valley of worry. What you have been seeking first is why you are where you are emotionally.

You have been devoted to the wrong thing and where you are is the result of seeking first the wrong thing. So Jesus says, I want to give you the solution.

The Solution for worry is a transfer of devotion. You transfer your devotion by spending time processing with God rather than yourself.

Your devotion determines where your emotions are and your emotions determine what you are worrying about. So here is the solution to worry.

Matthew 6:33 (ESV) 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,

But seek first...as opposed to school, your job, your house, your kids, singleness, loneliness...all those things are very important because your Heavenly Father knows all about them.

But as long as they are your primary devotion, as long as financial security is your primary devotion, as long as your primary devotion is a getting married, as long as your primary devotion is getting into the right school or getting the right job. As long as those are your primary devotion than you are just going to worry.

But Jesus is inviting you into a whole new way of living and thinking. Jesus is saying that if you feel like loving me, it you've got the notion, I second that emotion. So, if you feel like giving me a lifetime of devotion, I second that emotion.

This is Jesus' invitation for every one of us to surrender our entire lives to Him. Not a segment. Not just the area that you are worried about. Jesus says I want there to be a reversal in your devotion.

I want you to seek first my kingdom and my righteousness. Which means I want you to seek my agenda for the world and put your agenda second. You may have heard this said,

Worrying is like prayer in reverse.

When you pray your issues become small and God becomes really big. But when you worry, God becomes small and your issues become really big. It is true isn't it?

When you worry you take one issue in your life and you blow it up in your mind until that is all that you can see or focus on. (Pull out Balloon) Every worry adds air to the balloon.

My boss didn't seem to smile at me and say hello this morning. She had a meeting with her boss yesterday and they were in there a long time. Our company has struggled under the economy My review is coming up next week She is going to fire me! We just bought the new house We are going to lose the house We are going to have to live with my parents in Alaska

I hate cold weather even birds know to fly South. Maybe I should look at the birds...where did that thought come from? I haven't got time for birds, there is no work for me there, I make surfboards We won't have any money We are not going to have any food to eat. Food pantries have food, but what if all they have is peanut butter? I have arachibutyrophobia the fear of peanut butter sticking to the roof of my mouth.

I am not eating it. If I can't eat I am going to starve I am going to die skinny and frozen like a Popsicle. The Alaska tundra is frozen solid, what if they can't bury me? I am going to have to be cremated. Oh God, why are you allowing all of this to happen to me? Don't you care? Why are you doing all these things to me?

Do you see what worry does to you? We get hyper focused on the one thing and it just gets bigger and bigger and bigger. It is as if our worry acts like air in a balloon

and the more we worry the bigger our problem gets. We become totally distracted about something that more often than not never happens.

So Jesus addressed worry to us and he does something that I have not found in any self-help books or seminars.

Jesus actually offers us a solution to the problem of worry. **The antidote to worry is prayer.**

Prayer changes the focus of your devotion. It gives you God's perspective. All the other alternatives just help you medicate your worry or try to placate your worry by focusing on yourself.

But Jesus comes along and says actually there is a solution to your worry and this sets Him once again apart from everything and everyone else.

The problem with worry is that it is an indicator that we have a devotion problem. We have placed our issues ahead of God's Kingdom. We are going to learn next week about the action step that occurs as a consequence of the shift in our devotion.

Have you ever heard something so many times that you stopped paying attention to it? Things become familiar and we don't really think about what we are hearing. Here is what it means to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. It is not complicated. Jesus summed it up this way when He taught us to pray.

We have probably said this a million times and have probably memorized it but perhaps have heard it too many times to really think about it.

Matthew 6:9–10 (ESV) 9 Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

That means in your life, in your circumstances, in your world, in your marriage, business, finances, school, parenting, all that stuff. This is what He told us to pray. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. To accept Jesus' challenge to seek first the kingdom of God it means that you pray like this.

"Hey God. You know how badly I need my job. There are a lot of people at this company and we are all very worried. I have done everything that I know to do to reduce expenses, well... short of reducing my tithe. I have done all that I know to do to be a great employee, to honor you at work and to help our company in these tough times.

I know that you created Alaska but you know how I feel about living there, I am just saying. God you know how much I am afraid of peanut butter sticking to the roof of my mouth and how I hate cold weather. God I don't know how it is going to happen. My temptation is to obsess over what if, what if, what if.

But I have decided thy kingdom come and thy will be done on earth in my life, my world and my dirt, as it is in heaven. God...thy will be done.

Because I have made a decision that your kingdom comes before mine. If being a skinny frozen popsicle waiting for cremation somehow glorifies you and shines a light on you to others, then I am in. "

"I have decided to seek your kingdom first and my desire to have children second."
"I have decided to seek your kingdom first and address my singleness second." "I have decided to seek your kingdom first and my health second."

In other words, I have made a transfer of devotion. I am to the best of my ability going to surrender all of my life and say thy kingdom come and thy will be done. No matter what happens to me in my life.

At the end of every prayer, at the end of every day when I am tempted to worry about tomorrow, I am going to press pause. We have to develop a new conditioned reflex. Worry drives me to pray. Because I have learned that when your knees get weak, you need to pray on them.

God I am going to share my worry with you. You know what I want, I have told you that. But at the end of the day I sincerely to the best of my ability want your will to be done in my life more than I want my way.

When you make that transfer of devotion something happens to your worry. I have seen it hundreds of times. Sometimes people are forced there through brokenness. Life is so shattered and everything is taken away that they feel they have no option at all except to say I surrender.

Nothing about your circumstances changed only your heart has changed. You stop worrying by becoming devoted to something entirely different than you and your kingdom. How do we do this?

Well it starts like this. When I want to worry, I am going to pray. If you are a good worrier, you will become a great prayer warrior. You already know how to process, think, plan, and meditate on the issues of your life. The problem is that you have been processing with yourself.

Prayer is processing with Jesus, the only one who can give you his perspective, and the only one who can do anything about it. Jesus, I am going to tell you what I need. Then I know that you know. After every one of those prayers I am going to pray Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done. I will trust you with tomorrow as if I had any option anyway.

Every circumstance that you have allowed in my life is there to bring glory to you. Trials are my opportunities to shine the light of your Spirit into a dark world. When people see me not worried or freaking out....they are really seeing you.

I am praying that you would be glorified, your kingdom would be glorified, and you would shine brighter, and people would know you better because of what happens in my circumstances. That is what I want more than I want anything else.

You might say, man that scares me to death. Well there is another option. Just worry. If I open up my hands and offer God everything, what if He takes it?

Newsflash. If He wants all of it, you can't control it, He will have it anyway. I don't care how secure you think your job is, you have no idea what tomorrow holds...NONE. You have no certainty about tomorrow so why would we worry about it?

Jesus just says, I am inviting you to conquer worry in every area of your life to say...thy will be done...on earth...in my life...in my future...here....as it is in heaven. Then there is a surprise ending. The end of verse 33.

Matthew 6:33 (ESV) 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

What things? It's all the things that you have been worried about, all the things that you are concerned about, all the things that you don't have any control over, all the things you don't know how they are going to work out, all these things will be given to you as well. They will? Really?

Yes because you are more important to God than a bird. You are more important to God than a flower. You have been invited to address Him and call Him your Heavenly Father. So of course He is going to take care ...of you. Then Jesus closes with His summary statement.

Matthew 6:34 (ESV) 34 "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

In other words, when your mind begins to wrap its emotion and its concern about tomorrow. Jesus tells you to stop and say "thy will be done tomorrow." I have done all that I know to do in the now and in the today.

Rather than being anxious, I have prayed with thanksgiving, thy will be done tomorrow. I fully trust you with my tomorrow as I have sought to seek your kingdom first today.

So what are we going to do with what we have learned about worry? What does this teaching from 2000 years ago have to do with my life right now? What does Jesus want me to do based on what I have learned? How can I be more like Him?

Did you ever notice that Jesus lived his entire life here on earth very aware of a painful and horrible day looming out on His horizon? Jesus told many that His face was set to Jerusalem so that He could die on the cross.

Jesus always lived in the moment. Did you notice that Jesus never seemed to worry about His future? He always lived in the day. Even the night before He knew He would be murdered, he celebrated Passover Dinner with his disciples and there was no indication of anxiety or worry. On the day before!

He took bread and wine and said this is my body and my blood. This is my blood....He knew exactly what tomorrow held for Him, yet He was not worried about it.

Then when the moment came...when the trouble of that day pressed in and was immediate...Jesus did all that He could do and once again modeled for us how we should do the same...He fell on His knees, poured out his heart, and held nothing back as He cried out to the Father in that moment.

Jesus was anguished to the point of sweating out blood because that day had enough trouble of its own. Through prayer Jesus aligned and submitted His will to the Father's. Then when He had gained the Father's perspective, Jesus stood up, picked Himself up, set His face to the cross, trusted in His Father and said "thy will. Not mine."

Many in this room today need to do business with God. For too long we have failed to trust Him with our future. We have placed our kingdom ahead of His. We have spent all of our time worrying instead of praying. We face our future without God's perspective because we have never persisted in prayer to obtain it. We have talked more to our friends about our situations than to God.

You need to fall on your knees and submit your will, your future, and your concerns to the Father. For far too long you have failed to look Jesus in the eyes and obey His command to trust Him and fall backwards. You have sought your kingdom not His. You have wasted your life with worry. It has stolen your joy and today is the day that you say no more.

I am going to trust Jesus, perhaps for the first time in my life with the future. I am going to dedicate every moment that I have left on this earth to the Father. I am no longer going to let worry steal my life. I am going to pray until I can with confidence say your will Lord. Not mine.

Communion