

A Sermon  
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Grace Baptist Church  
Bryans Road, Maryland  
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## **Do Not Worry**

Matthew 6:19-34

Today, I'm continuing the series of sermons we began last week on the topic of generosity, especially as it relates to our stewardship of money and possessions. Last Sunday, we focused on how generosity is grounded in worship. In other words, all that we are and all that we have belong to God, who creates, redeems, and reigns. When we make our offerings to God, especially in the context of the Sunday morning service, we're acknowledging God's sovereignty in the world and in our lives. We're expressing our heartfelt devotion and allegiance to the Lord, who alone has the power to give life and to save. As the psalmist reminds us, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (24:1).

This morning, we move from the Psalms to the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus is in the midst of teaching his disciples what it means to live out the righteousness of God's kingdom together. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus covers many subjects, including how his followers should relate to money and possessions. Some of Jesus' most memorable words of instruction come from today's text: "Store up treasures for yourself in heaven"; "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"; "You cannot serve both God and money." And right after that, Jesus' exhortation, "Do not worry."

"Do not worry." This isn't Jesus' take on Bobby McFerrin's Grammy-winning song, "Don't Worry, Be Happy." If that were the case, Jesus could just move his sermon from the mount to the beach, trade in his cloak for some sunscreen, and go around turning frowns into smiles. But Jesus' words are way more than just good advice on how to live a more laid back kind of life. Actually, they're words about how to live a reign of God kind of life. Jesus is describing what life looks like for those whose one priority is devotion to God and doing the will of God.

"Do not worry." Or as it's sometimes translated, "Do not be anxious." Worry and anxiety. There's rarely a deficit of these two in our lives. In fact, most of the time, there's a surplus. Each day seems to bring a fresh supply of fears. What if I get sick? What if I lose my job? What if I'm not able to live independently? What if a storm strikes? What if I don't pass this class? What if I mess up this presentation? What if my child gets into trouble? Day by day, the what ifs just keep on coming.

Several years ago, social psychologist Daniel Gilbert looked at some data and concluded that Americans are smiling less and worrying more than they were a year ago, that happiness is down and sadness is up, that we are getting less sleep and smoking more cigarettes, that depression is on the rise." He concluded that the primary problem wasn't financial, but more a matter of uncertainty about the future. Gilbert summarized, "An uncertain future leaves us stranded in an unhappy present with nothing to do but wait. . . . Our national gloom is real enough, but it isn't a matter of insufficient funds. It's a matter of insufficient certainty."<sup>1</sup>

There's definitely a lot of truth in what Gilbert said, especially during that time of great economic distress. But I would just add that in lots of cases the insufficient funds and the insufficient certainty go closely together. We hear some of that in today's text as Jesus warns us about frantically pursuing the necessities of life. "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?" (v. 25). Granted, these words were originally addressed to Jesus' closest disciples, who had probably left their vocations in order to be with him full-time, to learn from him and to join him in announcing and practicing the reign of God. This included becoming more dependent on local hospitality and the generosity of others, through which God cared for their needs. But the fact that Jesus' call to trust God comes right alongside his words about treasures on earth and love of money shows us that we need Jesus' instruction on these matters just as much as those first disciples.

We too need to rely on God's promise that he will provide what we need. In other words, as we follow Jesus, God will see to it that we have the basics. Food, clothing, shelter, and whatever other essentials may be appropriate in our day and time. I know that leaves the door open for debate on certain items. It seems to me that transportation would probably be in there. And some might even argue that a cell phone belongs on the list of necessities. I don't want to go too deeply into things that may or may not qualify as basics of life. Suffice it to say that God knows what we need, and we should trust more in the list he compiles than the lists we often compile.

Jesus tells us that when it comes to God's care, we can learn a lot from what we see around us in God's creation. God sees to it that non-human forms of life, like birds and flowers, have what they need. Surely he will provide for us human beings as well. True, there are situations where some birds starve and some flowers fail to mature. We could all point to what seem to be exceptions to Jesus' teaching. But in this case, Jesus is the one doing the pointing. He doesn't just tell us to take a quick glance at some of the animal and plant life outside our window. Instead, he tells us to stop staring at our cell phones and take a long, patient, appreciative look at the way God gives and sustains life, moment by moment, day by day, in the creation around us. Instead of seeing the world from the angle of scarcity, where we're constantly in competition with each other for limited resources, we're called to see the world as a realm of God's generosity and providential care.

What a contrast to our frantic, anxious pursuit of possessions. In our minds and with our mouths we're saying that we trust God to provide for us. But with our spending habits, our efforts to accumulate, and our patterns of giving, we're often saying something very different. We're saying that what the heavenly Father thinks is enough isn't really enough, and that if we can just supplement his list of essentials, we can secure our lives, just to be safe. But according to Jesus, what we see as a way of securing ourselves isn't really as life-giving as we think. So he asks, "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" (v. 27). Actually, we may end up just shaving time off our lives, based on what a lot of medical research tells us.

Now don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that we should strive for a laid back kind of life where concerns don't press upon us, including our material needs. I'm not urging you to be naïve about life, thinking that "God will provide" is a substitute for hard work and careful planning. I'm not telling you to quit your job, sell your house, liquidate your retirement account, and move to some place where you can avoid all interaction with the material and financial complexities of life. I'm simply saying that the things we consume to meet our basic needs can become the very things that end up consuming us, making extreme demands on our time, attention, and resources.

One day this past week, I crossed paths with a friend whose family will soon go to closing on a new house. They've been living with extended family, in pretty cramped quarters, for awhile, so I was encouraged to hear that they'll soon have some extra space that can reduce some of the stress. But I could also tell by the cautious grin on my friend's face, and by the way he was shaking his head, that he knew some other forms of stress are coming. A higher payment. Property taxes. Insurance coverage. Maintenance and repair expenses. A longer commute. True, as Jesus says, the animals and plants are in God's care, and so are we. But those birds don't have mortgages, tuition bills, and taxes to pay. Things can get a little more complex for us humans.

But still, we each have legitimate basic daily needs. So what Jesus focuses on is our excessive worry and our excessive anxiety about whether those needs will be met, and how. In fact, at the end of our text, Jesus even acknowledges that each day will have its own share of troubles. So don't try to reach into the future, grab a handful of tomorrow's problems, and add them to today's worries. Instead, trust that wherever and whenever trouble is present, God is just as present, and that he is greater than your immediate needs. Granted, that's not a prescription for a worry-free life, but it is a way of thinking, and a way of living, that will help you stay focused on the most basic necessity of all, the kingdom of God.

There's nothing you need more than the reign of God in your life. If you have that, you have it all. That doesn't mean you can ignore the complex realities of day to day material sustenance, especially as those realities relate to money and possessions. In fact, your relationship with money and possessions is one of the critical ways that you live out your kingdom priorities. And that's because as disciples, God's reign of righteousness is supposed to be our singular focus, our primary pursuit. Seek first the heavenly Father's kingdom, his realm of justice and peace, and you'll come to see that he has all the other essentials covered: enough food, enough clothing, enough shelter, enough money, enough time, and everything else that God knows you need. Remember that if you spend your time chasing anxiously and relentlessly after these essentials, you'll miss what's most essential.

Instead, live by trust in God's care and provision. Rely upon his awareness of and responsiveness to your needs. Make God's agenda for the world your number one priority, especially when it comes to what you do with the financial and material resources he has given you. As you do, your pursuit of God's reign will take the shape of generosity.

For in addition to being an act of worship, financial generosity is an expression of faith. In other words, an offering placed in the plate is an indication of a life placed in the hands of God. When you give generously to the work of God through the church, and when you give generously in various other ways beyond the life of the church, you're demonstrating your dependence on God. You're showing that your confidence is in the heavenly Father, who knows you and knows what you need. When you're generous with God's generosity, you're living out your trust in a God who loves you, who will sustain you, and who will take care of you.

There's something about trusting in God's care and provision that frees you up from captivity to consumption and releases you from the grip of excessive worry about having enough. Faith in God gives you new eyes to see the world not as a realm of scarcity but as the creation of a generous Father who wants what's best for us, and who gives us our daily bread, so that we're nourished for the pursuit of his kingdom and righteousness. When we live with that kind of faith, we'll live generously.

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Gilbert, "What You Don't Know Makes You Nervous" (September 21, 2009). As seen in *The Week* magazine, (June 5, 2009) 14.