

Matthew 6:25-34 (1984 NIV)
What Jesus Says About Worry

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

²⁸ “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Introduction

Huang Na was an 8-year-old Chinese national living near the Pasir Panjang Wholesale Centre in Singapore, and who disappeared on 10 October 2004. Her mother, the police and the community conducted a three-week-long nationwide search for her. After her body was found, thousands attended Huang Na's wake and funeral; some gave money and gifts, such as sweets, flowers and her favourite Hello Kitty merchandise.

In a high-profile 14-day trial, Malaysian-born Took Leng How, a vegetable packer at the wholesale centre, was found guilty of murdering her and hanged after his appeal and request for presidential clemency failed.¹

This has been labelled as one of the 10 most gruesome murders in Singapore's history. The coverage of the case was widely followed by the people of Singapore. I was one of them. You must understand that I have a soft spot, for better or worse, for young children when I read, see, or hear of their suffering. So, what happened to this young girl had left me with a heavy heart.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder_of_Huang_Na

While this murder was still very much on people's lips, I was with Stacey (my younger daughter who was 10 then) looking around at some shops near where we live one night. Something in a shop caught my eyes and I stopped to look at it for a couple of minutes. When I was done, I looked around and noticed that Stacey was nowhere to be found.

Then there was this sudden panic I felt. I moved from shop to shop asking, "Did you see a young girl wearing a red T-shirt?" I got all negative answers. And an Indian lady seemed to appear before me from out of the blue saying, "Why, your son lost already?" She kept repeating the question. That made me even more worried and scared though I knew by now that this lady was a little "out of her mind".

I then saw a van parked by the side of the road. And you know what? I went over to peek into it to see if Stacey was inside, perhaps all bound up with a hood around her head. Yes, I was thinking of the worst possible scenario!

As I was trying to locate her from shop to shop, it suddenly dawned on me that I should call home and check. I did. And you guess who answered. It was Stacey. With a deep sigh of relief I asked, "Where did you go? I was looking all over for you?"

She replied, "I was also looking for you. But since I couldn't find you, I decided to walk home myself."

When I reached home later, I told God that I really felt so foolish about myself. "Why on earth did I feel so worried and panicky?" And I sensed this answer from God, "You are worried not because you worry for nothing, but you worry for your daughter whom you love. Where your worry is, there your heart is also."

Perhaps you have similar experiences like me in which you felt so foolish because you seemed to have worried for nothing. But if you think deeper, you might realize that you have not worried for nothing, but really for something or someone you treasure very much. Where your worry is, there you will find what or who you treasure much in your life.

In Matthew 6:25-34 Jesus talks about worry. The reason He does so is interesting. He has just told the people not to let money be their master. He says in verse 24, "No man can serve two masters; for either you will hate the one and love the other or else you will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

But Jesus knew that the reason a lot of people let money be their master is that they are worried about tomorrow, not necessarily that they are greedy.

Therefore, having told them not to let money be their master, He gives them a better way to handle the problem of worry.

Jesus wants us to be clear of two things when He speaks about worry.

I. Two things to be clear of concerning worry.

One, it has to do with what Jesus has in mind with the word “worry”. Verse 25 begins, “Therefore, I say to you, do not worry.” Worry in this passage means to have a distracting care. The same word is used in Philippians 4:6—“Be anxious (worried) for nothing. But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”

Therefore, a scriptural definition of worry is a distracting care resulting from assuming responsibility that is not yours. Jesus is not saying, “Don’t be concerned about your health.” He is saying, “Don’t let that become such a distracting care that it is all you can think about.”

Jesus is not saying, “Don’t be concerned about your finances.” He is saying, “Don’t let that become such a distracting care that money is all you think about.”

Jesus is not saying, “Don’t be concerned about your job.” He is saying, “Don’t let that become such a distracting care that your job is all you can think about.”

Worry is a distracting care resulting from assuming responsibility that is not yours.

Two, we also need to be clear that Jesus is giving a command in verse 25—“Do not worry!” The more literal wording of this phrase is something like this—“If you are not worrying, don’t start! If you are worrying, stop it right now!”

Dale Carnegie in his book “How to Stop Worrying and Start Living” gives seven ways to cultivate an attitude that will bring peace of mind:

- One, fill our minds with thoughts of peace, courage, health, and hope, for “our life is what our thoughts make it”.
- Two, stop trying to get even with our enemies because if we do we will hurt ourselves far more than we hurt them.
- Three, expect rather than to worry about ingratitude. Jesus healed ten lepers in one day and only one thanked Him. Why should we expect more gratitude than what Jesus got?
- Four, give for the joy of giving and find happiness in life.
- Five, count your blessings and not your troubles. Forget our own unhappiness by trying to create a little happiness for others. “When you are good to others, you are best to yourself.”
- Six, find ourselves and be ourselves, not pretending what we are not.

©2020-2021 John Yuen Ministry

You are permitted to use this sermon or article for free. If you choose to publish excerpts from it, please provide link or attribution back to the version on johnyuen.org.

- Seven, learn to laugh at ourselves and at life.

This is all good advice. But what does Jesus has to say about stopping to worry and starting to live? He gives us one key principle to deal with worries in life.

II. One key principle from Jesus on how to deal with worries.

The one key principle is this—don't lose focus on God's bigger picture by being fixated on the smaller things.

Verse 25 says, "Therefore, I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?" The point from Jesus is this—we sweat the small stuff; we worry the most about the small things because we have lost focus on God's bigger picture by being fixated on the smaller things.

That's why Jesus speaks to us about food, water and clothing. He reminds us that life is more than food, water and clothing as important as they are. Jesus reminds us that the Father will take care of these things for us. In fact, these things are really small stuff to Him. He has something bigger He wants to take care—i.e. you. In fact, Jesus tells us that we are more valuable to God than His other creations on earth.

He gives two comparisons.

- Firstly, Jesus says in Matthew 6:26, "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?"

In Luke 12:24, Jesus' words are more specific—"Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!" Jesus mentions a specific bird in Luke's Gospel—the raven.

I really believe I am better than ravens. I believe that my life is more purposeful than that of the ravens. But Jesus tells me that a raven is better than me in one sense—it doesn't worry.

So what does a raven have to teach me about my worries? I think what we can learn from a raven is to listen to its cry. A raven's cry is not a beautiful sound. It is a very loud, high pitched squeal that makes you go for your earplugs. When a raven cries, it is a cry from instinct. When a raven cries, it is a cry for food. When a raven cries, it is hungry and will keep crying until it finds food.

But what is important to remember about a raven's cry is that it is persistent and focused. If it could be translated into words, it would be: "I want food! I want food! I want food!" The raven knows that without food it will die. That's as far as it can go in terms of intelligence.

Amazingly, it is a cry that God knows. Psalm 147:9 tells us—"He provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call." It is a cry that God will respond to.

The food of a raven is not what we would call great. It is not five-star quality. A raven's food is extremely varied. Its food can include bugs, dead animals, fruit and grain.

But whatever it is, the raven ends up eating it; it quietens the raven's cry. The raven becomes satisfied. If the cry from a raven is the closest thing to that of a believer's prayer in this world, it means that the Heavenly Creator will respond to a raven's "prayer" for food.

God provides for the raven. God hears the raven's cry. God has provided food for the raven, even though much of it we humans would not bother eating.

Without pride or prejudice, I believe we are much greater than the raven because we are made in God's image. God provides for the raven. What about us? Why is it that we worry about the little things and not trust that God will provide? To a raven all it knows is that it wants food. All it knows is that if it doesn't have food, it will die. It doesn't worry about whether or not it should eat a dead squirrel on the road or a peach that has fallen from a tree. It knows what it wants and will eat whatever God provides.

We often worry about the small stuff in God's sight. When Jesus told His disciples then and us today to look at the raven, He hopes to lead us to focus on what's important in life. While food is necessary for us, as well as our other basic needs like water and air, God has a more necessary thing for us as human beings created in His image—and that is salvation.

Many things in this life seem necessary and important here on earth. But when we die, they stay on earth. No matter how much we have accumulated, we can't take it with us after death. The Egyptian Pharaohs would bury all their stuff with them in pyramids in the false belief that it would follow them into the afterlife. But where is all that stuff? It is scattered around the world in various museums.

But what about those of us who worry that we don't have enough. Jesus says to us today, "Don't worry about the small things in life, but focus on the big picture I have for you."

What is this big picture that Jesus wants us to focus on? It is seen on the cross. The cross is where Jesus died for our sins and for our salvation. When someone died, we put makeup on his face and dress him up in his best clothes. When Jesus died on the cross He wasn't even worried if His hair looked good. His focus was on fulfilling the will of His Heavenly Father. Because His focus was on the cross and our salvation, we have salvation in and through Him.

The cross is the big picture. Our salvation is the big picture that matters in our lives. All the little things that we worry about in our lives do not really matter when we reflect upon the cross that takes away all our sins. When we are saved in Jesus Christ and when we leave this world, we have every heavenly blessing. In Jesus Christ, we gain everything. When we are lost without salvation in Jesus Christ and when we leave this world, we also leave behind all that's in our hands and enter into a hopeless and empty-handed eternity. Without Jesus Christ, we lose everything.

We should remember that the raven only has one worry (if any)—food. If it doesn't receive it, it cries out. And yet God has provided in response to the cry of the raven and satisfied its hunger.

Yes, God will take care of us much more than ravens. But don't forget the big picture—the greatest gift of all is the gift of Jesus Christ and the salvation we can receive by faith in Him.

Jesus adds a little more insight before moving on when he asked in verse 27: "Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?" NKJV puts it this way: "Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?"

A cubit is a measure of length from the tip of the forefinger to the elbow. It's about 18 inches. God not only made you, He established the length of your days and your worrying can't change it the smallest amount, not even the equivalent of 18 inches. So let's learn to trust more in God's control and worry less in our lack of control.

- Secondly, Jesus compares us with some flowers to stress how much more valuable we are to God than His other earthly creations. Matthew 6:28-30 says: "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?"

Again, Luke puts it more specifically in Luke 12:27-28: “Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!”

Jesus is saying that Solomon in all of his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now Solomon was the most magnificently attired king Israel ever had. Even so, Solomon didn’t have as much glory as the lilies of the field.

Yet these flowers were “here today and gone tomorrow” because they were used to bake bread. Because of their reedy stem they were excellent for starting a hot fire that could be used to bake bread. That’s why Matthew 6:30 says, “If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!”

The only relationship between God and the lilies is that between the Creator and His creation. Jesus says to you and me today that our relationship with God is much more than this. We are His children. The flowers are here now and gone tomorrow. We as God’s children are to be with Him forever. We are more valuable to Him than the flowers. And if God takes care of His flowers, He will also take care of His children to a much greater extent.

The principle that Jesus wants us to remember as we deal with our worries on earth is this—don’t lose focus of God’s bigger picture for us by being fixated on the smaller things that worry us. He compares us with the ravens and the lilies. He tells us that if God cares for these, how much more will He care for us who are more valuable to Him than these because we are created in His image and meant for eternity with Him, and not just for here and now.

So, how then shall we live?

III. How we shall live.

Firstly, as those who know Christ, we are to live differently than those who don’t know Him.

Verses 31-32 says, “So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.” The word “pagans” refers to unbelieving nations or people who only go for material things.

Now to be sure, the Bible doesn't tell a non-Christian not to worry. In truth, he has plenty to worry about because of his lostness without Jesus Christ. That's why we need to present the Gospel to lost people. For a person who doesn't know Christ, his worries are always there because he has no spiritual understanding of God's promises beyond this life and the material. So, God expects them to worry. And He expects God's people not to worry about this life as if it is all there is for them. God's people can and should live a different life than those who don't know Jesus Christ.

Secondly, we are to concern ourselves with the Lord's business and He will concern Himself with ours.

If you are going to worry, worry about having a consistent prayer life. If you are going to worry, worry about growing in Christlikeness. If you are going to worry, worry about treating others with the love of God for them. If you are going to worry, worry about walking across to your neighbour and speaking a word for Christ.

If you concern yourself with the Lord's business, He'll concern Himself with yours. If He's where He ought to be in your life, everything else will be where it ought to be. As the saying goes, "When I leave everything in His hand, I will see His hand in everything."

Matthew 6:33 reads, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

Verse 33 does not say, "And 75% of these things will be given to you as well." It doesn't say, "And 85% of these things will be given to you as well."

It says, "And ALL these things (that He knows you need) will be given to you as well."

Thirdly, we are to live above the level of unbelievers because we have the Lord who holds our tomorrow.

Verse 34 says, "Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

An American singing evangelist lost his wife because she felt the ministry was not for her and decided to enter the world of entertainment. She left him to follow her dreams. Tragically, she was killed in a car accident. He was greatly grieved. Yet he wanted to remain faithful in singing for the glory of God rather than the gold of this world even in his loneliness. His name was Ira Stanphill. Have you heard of him? Maybe you have heard this song he wrote in 1950 when he was going through the deep hurt in his life. The song goes like this:²

² <http://dailyprovision.wordpress.com/2007/08/19/i-know-who-holds-tomorrow>

I don't know about tomorrow;
I just live from day to day.
I don't borrow from its sunshine
For its skies may turn to grey.
I don't worry o'er the future,
For I know what Jesus said.
And today I'll walk beside Him,
For He knows what is ahead.

Many things about tomorrow
I don't seem to understand.
But I know who holds tomorrow
And I know who holds my hand.

Satan tries to get us to bear tomorrow's problems with today's strength. The Bible says, "Each day has enough trouble of its own." Live one day at a time and tomorrow you can conquer worry the same way you have conquered it today—with the Lord who holds your tomorrow and who holds your hand as He walks with you each day.

Conclusion

We are distracted by worry mainly because we live each day as if it is all our responsibility rather than our response to God's ability to deal with the challenges of each day.

Jesus says to you and me today, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life." The idea behind is this—"If you are not worrying, don't start! If you are worrying, stop it right now!" It is worded as a command rather than as a suggestion. In that light, are you going to respond to Him with your opinion or your obedience?

Pray that the Lord whom we believe is with us will help us cast all our worries upon Him as we walk with Him and rest in Him each day.

Amen!