
Conquering Worry

Matthew 6:24-34

Greg Cook

Summary

Worry and anxiety over the future destroy grace and glad giving.

Introduction

We are in the midst of a stewardship series. This is the second of a multitude of parts. And I must tell you, as elders, we are coming into this series with fear and trepidation; at least I have, in the sense that we have done a stewardship series in the fall of the year for the last 2 or 3 years. But the circumstances in which we find ourselves in our giving makes it appear that we are clubbing you. And that is not the issue at all. I, myself, am being challenged in my heart about this matter of giving. It is our prayer that this series will be an encouragement to you. It is always good to review and I hope that you will be not be saying to yourselves that the elders are trying to beat you into submission on this matter of giving.

Our series is going to be running for a number of weeks, both the morning and evening services. We are going to be covering the following topics:

Understanding the Issues – Ed did a great job this morning in taking us through understanding the issues.

Tonight I am going to take us through Conquering Worry. The question you may be asking is why would a stewardship series have a message on worry. I am going to try to answer that question tonight.

Next Sunday morning we will have Bridging the Gap and Sunday evening will be Cultivating Contentment.

The following Sunday morning will be Abounding by Grace and Sunday evening - Resting in God's Provision.

The last Sunday morning will be Obeying by Faith and that night we will have our Open Forum as has become our custom whenever we have series.

Having moved among you as your brother and elder, I know that you have questions about this matter of giving. We hope that you will be very kind, very honest, and very open at that Forum. We want you to ask your questions so that this issue can be understood Biblically and we can all know what God asks of us, His children. I know that some of you sat there this morning as Pastor Ed took us through this matter

of tithing and you are saying to yourself, “I’m not so sure about this tithing bit. I don’t know if I believe that is a New Testament principle.” Please come to the Forum on that Sunday evening and ask, if after hearing all of the messages you are still not certain what is Biblical.

Well, your question might be, “Why would we have worry as a part of a stewardship series?” If you were listening this morning, you heard Pastor Ed say that sometimes we don’t tithe because we are worried that if we tithe, we won’t be able to make ends meet. I have been there myself and I know what you are saying. When there isn’t any money, what should you do about giving? Or, when there are more bills than there is income, what should you do? Is this giving issue really that critical? So tonight, as we look at this issue of worry, if there is one thing I would like for us to come away with tonight that is the principle that in 2 Corinthians, God says that He loves a glad and hilarious giver. And it is very difficult, if not impossible, to be a glad giver when I’m worried about paying the bills.

Let’s pray and ask God to give us understanding and grace as we look at our passage this evening. <PRAY>

The Governing Heart Issue

(v.24)

Please come with me to the sixth chapter of Matthew’s Gospel. This is a familiar passage of Scripture, verses 25 to the end of the chapter, but I would like to read it anyhow. I hope that tonight we will have a fresh look at this passage. <READ PASSAGE>

When we look at verse 24 it says, “Therefore”, so we need to look back at what precedes it. Going back to verse 19, that section ends with the statement found in verse 25, “you cannot serve both God and money.”

What is the governing heart issues that we see in this entire passage about worry? I believe that it is found in verse 24. The governing heart issue is that you cannot serve both God and money.

You cannot serve God and money

The passage says that you cannot serve both God and money. Your heart cannot be in two places at one time. I am either going to be concerned about what I’m going to eat, how I’m going to pay the rent, what am I going to do about the car, and the hundreds of other things about which I worry, or I am going to be concerned about serving God with my life. Where my treasure is that’s where my heart will be. Now, be careful. This passage is not teaching that you shouldn’t be concerned about being a good steward with what God has given to you. What He is saying is, “What is occupying your thoughts? What

is your mind dwelling on? What is taking a great amount of time, my worry or my service?" The underlying heart issue is whom will you serve? Will you serve God or will you serve money. That is the heart issue about which we are talking.

The Overarching Imperative

There is an imperative that is overarching this entire topic of worry and that is do not be anxious about your life.

Do not be anxious about your life

Don't worry about your life. Is that easy to say when the checkbook balance is minus \$5.31 and the rent is due tomorrow? The passage says don't worry about your life. OK. That sounds real good, Greg, but what am I supposed to do about the rent tomorrow? That's an excellent question. I am going to hold off answering that until later. I know that it is a serious issue, but we are told not to worry about our lives. This passage cannot mean that we are not to be concerned about paying our rent. What it is concerned about is that worry cannot be the overarching theme of our lives. He has given us this command – Do not worry! It is a command. And it is a very difficult command to obey. We pass off worry as being concerned.

It sounds like this: "I am concerned about being a good testimony to the outside world. I'm concerned about not paying my bills because I'm giving to God. That makes me not have enough money for my bills, so I'm concerned about giving to God and the testimony that it will be to those who are not believers."

He says do not worry! End of story.

I don't know about you, but this is hitting me way too hard. How can I now worry? How can I not be concerned when I'm working week to week not knowing if I will have a job next week? When I could be displaced from my job tomorrow? When my shoulder is killing me and I don't have hospitalization? And the list is endless. Our Saviour has the audacity to say to us "do not worry". You say, "I can't do that!" He says that we had better since it is a command, not a suggestion.

Worry is sin

(v.25a)

Since the Savior has given us this command to not worry, then what does that tell us about worry? It tells us that to worry is to sin. What! You can't tell me that worry is sin. That makes me feel bad and means that I'm guilty of sinning against God. But we cannot call it anything else besides sin. In fact, it is the sin of idolatry. He tells us that we cannot serve God and money and when we worry about

money, it is the sin of idolatry because we are giving something else besides God the preeminence in our lives. “Greg, I can understand that bowing down to an idol or worshipping an image would be idolatry, but please do not call my concern about life idolatry.” My friends, that is exactly what Jesus calls it – idolatry.

But the good news is that our Savior died for sin. And it is He Who will help us to obey His commands. But you say, “I can’t obey that one.” We know from the Scriptures that whatever God commands us to do, He will enable us to do. We are without excuse. Be careful. Worry is sin. Unadulterated, blatant sin.

Some of the people who come into our counseling rooms are eaten up with worry. They are on medications. They have great difficulty with their digestive systems. They have high blood pressure. That are irritable. You can’t hardly talk to them without having them take your head off. These people are eaten up inside. But He says, do not worry. He gives the grace to stop worry. He gives the Holy Spirit to enable us to obey. Call worry sin, because He does.

The Penetrating Interrogatives

(v.25b-30a)

Christ goes on to help us to begin to think differently about this win of worry. He asks us some very penetrating questions.

Isn’t life more than food, drink, and clothing?

Starting in the last part of verse 25 He asks us if life isn’t made up of more than food, drink, and clothes. And the obvious answer is, “Well of course it is.”

Are you not more important than birds?

Then He continues by using the birds. He says that aren’t we more important than the birds. And again, we must say, “Well of course we are.”

Who can add one hour to his life by worrying?

Then the next verse asks us if we can add even one hour to our entire lifetimes by worrying. And of course the obvious answer is that we can’t.

Why are you anxious about clothing?

Then He asks about our clothing. And He gives reasons as to why worrying about clothing is so futile.

Will God not clothe you?

And then He asks if God is able to clothe you. And we must answer, yes.

In fact, all of these questions are really getting to the heart issues. Isn't your life more important than food, drink, and clothing? Aren't you more important than the birds? Can you add one hour to your life? Why do you worry about clothes? Won't God clothe you? These questions are getting to the heart of the issue.

You respond, "Well, of course God can do all of that. No one has ever said that He couldn't. Those are silly questions. But what about the \$750 that I need for the rent tomorrow? I understand about silly birds and flowers, but what about me!?"

The Fundamental Indictment

(v.30b)

And, my brothers and sisters, that is the whole point of these questions.

You have so little faith.

The point of these questions is that you have little faith – little faith. In our Level One counseling class, the lecture on worry was written by Pastor Tim Pasma and he subtitled it *A mild case of atheism*. That is what God is saying. You have a mild case of atheism. You have little faith. He does not say that you have no faith. He says that you have little faith. And that is what these questions are pointing to.

"How can He say that I have little faith. I believe that He can clothe flowers and He can feed birds, but what about the \$3,000 hospital bill that I have. I have no money and I only make \$7 an hour. How is He going to take care of that?!" He says that you have little faith.

This is getting worse the farther we go in this passage. Wouldn't you agree? Not only am I sinning, but I am sinning by idolatry. And this idolatry stems from my little faith.

Do you understand what Jesus is saying. He is saying, "You don't trust me. In fact, you don't trust me so much that you are taking your life back into your own hands. You do not trust me with your life"

Now we would never say that out loud. But if we were honest, we would say it something like this, "Well, God, I've been watching how things have been going. And I must admit, that you are not doing things the way I would. In fact, I don't understand how or why You do things the way You do. In fact, the more I think about it, You are not doing things the way I think they should be done. I know what's best for me and things are not going that way. Since I know what is best, I had better take over from here. I think I can do a much better

job than you are doing. Or, at least I can trust myself easier than I can trust You.”

When we do not trust God we are saying that we are more wise, more good, and can do a better job with our lives than God can. When we put it that baldly, there isn't one of us here who raise our hands and admit that is what we are saying, but that is exactly what we are saying.

So what are we going to do about it?

Jesus gives us the ways that we can implement His command to not worry.

The Contrasting Implementation

(v.31-34)

Do not be anxious about food, drink, or clothing; God know all your needs.

He tells us in verse 31 that we are not to be anxious about food, drink, or clothing. And He tells us in verse 32 that God knows **all** that we need.

As I have consulted the commentaries, there is a disagreement among them. Some of them say that there is an argument from the greater to the lesser and others say there is an argument from the lesser to the greater. I don't really see that it matters much, since both views are making a similar argument. And here is how the argument goes. If you are a believer, someone for whom Christ died and for whom He gave His all, are you more important than a bird? Is a bird created in God's image? Does a bird have all that a believer has in Christ? Is a flower created in God's image? And all of us are saying, “This is so silly. Of course the birds and the flowers are not created in God's image! Why are you asking us these questions?” And the answer is. “That's what He is asking us. That's what He is showing us! Aren't you more important than birds and flowers?”

How silly is this?! Birds don't plant seeds, they don't plow, weed, or harvest anything. What does the flower do to make clothes for itself? And that's the argument. If God stoops so low and is so concerned about a bird who flies around, that He feeds him, won't He feed you?

How big is your God? How big is the God that you serve? Is He sovereign over all things? Is everything that comes into my life part of His sovereign plan? Is it for my good and His Glory? Is God really more concerned about me than He is about birds? Shake your heads yes. And so He says don't be anxious you people who have little faith, because He knows all that I need. He knows **all** that I need.

So if you're like me you might be saying, "Yea, He knows it, but what's He going to do about it?"

Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

So the next step of implementation is to seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness and is found in verse 33. I must admit to you that I have struggled with this verse for years. Now I want you to look down at your copy of God's Word and see if it says something similar to what my does in the ESV. Follow along. "And if you will seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, then all of these things will be added to you." Do any of your translations say that? No. Well let me read it again, "But if you will seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, then all of these things will be added to you." Does anyone have that translation that uses the if-then construction? I don't see any hands.

The reason that you don't see that is because it is not a conditional sentence. And yet, that is the way we think about it. We think that if we will start doing what God wants us to do, then we put Him under some kind of obligation to provide for us. If we will start pursuing His righteousness and become more righteous, then God is under an obligation to provide me with the things that I need. We do not put God under obligation. The Scriptures tell us that He knows all that we need. They tell us that He feeds the birds and clothes the flowers and that He knows all that we need. We are told later in this sermon that He is a loving Father. We, as fathers, know how to give good gifts, and surely He as our loving heavenly Father will give us all that we need. The issue here is not that we will be coerced into not being worried by seeking His kingdom and His righteousness. The issue is, "Folks, don't get entangled in worry because it is all taken care of! You serve Me rather than your worry. Don't you worship yourself! Don't you worship idols! Worship Me! Because I am worthy. I know what you need. I will take care of it. I take care of the birds." That's what He is saying here and that's what we have to believe as the truth in our minds.

This is not me making some kind of a contract with God. "OK, God, this is what I'm going to do. I'm going to stop working on Sunday, I'm going to start giving some money to church, I'm going to read my Bible every morning, I'm going to be the father and husband I need to be, and I'm going to watch my language from now on. So you make it so that I don't have money problems anymore." This is not what He is saying in this passage. Guess what. Even when you do all of those things, you may still have money problems. God does not promise us that we are going to get out from under the pressure. He says, "I know what you need. I am the all-wise, all-loving, all-sovereign God Who will take care of you according to My will, not yours. In My time-

frame, not yours, And in my way, nor yours.” That’s what we are to be seeking. We are to be seeking God for where my treasure is that’s where my heart will be. So don’t be anxious. Seek first the Kingdom of God.

But how do we do this? We do it by using the Scriptures. Every time that we are finding ourselves worrying we need to meditate on this passage. We need to tell ourselves that God knows all that we need. He is so concerned about the inconsequential birds of the air that He feeds them and He clothes the flowers of the fields. He provides all that they need. Surely, He will provide all that we need in His time and in His way.

Do not be anxious about tomorrow.

Then He goes on in the next verse and continues by telling us not to be anxious about tomorrow. There is enough trouble for today without bringing tomorrow’s trouble into today. We are not to be worried about the future. What is the worst thing that can happen? We can lose our lives and go to glory. That’s a pretty bad thing, isn’t it.

“But Greg, you don’t have to answer the phone calls from the bill collectors demanding their money.” You’re right, I am not answering your calls. But let’s consider what He is really saying.

He is not saying, on the one hand, that you don’t have to have any thought about tomorrow, just let go and let God take care of you. It’s not really your concern. That’s like saying that you need a job. And all you have to do is pray. In fact you pray all day and sit home waiting for the phone to ring with an employer offering you the position of a lifetime. I have the faith that God will provide and I’m going to pray and sit right here at this kitchen table, believing God until He provides me with that job. That is sliding down one side of the mountain.

On the other hand, you say that God isn’t really involved in this and it’s all up to me. I need to do everything that I can including what my not be pleasing to God, because the end justifies the means. It’s all up to me and I am going to spend every waking hour, and some of the ones when I should be sleeping, trying to manipulate, or whatever it takes, to get a job. This is the other side of the mountain slope. We have the two extremes – the two slippery slopes of error.

Remember, we have talked about the third way, the ridge of the mountain. That says that I am not going to worry. I am going to pray asking God for His provision in His time, as well as being a good steward of the time and pursue seeking a job trusting that He will guide my steps.

One of the things that we struggle with, especially in this country, is that we have so much, but we want so much more. We are not satisfied. In my position as a Certified Financial Planner, I have observed that it doesn't matter how much income you make, it is never enough. I have a few clients who make large incomes and they don't have 2 nickels to rub against each other. They are in not better shape, financially, than anyone else in this room. Although they may make \$500,000 or even \$750,000 per year, it is not enough. Now I don't know about you, but I think that I could probably make ends meet on \$750,000. don't you. It's not how much you make, it's how much you live on. It's what does it take for your lifestyle? And I know that I am probably no different than most of you. Whenever there is a raise, that raise is used to increase my standard of living. We don't define our lifestyles and how much it would take to maintain them. We define our lifestyle by how much we make.

I remember when my wife and I used to discuss what it would be like to be able to go out to eat after church on Sundays. We would know that we had made it when we could go out to eat at a restaurant on Sunday afternoons. We would be living high on the hog when that happened. Well, guess what? That has happened. Now what? We aren't satisfied. We never have enough to satisfy our lifestyle desires. We live on what we make, not what we need for a defined lifestyle.

Folks, when we sit down and look at our finances and there isn't enough money to pay all the bills and give money to the Lord's work, it's because we haven't looked at our lifestyles and evaluated them for how pleasing they are to God. Even if you were having trouble with the teaching of the tithe, there are some of you out there who are not even giving regularly and proportionately because there isn't enough to do it. You haven't looked at your lifestyle and decided what it should be before God.

You may be reasoning, well if I made \$750,000 a year, I would be able to give generously. Maybe that might be true, but it is my experience that people do not have anymore to give then because they have raised their lifestyle to that level. So make sure that you're not fooling yourself by thinking that the answer is just making more money. The answer is in defining your lifestyle. And in one of the messages later on, the speaker is going to be helping us to work with what God has given us.

But here is the bottom line. Jesus says that it is you of little faith. If God has told us that worry is sin. If God has told us that worry is idolatry. And He has told us not to worry, and that He will give us all that we need, then He has given to us, now, all that we need to obey Him by giving Him what He requires. He has supplied all that we need, currently, to obey Him. We have enough. What are we doing with it? What are we spending it on? What kind of a steward are we

being? One of the things that we need to decide is what are we going to give God. But more importantly, what am I going to live on so I can give God the rest. I need to look at my lifestyle. Am I more concerned about the Kingdom of God than I am about the house in which I live, the car I drive, the restaurants that I eat at, and all the other things that I am concerned about?

So how do we get rid of this worry? We do it by stopping the worry and trusting God and His provision. We are to be seeking Him and not worrying about tomorrow. Being good stewards using that third way of not letting go and letting God nor of doing everything myself without regard to God, but in faith, looking to God knowing that He will give me all that I need to obey Him. He has given me everything I need, in my hands, right now, to obey Him. I must be a good steward of what He has given and not worry.

Conclusion

Let's wrap this all up.

Worry is sin.

First of all, worry is sin.

Worry comes from a lack of faith.

Worry comes from a lack of faith in a God Who provides all that we need. A God Who is the sovereign God Who is more concerned about me than He is about birds and flowers.

Do not act like unbelievers. Place your treasures in heaven.

Also, I need to quit acting like an unbeliever. He says that the unbelievers are the ones who are concerned about food, clothing, and the things of life. He tells us to place our treasures in heaven.

Stop worrying and start believing God. Make the Kingdom your primary concern.

Stop your worrying and start believing God and make His Kingdom your primary concern.

Worry and anxiety over the future destroys grace-filled and glad giving.

And lastly, worry and anxiety over the future destroys grace-filled and glad giving. Folks, I am going to be so bold as to say that God doesn't want your check when you write it out of guilt or out of obligation or out of fear of reprisal, or under pressure, or trying to manipulate God. God says that He wants a glad-hearted joyful giver. And the only way we can do that is to stop our worrying about tomorrow and to trust in our loving, sovereign God and His provision.