

# What – Me Worry?

Matthew 6:25-34

Was Jesus being practical? What Caleb just read for us may seem to you about as far from reality as you can get. Jesus' words sound good, but in real life are they even possible? Is Jesus being unrealistic?

So, I'm not supposed to have any concerns in this life. I don't need to do anything or prepare or plan? Is that what Jesus is saying? I'm just supposed to quit worrying about anything? One might say to Jesus that this does not sound normal – at least from the people I know.

It really seems to be an irresponsible, lazy, approach to life. If I do nothing to plan and prepare then I'm shirking my responsibilities to my family and community if I take Jesus as literally and faithfully as I can.

I watched a movie with grandkids once. In the Lion King Simba meets a couple of characters named Timon and Pumbaa. They introduce the young heir to the animal kingdom to a philosophy of life which sounds like the recurring exhortation of today's passage, ***“Do not worry.”*** The warthog and the meerkat sing the African phrase, hakuna matata, **“no worries.”** It's Swahili, and literally means, **“There are no concerns here.”** Timon and Pumbaa sing it to a catchy tune (by Elton John), which I found myself humming long after the film was over. These two homely animals teach the young lion to eat bugs rather than working up a sweat chasing prey. Take one day at a time, live a peaceful, unworried life and let the world go by.

Yet part of Simba's coming to maturity is realizing that hakuna matata doesn't cut it. He has responsibilities. There are matters back in the kingdom he should worry about. He can't just drift through life. He needs to get up and accept the mission and work he has been given. Anything else is shirking the duty of real adulthood. So, the lion goes back to his family, shoulders his responsibility and starts worrying. If that is what the animal kingdom requires, how could God's kingdom be different? **We need to worry about and provide for our own security.**

Even if an unworried life does not strike us as foolish idealism or laziness, it probably seems impossible. Whenever I have talked about this passage, I have always heard people respond with the feeling that it is just impossible to live without worry. What Karl Barth says is true,

*If we ever take the risk of preaching on Matthew 6:25-34, we will at once meet with all kinds of sullen or dispirited or unwilling reprimands from our hearers, and most of all, if we are honest, from our own hearts and minds. For how can we help taking care for our life?*

One of the hardest things to imagine is a life without worry or anxiety concerning the necessities of life. Part of the survival instinct built into us is that we will be concerned with putting food on the table and buying shoes for our children. No wonder Jesus upsets us so much here. He's asking us for an attitude which may be just fine for birds or lilies, but which is unreachable for any right-minded human being.

Three times in these verses Jesus commands us ***“Do not worry,”*** because our Father in heaven will care for all our needs. What about my need to worry? How will that need get met? How will God address the anxiety I cannot let go of, no matter what?

This passage, beautiful as it sounds, is generally ignored. Not many of us, and I include myself, has given much thought recently to how we might allow God to eliminate worry from our hearts and minds. We are all worriers and we generally just accept the fact that we are like that.

Thinking about the fact that we all worry can start us down another unhelpful path regarding this passage. What Jesus says feels harsh. Here we are, bogged down in anxiety, and He criticizes us for it. Verse 27 asks the rhetorical question, ***“can any of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life?”*** Worrying is silly. Verse 30 questions our trust in God's willingness to provide for us, ending with the words, ***“you of little faith.”*** Worrying is a failure. Some say it's a sin. Verse 32 says bluntly that it is pagans, non-believers, who worry about food and clothing. Worry is silly, unfaithful, wrong.

So, Christ's call to an unworried life becomes a problem. Now I need to worry about my worrying!! Not only are we concerned about food and clothing, and any number of other problems, like taxes and tires for the car, but Jesus condemns us for our worry. If worry is a sin, then with all my other worries, I must worry about worrying. There is no escape!

Karl Barth asks us to consider this: these anxieties which we find so inescapable—are they a good thing? That is, do we enjoy worrying? Does worrying bring us any joy or pleasure? When Jesus commands us not to worry, is He forbidding something sweet and pleasant? When He calls us to eliminate worry from our lives, is He really adding such a heavy burden? Is it not that He wants to free us from a burden, the burden of fear and anxiety? Wouldn't it feel better not to worry?

Worry is not practical. A life without worry is better. A study of steel workers on high rise buildings asked if they would be more careful, efficient and productive working with or without a net below them? One might imagine lack of a net would make you more careful, more precise about where you put your feet or laid your tools. It would heighten alertness to what you are doing. A little healthy worry would make you work better. **The study showed just the opposite.** Those who worked with a net below them made less mistakes, had fewer accidents, and got more work done. The absence of worry is practical.

God knows an unworried life is best for us, that His security is all we need. Barth says this about Christ's command not to worry, *“Do we not stand to lose all the evil, and win all the good, if, obedient to the command, we are not anxious...? ...the command frees us. It is, therefore, full of the Gospel, full of grace, full of God's friendship. This is not an impossible demand to give up security. It is a gracious word, the word of a Father who really does love and value us much more than He does the birds of the air or the lilies of the field.”*

Jesus's command here is grace, not condemnation. However, the grace is given as we make progress through what has come before, beginning with the unconditional blessings Jesus began this sermon with.

A life secure in God and free from worry is a life which has first learned to accept His blessings through Jesus, as expressed at the beginning of chapter 5. That life is also one which has begun to show that love and blessing to other people, as Jesus taught in the rest of chapter 5. An unworried life is also built on a deepening relationship with God found in unpretentious practice of giving and praying and fasting, as Jesus explained at the opening of chapter 6. And then of course, directly related to our worrying, is last week's text, calling us to store up treasure in heaven rather than on earth.

The progression is not absolute. You do not have to master every step before you go on to the next. We do not have to be models of love toward others to grow some in our relationship with God. Yet there must be some growth in each area. Loving God without developing some love toward other people is just impossible.

Life without worry is going to come to us through what training rather than trying. The worst thing you could do today is go home determined to try hard to worry less about security which will probably cause you to worry about security! What I encourage you to find is some small step in that direction.

The first step is to accept eternal security through Jesus. He said you can't make your life any longer by worrying about it. But you can make your life eternal by accepting and trusting Jesus as your Savior. Beyond that first step, we all are learning together to appreciate the depth of that gift of salvation, to love God and love others, to pray, to worship, to give, to serve. We can't really be free of worry and secure until we've learned a little of these other things.

Jesus is reminding us that by faith in Him, we are, in fact, working over a net. All the most crucial matters of our existence are provided by the grace and goodness of God. We have, in Jesus, an assurance that if we fall He is there to pick us up and get us back on course. God Himself provides for our eternal life by the gift of His own Son's life. Not one of our cares on earth can remove that gift from us. We are always secure if we walk in the light. Part of following Jesus is to keep remembering that.

Take Jesus literally when He says to us, “Look at the birds of the air,” or “Observe how the lilies of the field grow.” You may not be able to quit worrying immediately, but it is possible to stop for a moment and watch a bird or focus on a flower. Combine that observation with reflection, as Jesus suggests, concerning how God like a father loves and cares for us. Thank Him for the amazing gift He has given us in Jesus. And in that moment, you will have done some training. Worry will be a little farther from you.

I confess it is still not easy. We bend beneath our worries like flowers bend in the wind. Yet God gives us the moments. I remember a long time ago a lesson taught me by our oldest daughter Melissa. We were rushing about in the morning getting breakfast and lunches before work and school. Melissa looked on our back deck and said “Look, it’s a Cardinal.” She stood there staring out the door, fascinated by the little bird pulling dry grass and worms from a planter. What I wanted to say was “That’s nice, Melissa. Now get your shoes on and the table set so you won’t be late to school.” But I bit my tongue and we all stopped for a moment and watched the little creature who without even knowing it relies entirely on God for what it needs. And I pray that we, that I, moved forward into the kingdom just a little in that moment.

I once had a doctor encourage me to spend time in a cemetery and get to know the folks that were there. His point was that they had not finished all they wanted to do in life and neither would I. worrying about it would not change the outcome – it might hasten it!

Security and an unworried life are not beyond our grasp. We approach it whenever we allow ourselves the time and place to be aware of all the reasons we must trust in God and not be anxious. May God give you and me those opportunities often.