

Do Not Be Anxious

Seek and Serve God, Not Stuff

Scripture: Matthew 6:25-34

Sermon Series: Matthew

Topic: Anxiety, Possessions, Kingdom of God

Introduction

This morning we return to the Sermon on the Mount. Our focus is **6:25-34**. The main idea of this section is abundantly clear. If you were listening carefully, then you heard Jesus repeat a phrase three times.

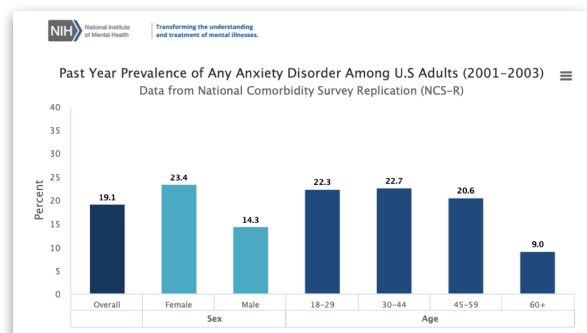
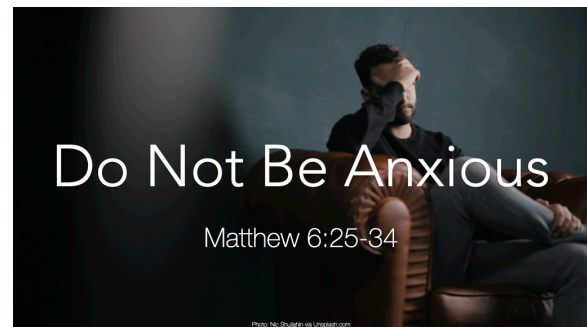
6:25 Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious...

6:31 Therefore do not be anxious...

6:34 Therefore do not be anxious...

Jesus does not want his children to be anxious. He commands his followers not to be anxious. This is ought to have our attention. Whenever Jesus repeats himself, he is emphasizing an important issue. But in this case, he gives a command three times. Evidently, we need to hear this.

Jesus' words are very relevant to us today, since we are a very anxious people. The **National Institute of Mental Health** has done research that would tell us that 19% of all adults aged 18 and over suffer from some kind of anxiety disorder. Younger adults suffer from anxiety more than do older adults and females suffer at a 10% higher rate than do males.



If this research is correct, and if there's about 180 of you in this room, then 34 of you struggle with anxiety. If you would say that you are *not* a person who struggles with anxiety, then almost certainly you know someone who does. Thus, what Jesus has to say about this issue is needful for all of us to consider together.

Outline

This section, vs.25-34, is a sustained argument.

- First, Jesus teaches us not to be anxious about *life* and food, nor about our *bodies* and clothes. He supports his argument by inviting us to think about birds and flowers.
- He calls us to consider the *effects* of an anxious life.
- He notes that *people who do not know God* are anxious people.
- He teaches us not to be anxious about *tomorrow*.
- And he concludes by commanding us to pursue a more fruitful alternative, which is to *"seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness."*

Therefore

In addition to three times using the word "anxious," he also three times uses the word '*therefore*,' which in each case immediately precedes the word 'anxious.' This communicates that Jesus' argument is actually expounding a conclusion. Jesus is presently making an argument based upon a conclusion that had been previously established. We need to know what that is before we go forward.

Two weeks ago Chris led us through a consideration of 6:19-24, where Jesus discussed wealth and possessions. His conclusion is found in 6:24.

Matthew 6:24 (ESV) "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

Jesus' point here in this verse is to force a question. Everyone of us must make a choice of *who will be the master of your life*. We must each ask whom we will serve? Will we serve God or goods? Which will we value more, heavenly things or earthly things? Will we be more deeply devoted to God or will we be more deeply devoted to acquiring material possessions? What do you treasure most, the God who created you or the things He created? This is the point of v.24. Everyone can ultimately serve only one master. Which will it be?

Jesus' point of v.25-34 is to demonstrate that *it is far better to serve God than it is to serve material possessions*. Jesus will argue that if you are more deeply devoted to material possessions, then your life will be filled with anxiety. However, if you are more deeply devoted to God, then your life will be filled with your Father supplying you with all that you need.

Do Not Be Anxious About Your Life And Body

Jesus begins his argument by stating his thesis.

Matthew 6:25 (ESV) “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious 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?”

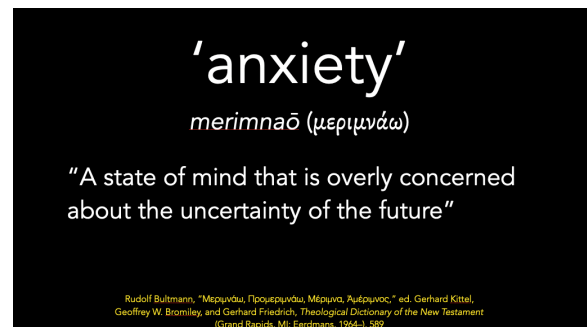
Jesus is arguing that *anxiety about life and our bodies results from a misunderstanding about God*. If God has given us life—which is far more important than food, and if he has given us bodies—which is far more important than clothes, then will he fail to give us what we need to sustain life and protect our bodies? The answer is no. If God has given us life and bodies, then he will not fail to give us what we need to care for and sustain them both, therefore, we ought not to be anxious about these things.

What Is Anxiety?

Before we go any further, we ought to define what we talking about. What is anxiety?

The word (*merimnaō* μεριμνάω) refers to “a state of mind” that is “over-concerned”¹ about the uncertainty of the future² or future events.

In this case, it would be an uneasy state of mind due to being overly concerned about whether or not there will be enough food tomorrow or enough clothes for tomorrow. Jesus will now offer three pieces of evidence for why the children of God need not be anxious about our food and our bodies.



Of Birds and Food

The first piece of evidence comes from **the birds of the air**. God’s children need not be anxious about food because God feeds the birds.

Matthew 6:26 (ESV) “Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor



¹ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 144.

² Rudolf Bultmann, “Μερίμνα, Προμερίμνα, Μέρμνα, Ἀμέριμνος,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 589.

gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

Jesus offers visible evidence to help you and me avoid anxiety. *Look at the birds of the air.* Birds do not **sow**. They don't plant gardens and yet they have food. Neither do they store their food in **barns** and yet they have food. They do not stock pile food in large locations, and yet they have plenty to eat. Look at this fact and do not be anxious about what you will eat.

Birds Work

Jesus is not giving you permission to be lazy. Birds are not lazy. "The early bird gets the worm." Jesus is not here advocating laziness. *Birds work hard, but they don't worry.* Jesus is not teaching us not to work. Paul affirmed that "whoever will not work, ought not eat" (2 Thes. 3:11). God created us to work (Gen. 2:15). Birds do not sit in the nest all day waiting for it miraculously rain worms and grain. They go out every day and look for food, but the point is that they find food.

Your Heavenly Father Feeds Them

Where do they get their food? "*Your heavenly Father feeds them.*" Did you know that God feeds the birds? God takes thought for birds³ and gives them what they need. The sovereign God and creator of this universe has his mind upon even the smallest, most insignificant creatures in this wide world. If your Father feeds birds, then it is inconceivable that he would fail to feed his children.

Are you not of more value than they? Of course you are. Humans are the crowing glory of God's creation. Humans are of much more value to God than are birds, even many birds. And among all humans there are none whom the Father values more than those who are his children. Jesus said,

Matthew 10:30-31 (ESV) "*But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows.*"

If your heavenly Father feeds birds, then do not be anxious about what you will eat. If God has given you life, then he will surely give his children sufficient daily food to sustain the life he has given. Evidence for God's concern for the wellbeing of his children is flying all around us.

There are exceptions to this general rule. Sometimes it is God's will for his children to go hungry. Paul tells us that even those instances He supplies the strength needed to go hungry. We see this in Philippians 4.12-13.

³ Matthew 10:29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.

This is the first piece of evidence for why his disciples ought not be anxious about life is because God sustains the life of birds. Birds are significantly less valuable to God than are his children and so if he provides for the birds, then his children need not be anxious that about him failing to provide for them.

The Effect of Anxiety

The second piece of evidence Jesus offers for why not to be anxious has to do with the effect of anxiety.

Matthew 6:27 (ESV) "And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?"

Jesus point here is to direct us to consider the effect of anxiety and worry. What does it change? Does worrying about a thing change that thing? Is anxiety a proper expenditure of emotional and psychological energy? Does anxiety alter the outcome? If you are anxious about long life, does that anxiety actually lengthen your life? No! Being anxious about life does not lengthen life, but rather studies have shown that it actually does the opposite.

Worry and anxiety shortens your life. A 2021 study by Yale researchers on epigenetic aging found that high levels of anxiety and chronic stress accelerates the aging process and thus reduces lifespan.⁴

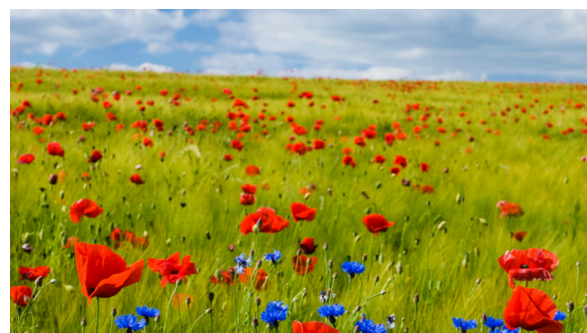
Being anxious about life does not add time to life, but rather takes away from it. Jesus is the "author of life,"⁵ thus he knows what he's talking about.



Do not be anxious about your life, because doing so adds not a single hour to your life, but can take away precious time.

Of Flowers and Clothes

The third piece of evidence for why not to be anxious has to do with the **provision of clothing**. Since God beautifully provides clothing for his creation, then do not be anxious about him failing to provide clothing for his children. Just



⁴ Source: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41398-021-01735-7> accessed 10 June 2023.

⁵ Acts 3:15.

as God clothes the fields with flowers, so he will give clothing to his children.

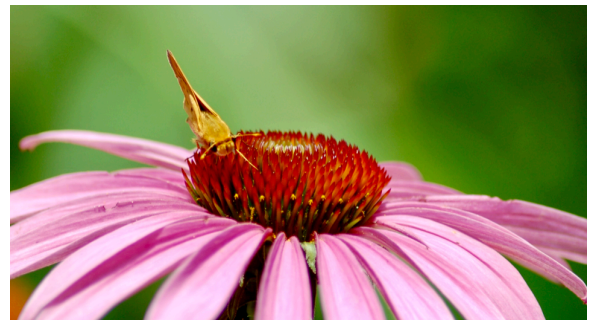
Matthew 6:28-30 (ESV) ²⁸ "And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"

Jesus commands his disciples to **consider** the flowers of the field. This call to consider is a call for serious reflection. He means us to ponder and think about what he is saying. He asks us why we are anxious about the clothing on our bodies. If God clothes grassy fields with glorious flowers, then why would you be anxious that God would not provide clothing for our bodies?



Think about this. Flowers **do not toil**. They do not work to create their own beauty. They do not spend hours coordinating their movements all across the field to ensure that their beauty is evenly distributed. And yet the fields are covered in flowers.

Flowers **do not spin**. They are not hours and hours in the sewing room spinning up a spectacular garment with which to wrap themselves in order to impress the passersby. And yet the passersby are impressed. The beauty of flowers is all around us if only we will stop long enough to see it.



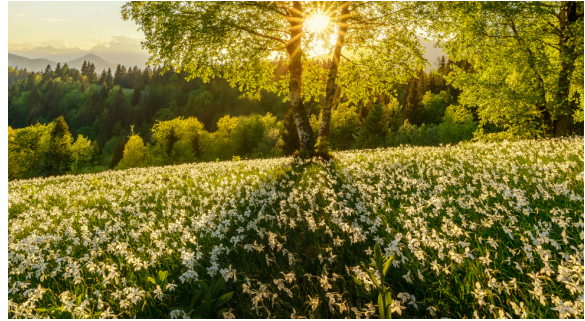
And Jesus says the beautiful glory of the flowers of the field surpasses even the glory of Solomon's royal robes. *"I tell you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."* In the estimation of Jesus, the intricate beauty of delicate flowers is more impressive than Solomon's most skilled fashion designers.

And who orchestrated these glorious floral arrays? God did.

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

God Is a Floral Designer

Have you ever considered this? Have you ever looked out across the *flower-covered field* and thought, God designed that. Have you ever paused to behold the lilies of the field and thought, There's God at work. Just as it is God who feeds the birds, so it is God who clothes the fields with glorious flowers.



Why Trouble with Flowers?

God is at work covering grassy fields with flowers. Why does God go to the trouble to so beautifully cover grassy fields when the grass is "*here today and gone tomorrow*?" Why does he show so much concern for grassy fields that only last a day or two? Surely it is to teach us that if He so beautifully cares for meaningless grass, then how much more will he care for his children? Surely God so beautifully clothes the grass of the fleeting fields in order to teach us that he will care for us all the days of our lives. Certainly it is this truth that motivates the psalmist when he wrote,

Psalms 62:8 (ESV)

Trust in him at all times, O people;
pour out your heart before him;
God is a refuge for us. *Selah*

Psalms 71:5-6 (ESV)

For you, O Lord, are my hope,
my trust, O LORD, from my youth.
Upon you I have leaned from before my birth;
you are he who took me from my mother's womb.
My praise is continually of you.

So he proclaims that he will trust him "even to old age and gray hairs" (Ps 71:18). So do not be anxious about clothing your body. If God takes thought to clothe the grass of the field, then he will certainly take thought to clothe his children. Therefore, do not be anxious.

O Ye of Little Faith

Jesus here also exposes the root of anxiety. It is a weak faith. It's not non-existent faith, but rather a frail, weak faith. It's not no faith, but rather little faith. Jesus frequently spoke of the fact that the faith of his disciples was weak. I counted four other times in Matthew where Jesus said to his disciples, "O you of little faith" (8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20). Hear these words of Jesus and trust in Him at all times. Pour out your heart to him. Make Him your refuge. Lean upon Him with all your soul. May the Spirit of God fortify your faith this morning.

Consider the Gentiles

A fourth reason not to be anxious about these things is because that is what unbelievers do.

Matthew 6:31-32 (ESV) ³¹ “Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.”

‘Gentiles’ in this context stands for all people outside the covenant relationship with God. In short, Jesus is referring to people who do not know God.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 (ESV) ...abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, ⁵ not in the passion of lust like the **Gentiles who do not know God**;

Paul is here explaining that people who willingly continue in sin, here he mentions sexual sin (‘sexual immorality’ refers to any sexual activity that falls outside the biblical boundary of marriage—between one man and one woman), are acting “like Gentiles who do not know God.”

Back in Matthew, Jesus is saying that Gentiles are anxious about food, drink, and clothing because they do not know God. They do not know that God knows the needs of his children and thus will certainly care and provide for those needs. People who are not his children neither have this knowledge nor this relationship. So they are worried and anxious about all these basic needs, which the child of God, the Christian, knows God is aware of and that he possess the goodness of heart to provide for. Therefore, you who are the children of God, ought not to be anxious like them. Jesus says, Do not be anxious about your life, for that’s what godless people do who don’t know God. You do know God, so don’t act like them.

[Today if you’re listening and you do not know that you are a child of God, then you may become his child today. That happens when you believe in and receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior. See John 1:12-13]

Do Not Be Anxious About Tomorrow

Jesus now turns his attention to the root of the problem of anxiety, which is being anxious about the future.

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

Jesus is arguing that anxiety today is compounded when you import imagined future problems of tomorrow into the present. There is no need to be anxious about tomorrow, because whatever it is about tomorrow that makes you anxious, may not even take place. Do not worry

today about what you expect may be tomorrow's problems. They may never actually materialize. If they don't, then you will be anxious for nothing.

Each day comes with its own cares and concerns. And also it comes with its own supply of grace. You will make today worse if you are anxious about the cares of tomorrow. Recall that God daily gives us the grace that we need for each day. This is what faith teaches us. God provides today all the grace that we need for today. Every day comes with its own new mercies⁶ and new grace. If tomorrow unfolds with great trouble than today, then we trust that God will provide greater grace and greater mercy than was needed for today.

Just as God provided for the children of Israel every day the daily requirement of manna while in the wilderness, so he will do for his children today (Ex. 16). Those who needed more for the day were given more, while those who needed less were also given just enough.

Seek First the Kingdom of God

The final point is found in v. 33.

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

This takes us back to the beginning. Jesus began this argument with 'therefore.' This is his conclusion. Since you cannot serve both God and wealth/possessions, then you must choose one or the other. If you set your face to seeking possessions, then your life will be filled with anxiety. However, if you seek first God, his kingdom, and his righteousness, then you will sweetly discover that you will have provided to you all that you need.

What does it mean to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness? Since Jesus is the personal and complete expression of the righteousness of God, we must look to him to answer that question. Jesus alone is righteous and Jesus alone live fully devoted to the kingdom of God.

Seeking first God's kingdom and righteousness essentially means to live out the Lord's Prayer.

- It means to seek to glorify the name of Jesus above our own name.
- It means living your private and public life with the aim of revering God's name.
- It means willingly surrendering your will to God's will. It means trusting this will is the highest good for you and everyone else around you.
- It means gladly obeying his commands.
- It means trusting him for your daily needs.
- It means hating your sin and being forgiving towards those who sin against you.

⁶ Lamentations 3:22.

- It means turning away from sin and temptation and turning to Jesus in faith and trust that he will provide in truth whatever good thing the enemy is telling you that you should have by lies and deception.
- It means fighting against all sin in your life and welcoming all righteousness.
- It means that you are more at home with Jesus, than any other person on the planet. It means you treasure him more than you do any other human being.

Conclusion

What did we hear Jesus saying? He said we must make a choice of whether we serve him or wealth. He said, "Do not be anxious." He said that he does not want you to live a life of anxiety. He says if you seek wealth first, then your life will be filled with anxiety. However if you seek him and his kingdom first, then all the stuff you need will be provided to you.

He said if God feeds the birds, then he will not fail to feed his children. He said if God clothes grassy fields with flowers, then he will not fail to give clothes to his children. He said anxiety adds nothing to your life, but it certainly can take away from it. He said godless people spend all their time worrying about stuff. He said his children ought not be like them.

He also said that if you find yourself filled with anxiety, then your faith needs to be strengthened. Faith is a spiritual muscle. It's needs to be exercised in order to grow. Talking to Jesus (in prayer) about what makes you anxious will strengthen your faith. Members of our prayer team will be available and want to pray with you.

So are you one of his children? Have you received His Holy Spirit dwelling within you? Have you surrendered your life to Jesus and obediently followed him in baptism professing your faith in him alone as your Savior? Are you trusting in him? Are you walking with him?