

Basic Training: Tomorrow
By Jason Huff
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Proverbs 27:1; James 4:13-16; Matthew 6:24-34

Friends, our final reading tonight comes from Matthew 6:24-34. Let's listen to the Word of God together. "[Jesus taught,] "No one can serve two masters. 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 both God and Money. 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 important than food, and the body more important than clothes? 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? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies 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, O you of little faith? 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. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.'"

My friend Brian West at Trinity Lutheran Church asked a hard question on Facebook this week. He said, "In a moment of raw honesty -- what keeps you from giving more of your money away?" One person said they had eight children...makes sense! Another person answered, "Selfishness...spending money on wants instead of giving more away. We do donate money but not as much as we probably should." But the overwhelming answer given time and time again was fear. Fear of what bills might come, fear sprinkled with wants, fear of not having enough to support one's family, fear of unemployment...fear of what might happen tomorrow.

These candid answers weren't from random people on the street. The responders were all Christians responding to a Christian pastor's bold question about why we're tightfisted. Most are regular church attenders, not just folks who show up on Christmas and Easter, people that we would typically assume are real believers. Fear keeps them from giving. I imagine if I were to ask that question here tonight, amongst a group of people I believe are attempting to be faithful followers of Jesus, if we were to answer truthfully, we'd say the exact same thing.

We are worriers – we would say it comes naturally, but it's not our natural state. It was brought about by sin. When Adam and Eve disobey God and eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the first thing that comes into their heads is worry – worry that they are naked, so they sew fig leaves together. The next thing that worries them is God's presence walking through the garden – they hide because they worry about what God will do next. Before their disobedience, they show no signs of worry. They trust God to provide for them.

Jesus knows what causes us to worry. Two weeks ago, He told us not to pursue treasures that won't last but instead to focus on treasures we can store up in God's Kingdom. This week, Jesus confronts why we pursue stuff, and what He says is a doozy. He warns that we can only serve one master -- either God or Money. Jesus' words are strong -- you'll either serve as a slave to God or a slave to money. Be God's slave and you will be free -- you're given salvation, forgiveness, and grace, which are poured out on us generously as we serve God out of our thanks. Be a slave to God and He doesn't treat you harshly; in fact, He adopts you into His family and gives you an inheritance. But serve Money and you will be enslaved to it. It is a harsh master that will not let us go and gives us heavy burdens -- the chief of which is worry.

If we trust in the Lord, if we bind ourselves to Him, if we believe in Christ for salvation, not only are we free to serve Him, we can serve with joy because God is so good to us! *Don't worry!* Can you imagine that? Jesus teaches His disciples that God wants us to be worry-free...about food, about drink, about clothes, about what will come tomorrow. How blessed we would be if we would live that way! How awesome that would be!

And God gives us good reasons to get rid of our worrying. The closest comparison we have from a worldly perspective is Bobby McFerrin's 1988 hit, "Don't Worry, Be Happy." Do you remember it? We could all probably sing it right now. Don't worry, the song says, because worrying doubles our troubles...not all that different from what Jesus says, how tomorrow has enough troubles of its own without worrying about them.

But the rest is painfully callous. "When you worry your face will frown, and that will bring everybody down." Later on in the song, he says, "Don't bring everybody down like this." Don't worry because it makes other people uncomfortable. That's just stupid! Later he says, "It will soon pass, whatever it is." That's just untrue. The video is hard to watch now because it stars Robin Williams, which makes the comment about trouble soon passing tragically ironic. I rarely agree with comedian George Carlin and I've never quoted him in my life, but what he wrote about the song makes a lot of sense. He wrote, "When I first heard the song Don't Worry, Be Happy, I realized it was exactly the kind of mindless philosophy that Americans would respond to. It would make a great national motto. Right along with Me First."

In comparison, God gives us several reasons to stop worrying that just make sense. God assigns us great value; He provides for every living thing, even those with very little worth, so He'll provide for us. He knows what we need better than we know it ourselves. Worry gives us no advantages; as Corrie ten Boom put it, "Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows; it empties today of its strength." On the bright side, a lack of worry shows an increase in faith. And best of all, when we seek the Kingdom of God and God's righteousness first, we find ourselves without need to worry at all.

These ideas reflect the Father's heart for us. As a dad, I don't want my kids to have to worry about anything. I want them to be free to be kids. I don't have enough money to give them everything they might want, but they shouldn't have to worry that there won't be a meal on the table tonight. And our Heavenly Father wants to provide for us the same way.

Jesus uses what we see around us every day as proof of God's love for us. No one in ancient Israel ever doubted that humanity was far superior to the animals or to nature. Birds had little value; they were accepted for sacrifices only if a family was so poor they couldn't afford a sheep or a goat. The grass of the field wasn't like what we see today. Nobody had ChemLawn! The only value it had was for its beauty and then for its use as something to keep your oven going. Jesus makes an analogy of lesser to greater. If God takes care of those things that are at the bottom of the value scale, how much more will He take care of us at the top!

God loves us. Every week, coming out of church, the word we hear from God challenges us to follow Him more closely and it convicts us of sin. But the word we hear from God should leave us with the awestruck feeling that God really loves us! He loves me! He loves all His people! He loves us so much that He sent His only Son to our world to rescue us from our sin. That's beautiful. It's the most important part of our faith. But it's also true to say that Jesus came to free us from the never-ending spiral of worry. That's an everyday blessing we need.

And Jesus spoke to people who had real cause to worry. They weren't worried that they couldn't afford the latest iPhone or the cable bill. Many were peasants, day laborers under no regular contract for work. If they didn't find someone looking for help that day, their families might not eat that night. There was no social safety net for those who got hurt or disabled on the job or were widows or orphans. The average person had two sets of outer clothes – one for every day and one for formal occasions like weddings – and a set of undergarments. They got patched when they were damaged until they fell apart. Food and drink and clothes were genuine issues. We go through our fridge and our closets and pick something we want. Jesus taught this to those who knew what it was like to be without, whose clothes might not last another week.

Jesus' audience knew something important that we should still take to heart – they knew what it was to work hard. Sometimes, we think worry is good because it motivates us. We could say that “worry” inspires us to get a job and to work hard at it. But Jesus' audience took hard work as an expectation of life. That work itself is hard is part of Adam's curse, but God put Adam to work before Adam fell into sin. Work is good! It says something about the ease of modern life that we want a job that fulfills us and makes us feel good about ourselves. Throughout human history, work has been necessary just to survive. It's a fact of life, and not one that they would say was motivated by worry.

Jesus' listeners up on the mountainside didn't worry about working hard. They worried that hard work was not enough, that drought and famine would ruin them, that despite their willingness, work would dry up and that they would literally die of poverty. Jesus' instruction is to avoid getting worked up about things that are outside of our control. God is sovereign. He has control over all things. His Kingdom is eternal. He will provide what we need in this life and the next. That's God's promise. That's really what this passage is about – trusting that God actually has control over the universe and cares about us.

Robert Mounce, a New Testament scholar, pulls no punches. He says, “Worry is practical atheism.” He's exactly right. When we worry, we believe that something is up to us beyond God's control, that somehow, God has forgotten these details or forgotten about us, or worse, that God really isn't there at all, even if we're unwilling to say the words.

Deuteronomy 28 tells us that not following God's ways and standing in awe of Him, forgetting Him, leads us to all sorts of awful problems, but noticeably anxiety. Paul says in Philippians 4:6, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

And that's where the passage leads us – if worry results from distrusting God, then the way to avoid worry is to seek first God's Kingdom and His righteousness. Know God's love for you, be embraced by His love, follow after that love that God has shown you, and worry no longer has to play into your life. Why? Because God provides. When God only has a tiny place in our lives, we think we need so much. We try to fill the void in our lives with anything that can make us feel better. But when God takes up the primary place in our lives, we recognize so much we have is unnecessary. If everything possession we owned were to go away and our bank accounts burst into flames and our stocks sunk to nothing, would we still have everything? If God is at the center of our lives, then yes, we do.

This is both personal and practical. Where I fail in this is particularly ironic. That's because my chief area of worry is about the church. I worry things are moving too slowly. I worry that we will lose some of you before we find a space we can worship on Sunday mornings at a price we can afford, that you'll want to go somewhere easier, somewhere simpler where less is asked of you. I worry about funding we need to raise. I worry we aren't big enough and successful enough, that we haven't yet reached enough people. I worry that people will come in and see twenty to thirty people and think we're too small to invest in. I worry that I'm inadequate and that my mistakes will cost us the ability to worship together as we sense God has intended for us. I worry whether we'll be able to afford the long haul necessary for CrossWay to become a force for the good news of Jesus Christ in Macomb Township.

None of those worries do a single thing for the Kingdom of God. In fact, they distract from it. Because it's not my church; it's God's church. I'm a servant of God; as I seek the Kingdom of God, there's a lot of hard work to be done preaching and teaching, inviting folks to learn who Jesus is and encouraging them to follow Him as well, even nitty-gritty things like fundraising. But as I seek God's Kingdom and do my work faithfully, I don't need to worry. Because whether we have 15 people or 500, whether we find the perfect place to move next week or next month or next year, no matter what happens, God is faithful.

God planned all the steps for CrossWay to exist years before we had a thought about the church in our heads. He gave me a friendship with Pastor Paul here at Bethel. He put it in my heart and the heart of the Session to look here for a place to land, and they've been incredibly gracious to host us at minimal rent. There hasn't been a single month where we couldn't pay rent or insurance or my salary. Not only that, but every month we've had plenty of funds to feed folks who need our pantry. We've had enough to send a hundred boxes to help children overseas, to fund a youth mission trip, and even to give over three hundred dollars to Sam and Crista, the missionaries we heard from last week. The funds, the building, the people...they're all here!

So I repent of my worrying about CrossWay and its situation. I'm going to continue to work hard for the church – probably harder than I even have in the past – but I'm not going to worry about it, and neither should you. Volunteer, give as God leads, serve others, use the gifts God has given you – and then don't worry. Rejoice that we have a place to worship, a faithful people who want to worship, and a God worth worshipping.

So what has you worried? Maybe it's finances that are keeping you from giving as God is calling you, to whatever God is calling you to give to. Maybe it's your health. Maybe it's your kids or grandkids. Maybe it's your home, your RV, your mortgage. There are tons of things we can worry about, and nothing worthy of our worry. Manage what you must manage for today. Plan for tomorrow, but do not worry about it.

God cares about you. He knows what you need. He knows every last thing about you. Like most of us, you'll find it's really difficult to set your worries aside. But take all that emotion and energy and time you spend on worry, and use it to grow with God in prayer, in study, in worship, in discipleship. You will find that things will be more than just alright. You'll find that God delights in you. You matter so much more to Him than the birds and the lilies of the field, and He provides for them. He will provide for us, too.