

"How to Stop Worrying" **Matthew 6:25-34**

INTRODUCTION

I want to begin today by asking you a question. What are you worried about? If you wrote down on a piece of paper all the things that you're worried about, how many and what would they be?

Followers of Jesus have a common problem. They worry about things but don't want to and ask, *"How can I stop?"*

The answer to that question is what I'm going to preach about today. Turn to the Bible's classic statement on this subject, Matthew 6:25-34. In this passage, Jesus Himself teaches us how to stop worrying. It's by doing three things, each of which I want to explain to you.

BE REALISTIC ABOUT WORRY

First, be realistic about worry. See it for what it really is – useless.

Jesus tells us to do just that in verse 27. He asks a rhetorical question here. Can we add a single "cubit", 1½ feet, to our height by worrying? If the answer was "yes," I'd be 7' tall – 5½ feet plus 1½ feet = 7 feet. One of my biggest worries growing up was not being tall enough. I thought about it all the time. But I finally learned what Jesus teaches here. Look at me. The answer to the question is "no." Worrying doesn't make us taller. It doesn't do anything constructive in fact. It's a totally, completely, and utterly useless thing to do.

I read about a businessman who was plagued by worry. He couldn't sleep, had an ulcer, and was always stressed. He finally decided to do something about it. He sat down and drew up a chart entitled *Why Worry?* He then wrote down on it all the things that worried him and analyzed them. This is what he found. 30% of the things he was worried about concerned circumstances he couldn't change. 12% had to do with criticisms by people he couldn't control. 10% related to his health, which only worsened when he worried. And 40% would never happen. Those are in fact accurate percentages. They are just as true of us as they were of him. Do you realize what that means? We can do something

about only 8% of the things that worry us. And even then worry itself doesn't contribute anything constructive to that.

I bought a home once that had a bowed basement wall, which I couldn't afford to fix. I worried for 10 years that it was going to cave in. But I was eventually able to get it fixed and did. I'd observe two things. First, all of that worry didn't do anything constructive about my bowed wall. And second, what I worried about didn't happen.

We need to be realistic about worry. We need to see it for what it is – useless. Knowing and focusing on that isn't a cure all. But it can help alleviate the anxiety we feel to some degree.

TREASURE KINGDOM THINGS

There's a second thing that we have to do to stop worrying. Jesus tells us what that is in verse 33. Seek God's kingdom and righteousness first. Or to use the terminology of verses 19-21, treasure kingdom things! Verse 32 defines the word "treasure." It means to eagerly seek. We must treasure or eagerly seek kingdom things.

Most people don't you know. According to verse 32, they treasure worldly things instead. There are many such things of course, four of which Jesus identifies in this chapter. These are the four that people most eagerly and commonly seek.

The first, in verses 1-18, is the approval of others. They pursue the recognition and praise of others. I saw a license plate just last week, for instance, that said "1 Nana." But there are many other "Nana's" or grandmothers out there, I'm sure, who would take exception to that.

There's a second worldly thing that people eagerly seek. According to verses 19-24, it's wealth. It's money and things. Financial advisers are now counseling clients that they need a \$1,000,000 investment to live comfortably in retirement. According to them, in other words, we need \$60,000 to \$100,000 a year to live the way we should in retirement.

The third worldly thing that people eagerly seek is outward appearance or looks. We see that in verse 27. This verse addresses

height or size. We also see it in verses 28-30, which address beauty. The fact is that looks are paramount to most people. They can live with not being "10's." I mean, after all, how many "10's" are there. But they'd give or do almost anything not to be a "5" or below.

Jesus identifies a fourth and for His purposes final worldly thing that people eagerly seek. Look at verse 25 and the words ***"do not be worried about your life."*** In those words, we find the one thing that almost every human being treasures the most – staying alive on earth. That's why they fight so desperately, at any cost, not to die.

Now, with those four things in mind, listen as I read verse 21, ***"for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*** That is a profound psychological insight. Jesus' point is that our entire personality is directed toward the things that we treasure.

Do you realize what that means and there are no exceptions to this. It means that if we treasure worldly things, we're going to worry.

Verse 19 explains why. It's because those worldly things are subject to risk or threat. The approval of others, wealth, looks, and earthly life itself. All of us know by experience that those things can be as easily lost as they are acquired. Consequently, if we treasure them, we'll worry and I mean either way. If we don't have them, we'll worry that we won't get them. If we do have them, we'll worry that we'll lose them.

I know a retired couple, not from our church, who are living off of a substantial retirement fund. But they're worried about it. ***"You know how volatile the stock market is,"*** the husband said, ***"Just because we have it this year doesn't mean that we'll have it next year."*** And he's right isn't he?

There's something you and I need to know. If we treasure worldly things, whatever they are, we're going to worry. In fact, stop and analyze the things that you've worried about over the years and are worrying about now. Most of them probably have something to do with the approval of others, wealth, appearance, or staying alive on earth.

So, don't treasure or eagerly seek worldly things. Treasure kingdom

things instead. That's what Jesus calls us to do in verse 33. Treasure kingdom things. There are many such things, including the antithesis of each worldly thing I mentioned before. They are the approval of God, simplicity or the basics, inner beauty, and abundant and eternal life.

People who treasure kingdom things won't worry. That's because they're beyond risk or threat. Referring back to verse 19, moth and rust cannot destroy them and thieves cannot steal them. Kingdom things can't be diminished or destroyed. God supplies them and they're always there. So, there's no reason to worry about them and we don't.

I know that by experience. I don't worry about the approval of others because I don't treasure it. What I do treasure is God's approval, which He supplies. I don't worry about wealth because I don't treasure it. What I do treasure is simplicity, the basics, which God supplies. I don't worry about outer beauty because I don't treasure it. What I do treasure is inner beauty, which God supplies. I don't worry about staying alive on earth because I don't treasure it. What I do treasure is living abundantly and eternally, which God supplies.

That then is the second thing that we have to do to stop worrying. Treasure kingdom things. Study the Bible and learn what those are. Then eagerly pursue them. You won't worry if you do.

HAVE FAITH IN GOD

The third and most important thing that we have to do to stop worrying is to have faith in God.

You can see that in verses 26 and 28-30. Jesus mentions two things in these verses – the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. He says that Father God highly values these birds and flowers. So He feeds the birds and clothes the flowers with beauty. But He values us far more than He does them. That means, Jesus concludes in verses 26 and 30, if He takes care of them, how much more so will He take care of us.

Now, let's suppose for a moment that all of that is true. God actually exists and is utterly competent – all powerful, all knowing, all

wise, and everywhere present. And He actually takes care of us, which means, practically, works things out for our good, Romans 8:28.

What would that mean in terms of the things that we go through in life? I'm talking about things like cancer, unemployment, poverty, rebellious children, aging parents, unfair criticisms, purposeful snubs, terrorist attacks, and more. It would mean that the competence and care of God, and not any of those things, are the dominant realities in our lives. It would mean that those things pale in comparison to the competence and care of God.

That is in fact the case, which means that there is objectively and literally nothing for us to worry about if we're followers of His.

One of our Friends pastors needs a heart transplant but can't afford one. So, he has a year at the most to live. Question! What are objectively the dominant realities in his life? Are they His weakening heart, inability to afford a transplant, and looming death? No! They are instead the competence and care of the God who loves Him. That means that he has literally nothing to worry about or fear.

You recognize of course what the issue is for him – and us. Do we believe that? It doesn't matter how true it is. If we don't believe it, we'll worry. That's why Billy Graham said what he said, ***“Worry begins when faith ends.”*** He's right about that. Worry begins when faith ends. The chief cause of worry is doubting God, not believing in His competence and care. So, don't doubt God. Have faith in Him instead. Believe in His competence and care. You won't worry if you do.

That's frustrating to hear isn't it? It always was to me at least. Preachers would stand behind the pulpit and tell me to have faith in God and I wouldn't worry. The problem was that I couldn't do it. I'd say to myself, ***“Okay, I'm deciding right now to have faith in God and not worry about things.”*** I'd then leave church, go out, and worry like I always did.

There was a reason for that. That reason is a sequence or order that's built into the very fabric of our existence. That sequence or order

is this: knowing – believing - not worrying. First, we know God experientially. Second, because we know Him, we believe in His competence and care. And third, because we believe in His competence and care, we stop worrying, period. That's the sequence and there is no way of getting around it.

You can see then what we have to do to stop worrying. We have to commit ourselves to knowing God. I know that most people don't like hearing that and won't do it. That's because it isn't the quick fix, the immediate answer, for which they're looking. It takes time, resources, and effort. Believe me though, it works. If you come to know God, you will eventually stop worrying, period.

We begin a study this coming Wednesday entitled *The First Aim*. This study is about knowing and loving God. Come to it, apply what you learn in it, and you will eventually know Him. And because you know Him, you will eventually have faith in Him. And because you have faith in Him, you'll stop worrying, period.

CONCLUSION

I close by applying everything I've said to a hypothetical situation. I have only a year to live and know it. First, I'm not worried about the process of dying because I know God and believe in His competence and care. He'll be with and sustain me through it. Second, I'm also not worried about dying itself because I don't treasure staying alive on earth. I do treasure living abundantly and eternally instead, which God supplies. And third, I'm not worried about my wife being left without a job and hospitalization because again I believe in God's competence and care. He'll supply what she needs. Besides, worrying nothing better and a lot of things worse. So, I won't worry.

What I've just said is either cheap talk or one of the most life-impacting truths that you will ever hear. So, which is it? All I can say is try it and see. Be realistic about worry, treasure kingdom things, and have faith in God. You'll stop worrying if you do.