

Jesus on Anxiety

Matthew 6:25-34

Series: Jesus On _____

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Last week we began this new series, *Jesus On ___: The Only Perspective that Matters*. And today's message is going to cover an important topic that probably all of us can all relate to on some level.

We're looking at and studying today: **Jesus on Anxiety**

Illus. Don't worry, Be happy - In 1988, a 38-year-old, son of a Baptist minister wrote a song that climbed to the top of the pop charts. It won *Song of the Year*, *Album of the Year*, and was the first ever acapella song to reach #1 on the *Billboard Top 100 Chart*.

Do you know what song I'm talking about? It's pretty catchy and if I start singing it, I promise you it will be stuck in your head and you will be singing it the rest of the day! Here are some of the lyrics to help you out:

Here's a little song I wrote

You might want to sing it note for note

Don't worry, be happy

In every life we have some trouble

But when you worry, you make it double

Don't worry, be happy

Don't worry, be happy

If it was only that easy, right? If we could in the words of Timon and Pumbaa from *The Lion King* just enjoy the Hakuna Matata lifestyle - "no worries" for the rest of our days! I mean if we could just:

- embrace this philosophy...
- say these words out loud...
- really believe them with all our heart...

THEN everything would be okay. If only it was this easy!

The reality is all of us have worries and anxieties that weigh us down. All of us have concerns in life that if we're not careful can:

- prevent us from moving forward spiritually...
- threaten to overwhelm us mentally...
- cripple us emotionally...
- and can sometimes even do physiological damage to us...

The word “worry” that we are going to see here in the passage of scripture comes from a word meaning “to choke or to strangle”. Some translations use the word “anxiety” which means to “divide” to “rip apart”...to “be pulled in separate directions”.

Don’t answer this out loud, but does anyone here today feel like that? Something is happening in your life and you feel like:

- you’re being pulled apart ...
- you’re walking through something...
- you’re facing something and it just feels like it’s choking the life out of you...

Well, if so, let’s listen to what Jesus has to say because in his very first sermon, he addresses worry and anxiety and how to deal with it.

Now, I’m going to read our passage, but let me just say as we turn there, if you never thought the Bible was relevant...or Jesus was relevant - maybe you are new to church or just coming back here after Easter last week (btw – we’re SUPER glad you are here!) – if that’s you, maybe you’ve had this thought about the Bible, that it’s an old, outdated book...not relevant to my life today.

ONE of the reasons that we are doing this series, *Jesus on _____* is because that thought could not be further from the truth!

Just about every issue we deal with in life, Jesus spoke about in one way or another. The Bible is extremely relevant and extraordinarily helpful on a very practical and we will see this throughout this series.

So, let’s look at what Jesus said about worry and anxiety. We begin in: **Matt. 6:25-34** – **“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? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 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? 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. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

Jesus is speaking to a group of people...the mass majority of them poor...many not knowing where their next meal is going to come from and four times in this passage of scripture he says to them, “don’t be anxious”.

Now, I’d say that’s a pretty bold command. If I didn’t know where my next meal was coming from - and as you can see, I don’t have that problem at all - but if I did, I don’t know that I would appreciate a traveling preacher telling me not to be anxious...just telling me not to worry about it.

That doesn’t sound helpful to me...it sounds like he doesn’t fully know my situation. It sounds like he’s minimizing what I’m up against. On first hearing it sounds like the first century version of “Don’t worry, be happy”...Hakuna Matata!

BUT...as is ALWAYS the case with Jesus, he doesn’t just tell us what to do or not to do. Instead, like any good teacher that cares he tries to reason and explain himself in a way that his listeners can understand AND he provides them with information that will help them to do or not do whatever it is he is teaching about.

Now, in this teaching Jesus gives three reasons we shouldn’t worry OR let anxiety overwhelm us and overrun our lives.

I’m going to add a fourth reason that Jesus doesn’t mention directly, but we all know it’s true and there’s no question it’s probably one of the reasons Jesus says “don’t be anxious” in the first place!

1. It’s unreasonable

Look...it’ doesn’t make sense to worry! Now, the ESV translates this word as “anxiety”...the NIV translates it as “worry” – are these the same things? I’d say they are incredibly close.

Some may suggest that anxiety is prolonged worry...for what we are talking about today we’ll use the words as interchangeable, and when Jesus speaks about worry and anxiety, one of the first points he makes is that it’s unreasonable.

Matt. 6:26, 28-30 – “Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you no of more value than they?... 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 is encouraging his listeners to take a step back and think! See, what happens when we are worried about something - tell me this isn’t true! When we are anxious about what is going on in our life or the life of someone we love, if we’re not careful one of the first things we lose...is our mind...our logic...we stop thinking straight!

What happens is we get “tunnel vision” on the problem we’re facing or the situation we are in and that’s all we can see. And it’s in times like this that if we are not careful, our mind will take off and run to worst-case scenario. Is this not true?!

And the more we fixate on what may or may not even be happening...what may or may not even be true...the more worrying we do and the more intense the anxiety grows!

? – Have you ever heard of the “worry cycle”? Linda Mintle is a Ph.D and she wrote a book called, *Letting Go of Worry: God’s Plan For Finding Peace and Contentment*.

In it, she talks of the “worry cycle” which is this downward spiral that takes place when we let worry and anxiety get the best of us, and it happens because we lose our minds to the “what ifs” – i.e. we allow our thoughts of worst-case scenario to consume us! She plays it out like this:

Illus. Worry Cycle – Your family plans a trip to the beach. You hear on the news that a shark has been sighted near your destination. Soon, the worry cycle starts! Our mind wanders:

1. If a shark has been sighted, there must be more than one.
2. If there’s more than one shark, the odds are we will see one while we’re at the beach.
3. If we don’t see a shark, how many more are there that we cannot see.
4. If there are sharks we cannot see, then we can’t be safe in the water.
5. If we’re not safe in the water, we’ll get too hot on the sand.
6. If we’re too hot on the sand, we could suffer a heatstroke.
7. If we could suffer a heatstroke on the beach, we should probably just stay in our room.
8. If we’re going to stay in our room, what’s the point of going to the beach? Maybe we should just stay home. Then we don’t have to worry about a plane crash, a car wreck, the airlines losing our luggage, our identities being stolen, getting food poisoning...and especially not being eaten by a shark!

Do you see how the “worry cycle” works?! If we fall prey to this and allow our minds to wander and go to “worst case scenario”, it can lock us up and when we take a step back and really think about it, we see how faulty our thinking is...how unreasonable our worry can be.

This is what Jesus is trying to get his listeners to understand. They may not have much...they may be poor and it could be that they don’t know where their next meal is going to come from, but Jesus uses an argument to say, “look at the birds – God cares about them and feeds them. Do you not think that you, his prized creation as men and women made in his image...you don’t think he’s going to take care of you?!”

And by the way, simply by them being there – present...accounted for...taking in oxygen as they listen to Jesus is proof he’s got them to this point! He’s provided for them so far! They might not have all their wants, but God has taken care of their needs.

Jesus says, “Look at the grass of the fields. God covers them with beautiful flowers and the grass. It’s here today and gone tomorrow.” Jesus wants us to see that it doesn’t add up that God would take care of birds and fields, but not take care of his children. Worry is unreasonable.

2. It's unproductive

Matt. 6:27 – “And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?”

Some translations have the words: **“And which of you by being anxious can add a single cubit to his stature?”**

Worrying doesn't add to life, it takes away! I read this week about a study that Cornell University did. They followed people for an extended period of time and found that 85% of what the people they were studying worried about never happened. In addition to that, with the 15% that something worrisome did happen, 79% of those said that what happened didn't turn out to be as bad as they thought it would, and that they handled the situation better than they originally thought they would!

Put these numbers together and 97% of the time, we are worrying for nothing! One commentator on this research is a surgeon by the name of:

Dr. Charles Black – “Let me reiterate, 97% of the things we worry about either never happen, or we handle them and possibly learn something valuable in the process. Only 3% of the time did peoples' worries prove well-founded. Only, 3%! I get better returns on my stock market investments than I get on my worries — and one of those worries is, ironically, the stock market.”

It was **Mark Twain – “I am an old man and have known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened.”**

Worrying is unreasonable...doesn't make sense when you really step back and think about it. It's unproductive. Someone said, “worry is like a rocking chair. It keeps us busy but gets us nowhere!

The mass majority of that which we worry about and that causes anxiety, we can't do a single thing about. It's unproductive to worry.

3. It's unhealthy

Now, this is the one that Jesus didn't say, but I do think it's one of the reasons he says, “don't worry”. He knows us and he knows that worrying is not good for us.

38% of all deaths are heart-related and many of these are brought on by hypertension and high blood pressure due to overwhelming anxiety and stress?

Did you know that according to the The National Alliance on Mental Illness there are over 40 million adults in the U.S. (19.1%) have an anxiety disorder.

Jonathan Haidt is a social psychologist professor at NYU just came out with a book called, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*.

I haven't read the book in full, but have seen and read some interviews. Here is a graph he gives with current numbers from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health. **(SHOW GRAPH)**.

His hypothesis is that smartphones and social media specifically is rewiring our children's brains and has prevented them from developing important coping skills and relational skills and as a result has led to an increase in anxiety will continue to into the future.

He said in an interview I read: **"The loss of human happiness, flourishing, and productivity from mental health is staggering. We've known that for a long time. So what's going to happen as this anxious generation—I don't know how much they get over it. We don't know yet. But presumably, if their minds are set more towards defend mode than discover mode, they do seem to be more anxious in their 20s as well. So I'm not saying, you know, it's locked in, you can't change. But I think we're going to see this generation more anxious and depressed for the rest of their lives, on average."**

He's got some good, practical things we can do in order to help our children – boundaries and such – the point I'm making though, and we know this – worrying is not healthy!

You can look up worrying on WebMD...don't do that by the way! I started having all sorts of symptoms while reading that site. Listen to what it says about worrying though:

"Chronic worrying can affect your daily life so much that it may interfere with your appetite, lifestyle habits, relationships, sleep, and job performance. Many people who worry excessively are so anxiety-ridden that they seek relief in harmful lifestyle habits such as overeating, cigarette smoking, or using alcohol and drugs."

We know this is true. According to the Journal of Clinical Psychiatry in an article entitled *The Economic Burden of Anxiety Disorders* it states that "anxiety disorders cost the US more than \$42 billion a year, almost one-third of the country's \$148 billion total health bill."

And listen, I want to highlight here that for some, the best thing you can do for your anxiety is to talk to your physician or a professional counselor about it.

I'm not knocking medicine or antidepressants in ANY way. It could be that there are some biological factors at play and a doctor or psychiatrist may be exactly what is needed to help – those can serve as agents of God's grace in your life.

The point I am making is worry is NOT healthy. We know it. Jesus who created you knows it, and it's why he commands you not to be anxious in the first place...he ONLY wants what is best for you!

So, as we have seen. Worry is unreasonable. It's unproductive. It's unhealthy. And then...here is one of the biggest reasons we should make sure we root out anxiety and worry in our life:

4. It's unchristian

Uh-oh...I said it! But, here's the deal. I'm only saying it because Jesus did! Look at:

Matt. 6:31-32 – “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.”

By saying the “gentiles”, Jesus is saying this is what the world does...this is what those who are not in a relationship with God do – they worry!

- NOT followers of Yahweh...
- NOT those who are in a relationship with the Lord!

Why on earth would followers of the Lord worry?! You've got God in your corner! So, let's answer the question once and for all – is worrying a sin?

Well “yes” and “no”. Listen, we are to be responsible and tackle problems and issues of life head-on. As Christians, there WILL be stresses and stressors in life – we don't put our head in the sand on this. We're not oblivious or immune to tough times and trials that can create worry, stress or anxiety.

- People we love get sick and die...
- Finances get tight...
- Relationships can be a struggle...
- Work can seem like more than we can handle at times.

There will be...we will have causes of concern in life that grip us! What Jesus calls for here is that his followers we should never get to a point where our causes of concern have us OR that we lose our grip on him! THIS is where worrying and anxiety becomes sin.

Notice the words of Jesus in **Matt. 6:30b – “...O you of little faith?”**

You want to know why worry and anxiety are so dangerous? Because it's in the same bloodline as unbelief – and unbelief will prevent the moving of God in your life (Matt. 13).

It's interesting...I did a little study this week on that phrase, “O you of little faith.” And the word “little” there, it can be translated as “lack” – it's not that there is NO faith present, it's just that there is a lack of faith.

And when you hear Jesus say this, don't think of a harsh rebuke, like Jesus is disgusted with them. Think more of him putting an arm around them and calling them to a higher place!

Illus. Coach – grab a facemask and yell or put his arm around me and coach me up

This is Jesus...check this: 5x in Matthew's gospel, it's recorded that Jesus spoke these words – "O you of little faith." He did it here in chapter six where there was a lack of faith and trust that God would meet the physical needs of the people – that's important!

He says it again in Matthew chapter eight. This is when Jesus is on the sea, asleep in the hull of the boat when a storm is coming (tell story) – again, they fear their physical safety!

He says it again in Matthew chapter fifteen...this is where Peter walks on water (tell story) – his physical senses assaulted!

He says it again in an interesting exchange with his disciples in Matthew sixteen and if you read it, it's regarding the disciples' mind being on the temporal and physical rather than the spiritual.

He says it again in Matthew seventeen after the disciples can't cast a demon out. Jesus says it's because the disciples doubt the power of God.

In EVERY instance where Jesus states there is "little faith" it correlates to a lack of trust in WHO God is, WHAT God can do – and in EVERY situation the physical prevails OVER the spiritual.

There is a lesson here: As Christians, we walk by faith and NOT by sight (2 Cor. 5:7)! We can't be influenced simply by the senses that dominate us – what we can feel, see with our eyes, hear with our ears – to do so will ONLY increase worry and decrease faith!

Listen to what the late author and pastor, **A.W. Tozer** wrote in his book, *The Pursuit of God*:

"The world of sense intrudes upon our attention day and night for the whole of our lifetime. It is clamorous, insistent and self-demonstrating. It does not appeal to our faith; it is here, assaulting our five senses, demanding to be accepted as real and final. But sin has so clouded the lenses of our hearts that we cannot see that other reality, the City of God, shining around us. The world of sense triumphs. The visible becomes the enemy of the invisible; the temporal, of the eternal. That is the curse inherited by every member of Adam's tragic race. At the root of the Christian life lies belief in the invisible. The object of the Christian's faith is unseen reality."

Listen...worry increases and faith decreases the moment we begin to focus on the physical OVER the spiritual. The opposite is also true. Worry decreases and faith increases when we focus on the spiritual OVER the physical.

While there are six times Jesus spoke the words and phrases, "O you of little faith", twice in Matthew's gospel, Jesus affirms someone who had "great faith".

The first is in Matthew 8:5-13, where a Roman centurion comes to Jesus on behalf of his servant who is sick. (tell story), Listen to:

Matt. 8:10 – “When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, “Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.”

A second time in Matthew’s gospel, he affirms the faith of a pagan, Canaanite woman who comes and literally bows before Jesus and begs him to heal her daughter. When Jesus sees this and they have an exchange, listen to what he says of her:

Matt. 15:28 – “Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.”

First, notice the irony...in all of the “O you of little faith”, Jesus was speaking to his disciples or to Jewish people – the chosen people of God. And to the TWO he speaks to and marvels at their faith – both Gentiles – ones who were supposedly far from God!

Second, what was the difference between the small faith and great faith?

The “small faith” people were focused on the physical and therefore doubted the spiritual or at a minimum clouded their spiritual vision. To them, the object of their concern (whatever it was – and it was a legit concern, boat, drowning, the demonic) – to them the size of the concern or their circumstance was BIGGER than the object of their faith – (God)!

The “great faith” people were focused on the spiritual NOT letting the physical cloud their view. The physical was BIG – servant sick and dying...a daughter demon possessed and hurting herself – but to the “great faith” people the object of their faith (Jesus) was greater than what was causing them stress and worry and anxiety.

If we want to increase faith while at the same time decrease worry, it begins by focusing on the spiritual over the physical. And how do we do this?

One word: **PRAY**

Prayer is what focuses us...we need to turn our worries into prayers and as we do, we will see an increase in prayer and a decrease in worry.

Prayer is what puts our worries and anxieties in perspective and it’s what puts them in their proper place. And so, let me give you as we close some practical ways to pray the worry away and listen...this is NOT some simplistic, christianese verbiage and advice!

Prayer is the ONLY thing I know that works to minimize and eliminate worry.

Max Lucado – “Worry is the interest we pay on the prayerless life.”

And he’s right! We’re talking about the words of Jesus – what did Jesus say about this, but let me just bring in the apostle Paul here for a second. Remember what he wrote about worry and anxiety?

Phil. 4:6-8 – “do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of

God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

So, what do we mean when we say pray?

P – Pursue the Lord and his will

Matt. 6:33 – “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

Prayer is seeking and pursuing God and his will. And as we do this, we will grow in our understanding of WHO God is. As we do this, we will begin to focus on the object of our faith – God – who is bigger than anything we will come up against AND we will be reminded of his character!

Jesus says, in (v. 26, 32) – “your heavenly Father.” 17x in this sermon on the mount, twice in this passage, Jesus gives these people, his followers a revolutionary thought to consider - “Why worry, when you have a father looking after you?!”

This is what fathers do! They look after...they protect...they provide. God is different than any earthly father you have had – don’t even try to compare. I had a great earthly father, but as GREAT as he was, there is NO comparison to God – he is the perfect father.

As my heavenly father, he knows me better than I know myself. Why would I ever worry when Dad has this under control?!

Illus. Teaching girls how to swim – what are you concerned about? I got this! I’m your father...I’m not going to let you drown! I’m not going to let go!

I think sometimes this must be how God looks at us – “O you of little faith! Have you forgotten who I am? I’ve got the whole world in my hands!”

I’m reminded of Jesus’s words in **Luke 11:11-13** – (context is prayer) **“What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; ¹² or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”**

When we pray, it reinforces and helps us to see we have a Heavenly Father that is large and in charge! It’s interesting, isn’t it? That which causes the MOST panic...the MOST anxiety is the unknowns...the uncertainties that come in life.

BUT, what is unknown to me and uncertain to me, is NOT to the God who knows all, sees all and is over all – he can be trusted! And if I want I increase faith and decrease worry, it begins by pursuing the Lord and his will for my life.

R – Remember what the Lord has done

Past faithfulness fuels future trust! When we pray, and we're confronted with a worry or a concern, it's helpful to look back either in scripture or your own life at how God has come through in the past.

Illus. journal

I love the call of Jesus here to "look around" – the birds of the air...the grass of the fields – "I've taken care of them, don't you think I'll take care of you."

Slow down long enough to pray and I would encourage you to pray with open eyes – you'll see all around you reminders of God's goodness and grace toward you. The physical can sometimes overwhelm us, but if we look at it through the lens of prayer, our faith grows!

- See doctors as God's provision...
- See storms rolling in and rolling out...
- See a community of faith that loves me and wants to walk with me...

A – Ask the Lord to hear and answer your prayer

Jesus would say over and over again – ASK! Seek. Knock. Tell the Lord what's on your heart and ask him to resolve it. Ask him to help you. Again, turn your worries into prayers. BUT, at the end of the day:

Y – Yield your will/wants to the Lord's will/wants

As our heavenly Father, he knows what's best, and he can be trusted. Jesus left us a wonderful example of this in the Garden of Gethsemane (Not my will, but yours be done).

Listen, if we want worry which is unreasonable, unproductive, unhealthy and unchristian to decrease and our faith increase, we must pray.

Jesus on anxiety. You can have it, but it's prayer that helps it not have us. Amen? Let's pray.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.