

## How to Let Go of Worry Matthew 6:25-27

Good morning! We're on the fourth and final message of our series we've entitled "God's Got You!". I hope this series has increased your faith in a mighty and faithful God. We all go through challenges in life and it's a relief to know that there's someone who's always rooting for us, someone who has got our back, someone who will carry us through.

Today, I'd like to tackle a topic that many of us are a victim of. We say we're no longer a victim but then life throws us a curve ball and we start the cycle again. I'm talking about worry. Who among us here doesn't worry? Raise your hand. If you're like me, you worry every now and then.

In fact, right now, I believe without shadow a of a doubt, with a certainty of 100%, that your number one worry is what? Whether or not the Washington Football Team is ever going to make it in the NFL playoffs.

OK. Of course, that's not your #1 worry. Your real worry is that whether you or anyone in your family will ever catch the dreaded coronavirus. As we all know, the great danger posed by this virus has been highlighted recently by the President and his wife contracting the COVID-19 disease. And how it has spread to many of his close contacts.

Now, worry can be healthy or unhealthy. Healthy worry is like when your children spends so many hours playing video games and you worry it would affect their social skills or their brains later on. So, that prompts you to take action by limiting their number of hours playing video games. The unhealthy kind of worry is when you worry that you will lose your job because of the economy and you couldn't focus on your job and you lose sleep because of it and you become irritated and you start to yell at your wife or children.

That's the kind of worry that's not productive. Because it affects you and others around you in a negative way.

I believe that is what Jesus is addressing in this passage we're looking at today. When we worry too much, or we worry unnecessarily, or we worry for no reason at all, then it becomes dangerous to our health and we also lose our perspective on life.

It's ok then to worry about the coronavirus. Because it makes you become aware of the dangers and you take precautions to avoid it. But if you don't and then you constantly avoid people or stock up on sanitizers and toilet paper and wear PPE even if you're not a doctor then something's wrong with you.

In this message today, I'd like to talk about how we can let go of unhealthy worry. I've entitled it "How to Let Go of Worry". I'd like to glean three principles we can find from this famous passage on worry by the Lord Jesus as written down for us by his disciple Matthew. Please turn with me to Matthew 6:25 and follow along as I read this passage.

Read Matthew 6:25-34.

Jesus says in verse 25, "Do not worry". Other versions of the Bible say "Do not be anxious" which actually is the primary meaning in the original Greek. That's why I said Jesus meant unhealthy worry because anxiety is always unhealthy. It always produces negative results. There's no such thing as healthy anxiety. According to the dictionary, anxiety is "An apprehensive uneasiness or nervousness, usually over an impending or anticipated ill; an abnormal and overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear, often marked by physical signs (such as tension, sweating, and increased pulse rate), by doubt concerning the reality and nature of a threat, and by self-doubt about one's capacity to cope with it." Didn't that make you anxious already?

If you notice, in the verses preceding verse 25, if you look at verses 19-24, Jesus is talking about money or the danger of focusing too much on money. Like in verse 19, he begins by saying, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal”. And then, in verse 24, he says, “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

He is saying, “Hey, you’ve got needs. You need to meet those needs. You need money to meet those needs. But be careful the way you pursue money. Don’t put your trust in money. In fact, don’t worry about your needs.” And then he continues to verse 25 where he gives us principles on how to not worry or be anxious about our life, food, and clothes.

The word for anxiety literally means “to be drawn in different directions” (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Loyal*), and that’s exactly what happens when you try to serve God and money at the same time. It pulls you apart!

Jesus says don’t let your money worries pull you apart! Do not be anxious! Don’t worry! But how? How do you stop worry? How do you prevent anxiety from pulling you apart?

Let me share with you three things you can do. Mind you, these things not only on money problems, but on every aspect of your life. Jesus says, “Don’t worry about your life.” So, first,

**1. Look at the birds of the air.**

Don’t focus on your need; focus on how God cares for His creation. Pay attention to the way God feeds and clothes His lesser creatures.

Let me read verse 26 again, “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?” (NIV)

See how God feeds the birds. It's not that they don't work. They just don't worry about where their food is coming from. Have you ever seen a worried bird? God takes care of them, and He will certainly take care of you, who is worth so much more than the birds!

Besides, your worry contributes nothing! And it does nothing! Psychologists have said that 90% of what people worry about never comes to pass. And someone stated, "Worry is like a rocking chair. It will give you something to do, but it won't get you anywhere."

Verse 27 says, "Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?" Jesus is saying, "Worrying is not productive. It doesn't increase the value of your life. In fact, it decreases it." When you worry, three things happen. You lose your sleep. You lose your health. And you lose your focus, right? And when any of those happens, that's another thing to worry about.

I read the story of a pastor whose name is Buddy Owens. He shared with his church that strange as it may seem, God has used birds to get his attention or to speak to him whenever there was a need in his life.

For example, before he became a pastor, he was the vice president of a company that's in the music business. He was sitting in his kitchen early in the morning paying the bills, and it had been one of those months where there was more month than there was money. They had some unexpected things happen and he was looking at this and he was going, "I don't know how we're going to get through this" He started talking to God. "What are we going to do?" And right then a robin hopped past the patio doors and he remembered, "Look at the birds of the air. Your heavenly Father feeds them and you're more important than they are."

There was another time in his company. They were about to launch a whole new product line. It was actually a partnership with another organization.

They'd been working with another company for months and had invested all kinds of time and energy and money into this launch. At the last moment they disappeared. Shut down, closed their doors and left.

He hung up the phone from getting that news and he just kind of turned in his chair and he looked out the windows to this field across the parking lot and he said, "Father, what are we going to do? How are we going to get through this one?" Just then a hawk started to circle over the field and he remembered, "Look at the birds of the air. Your Heavenly Father takes care of them. He's going to take care of you too."

But there was one time when God spoke to him in a very clear way. It was September and he received the news that his company was going to lay him off on December 16<sup>th</sup> because they were downsizing. At first, he didn't mind it and just trusted God. Maybe something will change. But as the days turn to weeks and the weeks to months he became agitated. Until December 16<sup>th</sup> came and woke up feeling like a worried bird. He prayed really hard because he was anxious about what he would say to upper management about his severance and he didn't know what to say. And he was pretty worried too about what was going to happen to his family. So, he dropped to his knees beside the bed and told God all about his feelings. After a long talk with God, not really knowing whether God heard him, he just said, "Father, I need a bird today."

After a few minutes, his phone rang. It was his neighbor Nancy who wanted him to come to her house to show him something in her backyard. He went reluctantly. In the backyard, Nancy showed her hand with a peanut and started to make a noise. It was a like a chirpy sound. Minutes went by and nothing happened. He thought he was wasting his time. Nancy continued to make the sound and then out of nowhere a blue jay flew out of the trees and he landed on her hand and he picked up the peanut and he flew away.

Then, she gets another peanut out of her pocket, puts it on her hand, starts calling, and the blue jay reappeared and took the peanut from her hand and flew away. Nancy then asked him to do it.

Buddy was reluctant at first but did it anyway and the bird did not land right away but in the end took the peanut also. The meaning of this, of course, was not lost to him. In his most pressing need, God spoke to him again that he would provide for him and his family the same way that Nancy and he provided for the bird.

So, that's the first principle. Don't be anxious. Instead, look at the birds of the air. Then...

## 2. LOOK TO YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER.

Focus on His love for you and pay attention to what He wants for you.

Matthews 6:31-32, "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."

The Gentiles in Jesus' day had jealous, capricious, and unpredictable gods. If they wanted any help, the Gentiles had to pest their gods with "many words," according to Matthew 6:7. But even then, their gods may decide not to help, so the Gentiles were pretty much on their own. That's why they sought hard after their basic needs.

Why do they have to do that? Because their gods are not real. Their gods don't care for them because they don't exist. But the God of the Bible is real. He is your Heavenly Father who takes care of you, because He actually loves you.

The Bible says, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). God loved you so much that He gave His only Son to die on a cross to pay for your sins (and mine).

As a result, those who trust Jesus with their lives, find that they are beloved children of the Father (1 John 3:1), blessed with every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3), and favored by Him (Ephesians 1:6). In fact, the Bible says, “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32) There’s nothing he will not give you because you are his beloved child. And you are his beloved child if you have acknowledged what his only begotten son, the Lord Jesus, died for you on the cross.

So, God your heavenly Father would bend over backwards to meet your needs. He will. So don’t worry! Look to your Heavenly Father who loves you and knows your need. Then focus your attention on His will. Don’t worry about getting your needs met; worry about doing what God wants you to do.

Matthew 6:33 says, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Make your number one priority the Kingdom of God. That is to say, make it your #1 goal to pursue God’s will for your life and to exhibit HIS righteousness. Don’t seek to exhibit YOUR righteousness. Seek instead to exhibit GOD’s righteousness as you let Christ live His righteous life through you. Pay attention to God’s interests first, and He will pay attention to your interests, to your needs.

After living as a quadriplegic for 45 years, **Joni Eareckson Tada**, who I mentioned also last week, reflected on the diving accident that changed her life. As a 14-year-old, Joni had embraced Jesus as her Savior; but in her words, she had “confused the abundant Christian life with the great American dream.” Joni said:

“I was a Christian and would lose weight, get good grades, get voted captain of the hockey team, go to college, marry a wonderful man who made \$250,000 a year, and we’d have 2.5 children. It was me focused: What can God do for me?”

I almost thought that I had done God a great big favor by accepting Jesus... [But my boyfriend and I] were doing some things together that we knew were wrong.

“In April 1967,” Joni said, “I came home from a sordid Friday night date... and cried, ‘Oh God... I'm staining your reputation by saying I'm a Christian yet doing one thing Friday night and another Sunday morning. I'm a hypocrite... I want you to change my life... Please do something in my life that will jerk it right side up because I'm making a mess of the Christian faith in my life and I don't want that. I want to glorify you.’ About three months later, she had the diving accident.

Immediately after the accident, Joni told God, “You'll never be trusted with another of my prayers.” But after struggling with anguish and anger Joni said, “I prayed one short prayer that changed my life: ‘Oh God, if I can't die, show me how to live.’ She said that was probably the most powerful prayer she had ever prayed.”

It was when Joni turned her focus away from herself and to God that her life changed and as a result she made a difference also in other people's lives. I'm one of those who was impacted by her faithfulness and obedience to God. I remember I even went together with some church friends to see her speak in a church in New Jersey many years back.

Friend, God is faithful and he will provide for you. That's His promise to you, so do not worry! Instead, look to the birds of the air; look to your Heavenly Father; and...

### **3. LOOK ONLY AT TODAY.**

Focus only on today's needs. Pay attention to only one day's trouble at a time. **Matthew 6:34 “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”** The ancient Jews had a saying: “Do not worry over tomorrow's evils, for you know not what today will bring forth.



Perhaps tomorrow you will not be alive, and you will have worried for a world which will not be yours” (William Barclay, The Gospel of Matthew, Vol. 1). It’s a little morbid, but the point is clear. You have no idea what’s going to happen tomorrow, so it’s useless to worry about it today.

In July 2019, clinical psychologist, Dr. Lucas LaFreniere, released a study to Science Direct with the title, “Exposing Worry’s Deceit: Percentage of Untrue Worries in Generalized Anxiety Disorder Treatment.”

In his study on worry, he asked participants to record their worries and how they caused distress and interfered with their lives. Each night at 10 pm, they reported how much time they spent thinking on each specific worry throughout the day. Then, 20 days after that period, they reviewed each entry and reported whether any of the worries had become true. He discovered that 91.4 percent of their worries never actually happened!

Dr. LaFreniere said, “This is what breaks my heart about worry. It makes you miserable in the present moment to try and prevent misery in the future. For chronic worriers, this process leads them to be continually distressed all their lives in order to avoid later events that never happen. Worry sucks the joy out of the ‘here and now’”. The good doctor’s study only confirms what Jesus said 2,000 years ago! Please, don’t worry about tomorrow. It only sucks the joy out of today.

So, don’t think too far ahead. Attack things one day at a time and let tomorrow’s worries take care of themselves. Besides, over 90% of them never materialize.

In 2008, my family and I were living in Staten Island, NY. The previous year, I left the church I was pastoring in Brooklyn. I had a growing family and I thought I’d concentrate on just growing my family. So, I went back to my profession as a computer programmer. I found a job as a contractor in a manufacturing company in Long Island, NY which was about an hour drive away.

In late 2008, the country was undergoing recession. The company I was working for started to lay off people. I was worried because one by one they were removing contractors until November arrived and I found myself as the lone contractor in our department. I might be let go any minute, I thought. So, I started to apply at other companies even as far as Boston. In fact, I almost got the job in Boston but in the end they chose another candidate. I was downhearted because I thought that was my best chance to survive in the failing economy.

Then, my agent called around the middle of December and said, “Rolly, I just spoke with your manager and good news! They’re retaining you till 2009”. I heaved a sigh of relief. That was really great news. I thanked God because he was providing for my family. So, my worries were gone and I looked forward to a merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

After a couple of days, my agent called again. He said, “Rolly, I just spoke with your manager and bad news! They decided to not renew your contract. I don’t know what happened. They assured me you were still in the payroll and then they changed their mind. They didn’t tell me the reason. Your last day is the 24<sup>th</sup>”. I was shocked. I didn’t understand it. Why the sudden turn of events? It would be a very bleak Christmas. To think that the economy was really going down and I braced myself for a loooong lay off. But what can I do? I knew God would provide but how? Ally and Eze were still toddlers and needed lots of milk.

So, the 24th came and I left the office that day feeling downcast. I asked, “Lord, why did this happen? What’s the purpose of my losing a job just before Christmas? Why make me expect something good which turned out to be bad?”

Anabel prepared a simple meal for us to celebrate our “Noche Buena”, ate, then prayed for God’s help, and went to bed wondering what the future held.

The next day, I was still worried because I knew I couldn’t even hope to start applying for a job because December is a dead month for businesses.

And I knew that the situation would not improve in the coming months since unemployment was increasing. There would be a tight competition for jobs, if there are even any available. I don't know what else I did on that day, but I knew it was not a joyful Christmas day.

The following day, the 26<sup>th</sup>, at 2 PM, my phone rang. I answered and it was the manager of one company in Reston, Virginia where I applied for a job a couple of weeks before. He said, "Do you have time? Can we interview you right now?" I said yes and then he handed the phone over to one of his tech guys. Well, after a few minutes they decided to see me in person and asked me to travel to their office on the 28<sup>th</sup>. So, Anabel and I drove. They even booked us at a hotel.

Then, I went to see them. It was very informal. They offered me a job, we agreed on a salary, and just like that, I have a job again starting January 2009. It turned out God was in control all the time. Of course, he was. He wanted me to come to Virginia to pastor again after I told him I would never pastor again after I left my former church.

I learned that I should have just taken it one day at a time one day at a time. If I had only focused on worshipping God from Dec. 24 to Dec. 26 instead of worrying, then I would have saved myself some stress and unnecessary fretting.

Fast forward, August 4, 2020. Yes, just recently. The tenant of our house in Staten Island called and said, "Rolly, the fence and gate were damaged because of the storm last night." **Then, she sent me pictures of the damages.** Worry reared its ugly head. But I immediately stomped it down and reminded myself, "One day at a time." Now, my insurance covered the damages. The thing is after my deduction, which was quite a sum, the amount left was not enough to cover the repairs. And the contractor was going to charge me a big amount of money. So, again worry tried to rear its ugly head. "One day at a time, I told myself." I knew God knew exactly what happened and he would provide.

Now, the contractor couldn't come immediately because he was finishing a project. A month passed and he hadn't come yet. My tenant was becoming impatient but I told her of the situation. I was beginning to worry, too, because the gate could collapse any moment and it would cause more damages.

Then, one-and-a-half months later, on Sept. 16<sup>th</sup>, our tenant called again. She said, "Rolly, there's been an accident. A car slammed into the gate and look what happened." She sent me pictures.

And I said to myself, "Praise the Lord!" Because no one was hurt. The driver actually ran away but was caught by the police later. But I praised God also because I knew that's it's the other guy's fault and his insurance should cover it. To cut the story short, the fence was fixed and what is remaining is this tree which stopped the car from going directly into the house and cause further damage. It's about to collapse but it would be taken down next week. And all these is going to be covered by the other guy's insurance.

Worry tried to make its way into my mind the past couple of months but the words of Jesus prevented it from penetrating. "One day at a time."

Friend, don't worry about something that may not happen. Know that God has total control of each passing day of your life. He knows what's going to happen next and you should just trust him with all your heart. The Bible says in Proverbs 3:5-7 and this is one of my favorite verses and one of the verses I memorized early on in my Christian life, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."

So do not worry! Instead, look to the birds of the air; look to your Heavenly Father; and look only at today. In a word: Have FAITH! Trust the Lord to take care of you today and tomorrow.

I like the way Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. put it years ago. He said, “The words of a motto which a generation ago were commonly found on the wall in the homes of devout persons need to be etched on our hearts: ‘Fear knocked at the door. Faith answered. There was no one there.’”

That’s the way to keep worries from stealing your peace! When fear knocks at your door, send faith to answer and find your worries no longer there.