

How well are we sleeping?

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning everyone. It's great to be here with you again. I want to thank Nick for the invitation. It's nice to be asked and it's even nicer to be asked back. So thank you very much indeed.

I thought I'd begin by asking how you are sleeping at the moment. You sleeping the sleep of the innocent, sleeping like a baby, or is the alarm clock urging you out of bed?

Or maybe you are struggling a little bit with sleep, sleeping consistently and sleeping well. A lot of people do.

And you'll be aware, of course, that problems with sleep have all kinds of causes, all sorts of reasons. One of the major sleep problem issues today is busyness, over-business, stress, the speed of life, how much we need to cram in to the day that when it comes to sleep in the evening it's not so easy to slow down and rest.

But another common reason for poor sleep is worry. Four o'clock in the morning and your brain is buzzing and full of care and full of concern.

[1 : 36] You're worrying about your brain. You're worrying about your brain. You're worrying about your health.

Worrying about your weight. Maybe your fitness. Maybe your illness. Maybe someone close to you is unwell. Worrying about your children. Getting them Christian. Keeping them Christian. Worrying about their happiness.

Worrying about your marriage. Worrying about your friendships. Worrying about money. Paying for everything today. Paying for everything tomorrow. Worrying about the future.

What's going to happen? What's going to happen to me? What's going to happen to those I love? What if this happens? Isn't there a great deal under the surface of life?

Everybody knows that. How we present when we meet one another is not the whole story. We're like the iceberg, aren't we? Nine-tenths is beneath the surface.

[2 : 44] And there's a lot of dread, a lot of guilt, a lot of anxiety. And we're all aware of that. Now, anxiety is acute worry.

It's very serious worry. It's very serious worry. Apprehension. That something bad might happen. And many people experience anxiety and often for reasons that are difficult to comprehend.

You know, anxiety is increasingly recognised as a particular problem today in a way in which it might not have been in previous periods.

Whether the poet W.H. Auden was right to say that the modern world is in an age of anxiety, it's certainly true.

People have always struggled with worry about the future. People have always worried about how they're going to practically make ends meet.

[3 : 51] They've worried about love. They've worried about work. They've worried about what's going to happen. They've worried about material things. People have always had to worry about how they're going to manage, how they're going to survive.

People have always worried about the existential things, if you like, the experience, the inner, the inner experience, who am I, where am I going, what is this world, where is it going.

Plenty of clever people, though, think that today insecurity has worsened and that many of the social problems that we face in the world, many of the personal problems that we face, depression or addiction, the sense of rootlessness, that that's actually harder now.

Our personal problems as well as our knowledge about the international issues. Years ago, a French sociologist, someone who studies society, a man called Emil Durkheim, he said, there's no longer any reason for asking whether happiness grows with civilization.

Rather, it has become all too clear that if we are now today open to more pleasures, we are also open to more pain. And with these sorts of thoughts in mind, I would suggest that it is remarkable to notice, first of all, when we look at this passage of Jesus' teaching, how clear the Lord is, that life is full of kakia.

[5 : 46] Life is full of trouble. You notice that. Verse 34. Don't be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself.

Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. So Jesus himself agrees with the sorts of thoughts that we've been working through here.

He understands, he knows, that daily life is full of evil, full of trouble. And it's distressing. Daily experience is distressing for many people, whether for most people here this morning or for some people here this morning.

The Lord Jesus recognizes that. Today's trouble is enough for today. Each day brings its own unpleasantness, and in this world it will always be so.

The trials, the tribulations. In another place, John 16, 33. In this world, Jesus says to the disciples, you will have trouble.

[6 : 49] So that's normal. Our lives in this world are going to be under threat. Anxiety has a theological origin.

What do I mean by that? Acute worry. Worry about what's going to happen. It has a root, and that root is our flight from God, our disbelief, our distrust of God, our disobedience to God, our denial of God in his supremacy and his gracious claim on our lives.

So sin is the root cause of anxiety, and since the fall, anxiety haunts the planet.

And so to be human is to be anxious in a world of sin, in a world of death, in a world against God, in a world of judgment, in a world of wrath, of God's wrath, of God's opposition to our disobedience.

Anxiety is part of what it means to be human, and people have always lived in this age. Now, let's just think for a second, well, if we're aware of our problems today, what about the problems in Jesus' day?

[8 : 22] I mean, let's just recognize that daily experience for most people, for most of Jesus, those who are listening to Jesus when he spoke these original words, when he spoke these words originally, the daily experience for most people was very, very problematic.

if you think of the poor in our own city, or in our own country, or on this continent, if you think of the squatter camps, and you think of the townships, listen to this description of everyday life in ancient, the ancient Near East, ancient city life.

It's written by a historian. Everyday life, he says, in the cities of the ancient world was far different than even the most difficult circumstances of urban life in the modern world.

Now, let's just take that statement and put a big pinch of salt in it, because this guy is writing in North America. So he probably isn't so familiar of what urban city life is like in other places in the world.

But it's much more difficult, he says, than in modern world. There was limited water, there was very few means of sanitation, there weren't any sewage systems, the incredible density of humans and animals, accommodation was often smoky, dark, damp, dirty, the smell of sweat, of sewage, of decay, permeated everything.

[9 : 56] Outside on the street, it was a little better, mud, the drains were open, manure, crowds, corpses, adults, corpses as well as those of infants, sometimes just pushed into the street and abandoned.

So, in the original setting when Jesus speaks, who was there? I mean, were they mostly affluent? No. I mean, there may have been some wealthy people, there may have been some people of means whose lives were relatively comfortable, but most of the people that were listening when Jesus spoke to them about anxiety and about worry, they were mostly, mostly people who were either poor who were working hard for a living to survive and that was their setting of ancient urban life and they're just trying to figure out, many of the people there are just trying to figure out how they can supply their needs for that day and for their families and for their children and for their future.

Now, that's just a few thoughts by way of introduction. Now, when we come to look at what Jesus says about anxiety, we'll see if we look at the passage that he uses the word for worry four times.

It comes in verse 25 and then in verse 27 and verse 31 and verse 34 and the word used there is intense concern.

It means acute concern or great care about something. Now, that same word is sometimes used, occasionally it's used in the New Testament to talk about worry about worthwhile things, things that are really worth worrying about.

[11 : 45] For example, in 1 Corinthians 7, Paul uses that word when he talks about being anxious for those things that please the Lord. And in Philippians 2, Paul uses the same word when he speaks about caring about others' well-being, if you're caring about the well-being of other people, if you're anxious, if you have great care, great concern for how other people are doing, that they're doing okay, that's fine.

If you have great responsibility, if you have small responsibility, then it's right to care and care deeply and wisely and well about those for whom you are responsible.

so great care, great concern is fine when it's directed at the right kind of things, about things that are actually meaningful, particularly when it's concerned with the well-being of other people.

And when that worry is kept within the right sort of bounds and when worry is moving us to duty, when our anxiety for others is spurring us on to do our right duty as Christian people, that's fine.

But here what Jesus is getting at is bad worry. So if you like, there's good worry, there's good anxiety, and then there's bad worry, there's bad anxiety, and that's what he's talking about.

[13 : 13] He's talking about the kind of care that's uncontrolled. You're overly anxious, and you're overly anxious about things like food and clothing and the future.

It's anxiety about the physical necessities of life. It's anxiety about the length of your life. Verse 27, which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?

So it's worry about the overall future, about your overall destiny. Tomorrow, verse 34, tomorrow, worry about that that's inappropriate, Jesus says.

It's misdirected. It's understandable. He understands why we worry. It's not that he doesn't comprehend it, but it's inappropriate because it leads away from God.

It's the kind of worry that causes us to mistrust. There's another interesting place where Jesus talks about the worries of life. Can you remember where it is?

[14 : 23] It's in Mark 4. It's the parable of the sower. And Jesus says, he talks about the different places the seed, God's word is sown. And there's one, Mark 4, 18, don't worry to look it up.

He's speaking about the worries of life and he says that they're like thorns that grow up and choke the word. They throttle the word and they make it unfruitful.

so there's this problem. Anxiety doesn't do us any good. All the worry in the world is going to do nothing about the concerns of tomorrow.

You can't add to your life. You can't add to the length of your life by worrying about it. But this sort of worry, Jesus says, it's not going to work but it's also foolish because it works against God.

That kind of worry that works against the things of God. it distracts us. It makes us desperate in the wrong direction. Do you understand what I'm getting at here?

[15 : 24] Do you see the difference between the kind of worry that is okay and understandable and the kind of worry that is going to cause you to distrust and disobey and distract you?

So the kind of anxiety Jesus speaks of here is the anxiety that confuses us about what really counts and takes us away from really important matters.

Now, what is the answer to anxiety? You see from the passage what you think the answer, what's the antidote to anxiety that Jesus recommends?

I think we can sum it up fairly straightforwardly and say the Father is the answer to our anxiety. That God is a heavenly Father who knows who cares.

That is the antidote to anxiety. See, the first, the main assumption that Jesus communicates is that God is the Father in the heavens who knows and he cares.

[16 : 35] Father comes twice in the text, verse 26 and verse 32. the Fatherhood of God is the backdrop to all of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

And in fact, 17 times Jesus speaks of the Father in this sermon and 12 times in chapter 6.

Now, the reason I've counted them up 12 times is because when you look at how frequently a word is used, you can sometimes understand what the passage is all about.

This is the most frequent use of the word Father for God in the entire Bible. Did you know that? This passage speaks about the fatherhood of God more frequently than anywhere else in the New Testament.

And God's fatherhood is the weight of what Jesus has to say about worry. The Father is worthy of glory, Jesus says, chapter 5.

[17 : 39] The father is kind to those who oppose him. Love your enemies, Jesus said. Pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your father.

Your father is perfect. The father is the one who wants to reward his children. He sees in secret. The father sees in secret, Jesus says.

And he's all-knowing. The father is the one who wants you to, he encourages you to talk to him in secret, to pray in secret, to go into your room, shut the door and pray to your heavenly father.

The father is the one who will honor those who honor him. The father is the one who will notice when you do a good thing and he will reward you.

the father knows what you need before you ask him. He says, 6, 8. He knows what you need before you even ask him.

[18 : 42] And he's actually a God who likes to be addressed as father. He's a father who forgives. He won't tolerate unforgiveness among his children but he's a father who forgives and he's a father who's looking to give good things to those who ask him.

So he's kind. He's glorious. The father is perfect. The father is the one who rewards those who seek him. The father is all knowing.

He's all seeing. He's forgiving. He's hugely generous. He's infinitely powerful and yet he's not to be crossed.

He's a father who must be obeyed. But this kind of father, this God who is father, is the weight of what Jesus says against worry and assurance about the father's care, the father's knowledge of each one of us is supposed to be normal experience for us as believers.

Now, we're not children, we're not God's children naturally. I mean, we are creatures and in that sense we're created by the father, the almighty father of creation, but we come into relationship with him as his children through faith in Christ.

[20 : 12] Now, have you done that yet? Call God your father, your heavenly father, through trusting in the Lord, in the living Lord Jesus.

Have you done that yet? So, with that sense of God's fatherhood in mind, Jesus then gives the disciples some specific reasons why they need not be ruled by worry.

Verse 26, anxiety about food. The creator God is your heavenly father who feeds the birds of the air. So, the heavenly father is an almighty creator.

He cares for the smallest creatures. He provides for the smallest of creatures. Now, the birds do all sorts of things to survive, don't they? Like migrate thousands of miles and build nests and they forage for their food.

They protect their young. When they're not asleep, birds are usually busy. Doing that comes naturally to them. Doing the things they can do, the birds assume that they will be provided for.

[21 : 27] That's the logic of what Jesus is saying. The processes of growth, the seasons, the sequence of the seasons, that all lies outside their control and yet the father keeps his end of the bargain with bird life.

Jesus' argument, see how he says, and so it follows, that he's going to keep his end of the bargain with the lives of his human children. They're considerably more valuable.

Verse 26, you are much more valuable than they, he says. People are created in God's image. You bear the image of God.

You are the crown. Human beings are potentially the most powerful, the most beautiful being ever brought into existence.

You are the crown. You as the bearer of God's image are the crown of creation. Jesus says, your father will feed you. He will provide.

[22 : 39] Anxiety about clothing, you know, the necessities of life, shelter. Jesus points to the wild flowers, verses 28 through 30. The wild flowers, the grasses, the beauty of the flowers, the plenty of the grasses.

They're signs of God's skill, God's power in provision. You ever thought how many animals live on grass? Go up north, you see the herds of animals that follow the grass around.

So the father can provide, but he's also an artist. He's a designer. And these are wonderful flowers and grass, wonderful creations of God, yet they're lower order creations than you and I.

So if God is careful to sustain these wonderful yet lower orders of creation, they come and go with the seasons, will he not much more clothe you?

You little faith, he says. Then thirdly, verses 31 and 32, Jesus says pursuing food and clothing is what the nations do, the ethne, the nations, the Gentiles, the pagans.

[24 : 06] In other words, those whose lives are lived outside of God's kingdom, those whose lives operate outside of God's values. Whether you're wealthy or you're poor, those outside of the kind of attitude which counts on God.

Worrying about food and clothing, that is a sign that you're disregarding God. But instead, Jesus says, well, your father knows that you need them all.

All the necessities, he understands, he knows, he cares. So God the father cares. God the father knows. He is interested.

And he promises, Jesus tells us that he promises, the father promises to provide. And that when we recognize that this kind of father is the great God of the universe, or putting it the other way around, this God, the great God of the universe, is a heavenly father who knows, who's interested, and who cares, that is what frees us to pursue what matters most.

There's a book recently published by Shlumelo Biko called The Great African Nation. It's about South Africa. Plan for a nation gone astray, the great African society.

[25 : 41] And there's a passage in that book where Shlumelo Biko is reflecting on societies that have gone into full-blown meltdown. Libya, Syria, Zimbabwe, perhaps.

He says, somewhere along the way, citizens in these countries lose faith in the prospect of a better life for themselves and their children. All they see is extreme protracted injustice that they believe will be irreversible without some sort of revolution.

As complex as the factors for social meltdown may seem from the outside, the common points can usually be reduced to a monopoly over political and economic power by a small elite that usually sustains this power through corrupt social networks underpinned by military protection.

And you can just throw that out on most of the problems internationally that the world faces. So there's been great progress in this country.

Biko, in this book, he's talking mostly about South Africa. But he says, look, you've got between, which depends which figures you believe, you've got between 25% and 40% unemployment.

[26 : 55] You've got 4 million people in this country living on less than a dollar a day. 50% of the population below the poverty line. 25 million people, that is, who can't make ends meet.

And one of the things that that kind of inequality does, it makes people open to bad leadership and to populist politics and crime statistics.

They continue to come, theft, burglary, assault, the murder rate, the range of sexual offences against women and children. that's staggering.

He says, only a society decaying from within can produce such frightening statistics. Only the truly cold hearted can look at these statistics and claim they're not going to be concerned about the direction the country is going.

So we have our own personal fears and then of course outside there are, these worries can be put on a much wider scale. people. And yet Jesus says, don't be anxious.

[27 : 57] Don't worry. Command comes three times, doesn't it? Look at this, verse 25. Don't worry. Don't worry.

Don't be anxious about your life. Life is insecure, yet Jesus says we shouldn't worry about the ordinary things. Is he crazy? Is he crazy? No, he's the only sane one, the most sensible one, the most intelligent, the smartest, the best informed person who ever lived.

Don't worry. Is he simplistic? Okay, a couple of thoughts to draw things together.

First is recognize the value of your life. We rid ourselves of worry, about the wrong things by realizing that our lives are essentially valuable because they are valuable to God.

Verse 25. Is life not more than food, the body more than clothes? Yes. Are you not of more value than birds?

[29 : 14] Yes. You are valued. God the Father himself counts you, he counts your life very, very valuable indeed.

He loves you. Your heavenly father loves his earthly children and if you can trust Christ, you're safe in the father's care now and forever.

Nothing takes us outside of the father's care. nothing takes us outside of his reach. He'll never forget, he'll never stop being interested, he'll never stop knowing about you and about the circumstances in which you live.

Nothing, whatever happens, will give you good reason to say his care cannot be trusted. You count, you count to him like water is built to run downhill.

You count, you matter, you're valuable. So the value of your life before the heavenly father. Second thing, pursue the kingdom. If you want to eliminate worry, reduce worry, anxiety in your life, then pursue the kingdom.

[30 : 28] I've said very little about this verse so far and of course one could preach a sermon on this verse or several probably. Verse 33, look at this. Verse 33, seek first the kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you.

So God's kingdom is close. God's kingdom is closer than you think. We often talk about the kingdom having come with Jesus and we talk about the kingdom coming when he returns and establishes the eternal rule of God over all reality.

But of course the kingdom here is here and now through Christ. kingdom is here, the kingdom is present now. When we trust in Christ we already have entered the kingdom of God and yet our experience of it needs to grow, our knowledge of it and the knowledge of others about the kingdom needs to grow.

So we must pursue it, we must chase it, we must search for it. Above all, that's the priority. and as we live, act, trusting in God, our heavenly father, in his sovereignty, in his rule, Jesus says well the world now is the place of God's kingdom and the father's rule is the greatest factor in your life.

his rule, his righteousness, his character, his moral character, that is the structure of the universe and we can take that on into ourselves and the great king will look after the rest.

[32 : 17] He'll take care of us, he'll help us handle our needs, he knows how to do that. So know that you're of value, pursue the kingdom, and then lastly, trust God for provision.

One of the most practical ways to deal with anxiety is prayer. Give us today our daily bread. Remember that comes a few verses, verse 6, sorry chapter 6 verse 11.

Give us today our daily bread. When you pray you practically are expressing your trust in God. Don't be anxious about anything.

Paul says Philippians 4. But in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. You can find good anxiety in Philippians 2, bad anxiety in Philippians 4.

1 Peter 5. Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. God's love.

[33 : 24] So we have a heavenly father whose care is backed up by infinite power and infinite resources. He is the king over all and he says we can ask him. He loves to give, he wants us to rely on him.

But what if we pray? Let's just think about this one last problem. What if we pray and we ask God for provision and yet we remain in need? what then?

As I was thinking about this I talked to an Ethiopian friend of mine and I asked him exactly that question. It seems to me that is the question that you end up with.

If you're convinced that Jesus is smart and that he knows what reality is really like and he's giving, he's counselling us on how to live well as his disciples in the world in which everything is taken care of by a father who cares and knows, well if then, what then if we're left in need?

What if we're left in want? There's plenty of poor Christians in this country, plenty of poor Christians in Ethiopia. So I said to my friend, well look, what about this?

[34 : 41] What about this? And his response was this, well God promises to be with you, God's presence will satisfy and he promises to provide sooner or later and you must leave the timing in his hands.

I'm paraphrasing but this is what he was saying, God's presence is with you, he's going to provide and it may be sooner or it may be later but even when he doesn't provide, when we think he should, when we think he's promised, you know the biggest problem is that we think he should provide when we understand him to have promised to and when he doesn't provide on the schedule if you like that we think is appropriate, my friend said this, even then you don't need to be consumed by worry because God knows, the father knows and that's enough, the father knows, the father knows, that's enough and he didn't say it lightly, I don't think he was saying it lightly, the father knows, the father cares, here's some words from Bonhoeffer, this word of Jesus is either an unbearable burden, an impossible destruction of human existence for the poor and the suffering or it is the gospel itself which will make us completely free and completely joyous,

Jesus isn't speaking of what people should do but cannot do, he's speaking of what God has given and continues to promise, if Christ has been given, if we are called to follow him then everything indeed is given us with him, everything else shall be given, so those who follow Jesus are in the care and protection of Jesus Christ and his father, nothing can harm them, they cannot doubt that the father will feed his children, he will not let them starve, God will help them, God knows what we need, so Jesus has come, his life, his death, his resurrection bring us into God's family, under the protection, under the provision of God's fatherhood, that is the miracle of the gospel, that is the perspective the gospel brings and when we grasp it, when we're grasped by it, that is going to radically alter the way we feel about things, that's how faith works, the anxiety will fade, positive concern will grow, anxiety about

God, anxiety for God's people, anxiety for God's reign, worry about God's purposes, God's plans, what God is doing now, what he intends to do, what he's going to do in the future, both for you, for me, for his people, for his children, that is going to grow and that is the answer I think to anxiety according to the Lord Jesus.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Amen.