

# How to Stop Worrying

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Everybody seems to be worried about something, right? Whether it's big things like crime or inflation or nuclear war or small things that we may not even realize that we worry about, but subconsciously we do.

One survey done in Europe discovered some of the more mundane things people tend to worry about and a number of questions were asked and these were the results, some of the answers.

Missing your alarm and waking up late. Tripping over in public. Being pooped on by a bird. Losing your keys.

Ripping your pants. Forgetting to unsubscribe from a free trial before it charges you. I worry about that. I've got a whole lot of reminders in my calendar.

And unsubscribe from this, unsubscribe from that. Accidentally, I like this one. Accidentally liking someone's post on social media from years ago. And this one was quite popular.

[ 1 : 0 9 ]     Running out of toilet paper was a worry of people in the modern world. We saw this worry, didn't we, on full display during COVID when people rushed to spa to buy as much toilet paper as they could.

Everybody's worried about something. Whether big things or small things. We all tend to be worried. Even if it's just subconsciously.

We're constantly worried about things. It seems to be just a natural part of life. It's kind of like breathing. Just like breathing, we worry. It's just what everyone does. It's just how we have to live in this world.

Even more so in South Africa, isn't it? Another more serious study was done that found that anxiety levels in our country are more than double in other countries.

Most other countries. And you can understand why. I mean, with the government we have. And with crime levels we have. And with the unemployment we have. You can understand why anxiety levels are so high in our own country.

[ 2 : 1 1 ]     And interestingly, worry is something that occurs equally across the board. Rich and poor are worried. Poor people are worrying about getting their most basic needs.

You know, food and clothes and shelter. Rich people are worried about keeping the stuff that they have. And being able to pass it on to the next generation.

And so no matter how much you have, no matter how much we have, we still worry about it. Which makes what Jesus says here in this passage today in Matthew 6 almost laughable.

Verse 25, Therefore I tell you, don't worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink or about your body, what you will wear. Really?

Jesus, are you being serious here? Don't worry? It sounds great. But it sounds very idealistic as well, doesn't it? It's almost like he was out of touch with the real world that we have to live in day to day.

- [ 3 : 16 ] But he wasn't. He lived in the same world as we did. And what he's saying, if you think it sounds out of touch, it would have sounded even more so for the people he spoke to.
- The people in his day that were there in the crowd, who had no fixed salary, most of them. Most of them were subsistence farmers. They relied each day on getting what they needed.
- And they had enemies on the borders that could have invaded at any point. And their Roman overlords could have changed the laws. There was lots to worry about in his day, just as much as there is today.
- And yet Jesus tells even them then, just don't worry. Just don't worry about it. And so how much more shouldn't we worry about the host of things we tend to worry about in our lives?
- And yet it seems so impossible to do what he says here, doesn't it? We read him saying, just don't worry about life. And we know deep down, well, I mean, really, that seems so impossible to do.
- [ 4 : 21 ] And that's why Jesus shows us in this passage, not only that it actually is possible, but that it's essential.
- If we're ever going to be the kind of people that Jesus has come to make, it's essential that we learn to stop worrying. And that's why Jesus gives this key teaching here at the end of Matthew 6, in the Sermon on the Mount.
- And in it, what we're going to discover this morning is two vital habits. Jesus says we need to cultivate, you need to cultivate in your life, these two habits, if you're ever going to stop worrying.
- So I don't know about you, but I really want to be able to know what these are and how to put them into practice. And the two habits, I'll tell you right away what they are, that we're going to look at.
- The two habits to cultivate are first, look at the birds, and secondly, seek the kingdom. And Jesus says if you cultivate these two habits, you will actually learn how to stop worrying, how to put off worry in your life.
- [ 5 : 31 ] And so let's look at them in turn. Firstly, look at the birds. Now, Jesus' advice here is not just a de-stress technique, you know, go and have a nice walk in nature and look at nature, but He actually wants us to think about birds.
- He wants us to really consider their lives. So have a look at verse 26. Consider the birds of the sky. They don't sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them.
- Aren't you worth more than they? So let me ask you, have you ever seen a stressed out bird? You know, have you ever opened your curtains and there on the branch of your tree is a bird going, I just, I really don't know how I'm going to handle today.
- I mean, there's so much to do. Have you? No. You've never seen a stressed out bird. And it's not that birds just live a life of leisure. I mean, you watch them, you see they work really hard.
- They've got a lot to do. They've got to build nests. They've got to feed their little tweeting chicks that need food. They've got to go around. They've got to do, like the whole day, they're working. And they make provision.
- [ 6 : 54 ] There's lots they have to do. Jesus is not promoting here just a life of sitting back and doing nothing. But what's different about birds, if you watch them, is they don't worry about all the stuff they've got to do, do they?

No matter what they're facing, no matter what their day ahead holds, in the morning, they're still chirping, aren't they? They're still singing every morning. No matter what they have to face.

They don't worry about it. Why? I mean, you see that and you go, oh man, yeah, I wish I could live a life like that, but they don't have mortgages and they don't have, you know, governments to worry about.

They could if, you know, they've got enough stuff that they could worry about, but they don't. Why is it that they don't worry? Well, the reason is, and Jesus is teaching us here, is like the rest of the animal kingdom, birds instinctively know that they're not their own providers.

That's why they don't worry. They instinctively know, without ever having been taught that, they instinctively know that something outside of themselves is providing what they need.

[ 8 : 04 ] that it's not coming from their skills or ability or forward planning. They're sowing or reaping or storing in barns. They know, all animals instinctively know, something outside of themselves is causing them to have what they need.

You know, I was watching a bird through my kitchen window the other day in my garden. It landed, a little bird, it landed on the grass and it was hopping about and suddenly, with its beak, it just went into the grass and took something out and started munching it and hopped a little bit more and then took something, probably little bugs or worms or I don't know what it was eating, but it was finding these things in the grass of our garden and what struck me is that it didn't breed those bugs.

It didn't plan what gardens and what parts of the grass were going to hold bugs for it. You know, it didn't attend a symposium on the sustainable ecology of bugs.

They were just there when the bird needed it. It just landed and boom, his food was there. The bugs were there and the bird never asked how they got there.

They were just there. The bird automatically accepted that provision was going to be made for it and that's what they do, don't they?

[ 9 : 36 ] That's what birds do. That's what animals do. They automatically know that something else outside of themselves is going to provide for their needs and their creator is actually very good at providing for them, isn't he?

Think about it. Millions of birds every day in millions of gardens across the world and millions of jungles and millions of forests, they get what they need.

Every day, their creator provides their needs millions of times over and they get what they need without ever worrying about it. And Jesus' point in this passage is if he does that for the birds, how much more will he do it for humans?

Do you think you're less valuable than those birds? We know from creation, from Genesis, that God values human life far more than he values animal life.

So why wouldn't he do the same thing for you? Verse 26, at the end, aren't you worth more than they are? He goes on to say a similar thing about flowers.

[ 10 : 51 ] Have a look from verse 28. And why do you worry about clothes? Observe how the wildflowers of the field grow. They don't labor or spin thread.

Yet, I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these. If that's how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won't he do much more for you?

Won't he do much more for you? You know, we worry about clothes today quite a bit. Not just having enough, but having clothes that look good, that are fashionable, that bring out our best features.

Well, you know what? Solomon, Jesus quotes him here, Solomon, the great king of Israel, had more money than any of you will ever have.

Than any of us have. Like, he was super loaded. He was rich. And, he could make himself look really good and apparently, he did. You know, he was wearing the ancient version of Brooks Brothers suits for every occasion.

[ 12 : 03 ] He had the latest Gucci shoes. You know, I looked those up, Gucci shoes, 20,000 rand for a pair of those. Crazy. But he had it all. He had everything, all the latest ancient fashions.

And yet, Jesus says, you know what? Flowers look even better than he did. And they didn't pay a cent for it. If you look at, for example, a rose, I mean, there's so many flowers that are just so beautiful, but you look at the intricate design of a rose.

How carefully it was designed. Better than any fashion designer from the catwalks of Paris could ever come up with. And you know what it is? It's just good looking grass.

That's all it is. Really. It's worth nothing, really. I mean, Woolworths would have you think differently. But flowers are actually very common out in nature.

You go up the west coast during flower season, you just see fields and fields of these beautiful flowers. You see them from a distance and there's just fields, but you go up and each single one of them is just so intricately designed.

[ 13 : 17 ] But they're so common, and as Jesus says, back then they were actually used grass and flowers were dried and used as a way to heat up people's ovens in their home.

They were just used to throw into the fire, fuel for the fire, and they're just temporary. They're just so temporary. You know how it is with flowers. Someone will buy you a bunch of flowers and a week later they'll be drooping and dead.

They're temporary. Verse 30, if that's how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won't He do much more for you?

You see, Jesus' point is even though it's temporary, even though it's not really worth much, God still takes time and effort to clothe intricately, even just the grass of the field.

And the point Jesus is making in this passage that we need to get is that God takes it upon Himself to provide for His creation and you are part of that creation.

[ 14 : 23 ] You are part of that creation that God so intricately provides for. Why do you think He won't provide for you? And that's why just because we're part of that creation, we need to realize something.

Because we are actually not gods, we are creatures, just like the birds and the flowers, you were never meant to be your own provider.

That's a lesson we need to get into our head, which we don't believe, but that's what Jesus is trying to say here. You were never meant to be your own provider. You are part of that dependent creation that God has made to depend on Him and that He wants to provide for.

Provision for your life, what you really need, all the things you need, comes from outside yourself and it always will. You are meant to be a dependent creature.

You were never meant to provide for yourself. And the animals know this by nature. That's why they don't stress.

[ 15 : 32 ] They know that it's just ingrained in them that provision will come from outside. They are dependent creatures. We have forgotten this though. And that's why we stress.

We once knew it before the fall. We read in the first two chapters of the Bible in Eden when people lived in a right relationship with God and all provision for them came from Him.

They slid to work. They slid to work the land and go and do the things that God told them to do. But He made sure they had everything they needed. And they lived in this beautiful relationship of settled trust in God to provide for their needs so that they could go out and do what He told them to do.

And it was great. But it was lost when we broke relationship with God as humanity when we thought we could do better by ourselves. And so we turned our back on God and we've been doing it ever since.

And that is when we did that in the fall of mankind from that relationship with God that is when sin and death entered into our world but it is also when worry entered into our world and into our lives.

[ 16 : 51 ] Because we stopped trusting in God as a father who really cares for us. We forgot that. We stopped trusting in God as a providing father.

He didn't change but we changed. We stopped trusting in that. And we still don't trust in him as a father who cares.

It's not instinctive to trust in him like that because of who we are because we're sinners. We don't instinctively trust in him like that like the animals do. And that is why Jesus calls us here at the end of verse 30 you of little faith.

Because he knows that's a result of sin. That's a result of our fall. We do not have trust in our father to provide for us by nature.

And that is what causes our worry. That's what causes our stresses every day. I don't know if you've ever met a street child.

[ 18 : 00 ] Some of you I know have worked in situations where you've met these street kids. And you know they're in terrible circumstances. They've grown up without parents and they've grown up on the street.

And even when they're young they're very adult. You know they're very brash and very bold. they have to be to kind of survive in that situation.

But behind it, behind that brash and bold exterior, if you get to know them, you realize there's a deep anxiety there. There's a deep stress that leads to all kinds of psychological problems and addictions.

The deep stress and anxiety of living life without a parent to provide for them. And you know what? We are all like that street kid in our sinful nature when it comes to God.

We've left our father and we're living on the streets as humanity. You might have the best family in the world. You might have had the best parents.

[ 19 : 11 ] You might have the best parents now. But if you don't have a father in heaven, you will always be like that street kid. And you will carry the stress of being your own provider that you were never designed to bear.

But that's exactly what Jesus came to earth to change. That's why he says this here in the Sermon on the Mount. That's why he says you don't have to worry anymore because I've come.

the purpose Jesus came was to bring us back into that relationship with God that we were made for. Where we rely on him.

He came to bring us into a relationship, to bring you into a relationship with God as your heavenly father where you can know that you are valuable to him.

and if you didn't realize that he showed it by going to the cross to die for you. That's how valuable you are to your creator that he would do that.

[ 20 : 21 ] That he would give everything for you. You think you're not valuable? You maybe have a low self-esteem? All you've got to do is look at the cross and realize what God gave because he values your life.

Because he values you. And when you begin to realize that, which is the growth in the Christian life, when you begin to realize that your creator actually values you deeper than you ever knew and loves you more than you ever thought possible, it's then that you begin to trust him more and more.

You begin to trust his provision. You begin to be able to do what Jesus is saying here. and realize I'm even more valuable than the birds who he happily provides for.

Because you see how much he values you and what he gave for you. As the verse we read earlier in the service, I'll read it again from Romans 8 verse 32. Listen to these words. He did not even spare his own son, but offered him up for us all.

How will he not also with him grant us all things? See what they're saying? If God did not spare his own son, but he gave him to you, how will he not give you all the lesser things you need?

[ 21 : 46 ] Of course he will. And that is why coming into that relationship that you were made for, but that sin has taken you away from, but that Jesus has come and died to bring you back into, coming into that real relationship with God through Christ is the only real way to stop worrying.

It's the only true way to stop worrying. You can go to as many self-help courses and read as many books and take on as many stress busting techniques that you see on YouTube as you possibly can, but you won't stop worrying until you come back into that relationship that you were made for, that Jesus died for you to be in.

And that's why the dumbest thing, I'm sorry, but the dumbest thing is to let your worries keep you from Jesus. To let your stresses and worries in life keep you from coming to church because you've just got too much to do.

Sorry, that's really dumb because Jesus is the only one who can take those worries away. He's the only one who can actually solve all those problems that are keeping you away from Him.

Day to day. You know, Luther realized this. Martin Luther, the great reformer, and he famously said, I have so much to do today, that's why I'm going to spend the first three hours of it in prayer.

[ 23 : 18 ] He knew that the more stresses that he had, the more worries that he had, the more time he had to spend with his Lord, who was the only person who could take those away. Now, the thing is, you might already have a relationship with God.

You may be a Christian who's been walking with the Lord for many, many years, and yet, you still worry. So, maybe, what I'm saying to you, you go, I know, I have that relationship with God, I trust in Christ, but I'm still worrying.

Is that you? Well, if that's the case, it's because you haven't done the second thing Jesus tells us we need to do. The second habit we need to cultivate is to seek the kingdom first.

To seek the kingdom. So, let me read from verse 31. So, don't worry saying, what will we eat, or what will we drink, or what will we wear, for the Gentiles eagerly seek after all these things, but your heavenly father knows that you need them.

Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. Okay, so Jesus talks about the Gentiles or the nations, the people who don't know God, running after all these things.

[ 24 : 43 ] He says they run after all these things, and it's true, people who worry will always run after what they worry about.

It's inevitable. Whether it's basic needs, food, clothing, if you need those things, if that's a major worry, pursuing those things will consume all of your time and energy, primarily.

You will run after those things first. But even after those things are met, even if you do manage to get your basic needs, you will then run after the other things you worry about.

And there will always be more things to worry about. If you worry about your health, you will run after fitness, quite literally. You will make that the focus of your life, to be fit, to eat healthy, if that's your worry.

If you're worried about acceptance, you will run after relationships. If you're worried about the future, you will run after security and wealth. And you know, even a lot of religion, today and back in Jesus' day, a lot of the pagan religion, was just another form of running after worries.

[ 26 : 01 ] I mean, back in his day, everybody was religious. Everybody believed in God or gods. But it doesn't mean that they were seeking what God wanted. They were often just using God or the gods to seek what they were worried about and get it from the gods.

And, you know, there's forms of Christianity that do exactly the same. There's forms of religion that are just another way of running after the things we're worried about. A book by Tim Keller on prayer, a very good book that I read a year or two ago, says, even Christian prayer can often just be worrying in God's direction.

using God to carry on running after the things we're worried about. I wonder if that's what Christianity is to you in prayer.

It's just using God to continue to run after the things you're worried about in life. Often, that's all it is for people. And they wonder why they don't grow as a Christian. Or they don't have any joy in God.

It's because actually they're only using Him to run after the things they're worried about. Jesus says the whole world is like that. Religious or unreligious.

[ 27 : 18 ] People are just always running after the things that they're worried most about. And that's why Jesus says here, to stop worrying, therefore, you have to change what you run after.

You've got to consciously change what you run after in your life if you want to really stop worrying. And if He goes on to show that if you're in a real relationship with God that Jesus came and died and rose again so that you can enter into, if that is you, you don't have to be like the world and run after your worries.

You don't have to do that anymore. You can be liberated from that because God has given you better things to run after. Verse 33, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these other things will be provided for you.

Seek first the kingdom and God's righteousness. What does He mean? Well, what does He mean by seeking first the kingdom and righteousness? All the stuff that He's been telling us in the Sermon on the Mount so far.

So if you don't know what that is, re-listen to those sermons. Re-read the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5 because that is the kingdom of God and His righteousness. All the things that He's been talking about.

[ 28 : 38 ] Being these new people. Being salt and light to the world around us, to the people around us. Connecting heaven to earth, bringing the power of heaven into the lives of the people around us and engaged in the mission that Jesus calls His disciples now to do.

That's seeking first the kingdom and righteousness. Notice what He says here in verse 33. By choosing to run after that rather than your worries, you will find that all these other things that you would otherwise have worried about are given to you anyway.

But only when you stop running after them. That's the weird thing, but that's how it works. that the stuff you're worried about and you're running after, you will only have it securely provided for you when you actually stop running after it and run after the things that Jesus has called you to run after instead.

And I can list so many Christians in every century who can testify to the truth of that, that it's when they stopped worrying about the stuff in their life and they sought first the kingdom that suddenly God started to provide for them everything they needed.

And it's only then, only when you do that, when you make that change in your life that you realize you never actually had to worry about these things in the first place. Because as Jesus said back in verse 25, life is more than food.

[ 30 : 16 ] The body is more than clothes. And God made you for something much more than spending your life chasing after those things. You are more valuable than that.

And He made you for better things than to spend your life chasing after stuff that He already wants to give you. But I'm really not sure how many Christians have got to that point yet.

I know many Christians have and they've experienced that and they realize that they can stop worrying and they can seek first the kingdom of God. But I'm not sure how many Christians.

There's a lot that haven't. I know that. There's a lot of Christians that haven't yet got to that point in their lives. Many will say, I do trust God as my provider.

I do. but they're still not seeking His kingdom first. Like Jesus said here, seek first His kingdom.

[ 31 : 20 ] They're seeking it third maybe. After family and career, well then church stuff. Then I'll concentrate on God's stuff. But there's other stuff first that I've got to make sure.

That's not seeking first the kingdom. That's seeking third the kingdom. Okay? Maybe even second. Maybe they're retired and career is behind them and you know, family is kind of first but then yeah, absolutely, I'll be at church, I'll be at growth group.

But still earthly worries take first place. That's the thing that is still in their mind mostly. What about you? What are you seeking first?

Are you preoccupied with God's kingdom yet? Or are you still preoccupied first with other things? Ask yourself.

Be honest with yourself. What's in first place for you? Your family? Your business? Your retirement?

[ 32 : 29 ] Your happiness? goodness? Well if that's the case, then maybe it's time for a reset in your life.

Maybe it's time to move God's kingdom from third or second to first place where it belongs. Because only when you do will you truly stop worrying about those other things.

things. Because you will realize that God can take care of those things much better than you can when you take care of what he's given you to do.

Not that that will suddenly make everything easier. No, don't get me wrong. Jesus also goes on to end with a very sober verse.

Have a look at what he says in verse 34. Therefore, don't worry about tomorrow because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

[ 33 : 38 ] Each day has enough trouble of its own. So what is Jesus saying here? He's not guaranteeing that tomorrow won't have trouble. Just because you've got your priorities right, it doesn't take away tomorrow's trouble.



There are difficulties still to come. Even if you've got your focus right, you're still going to face difficulties. You know this. Jesus says you will. Tomorrow will have trouble.

The difference, however, is that if you know God is your Father and you're seeking first His concerns, you don't need to worry about tomorrow because it's in the hands of a provider who cares for you and who you are valuable to and who has already provided your ultimate needs, forgiveness and eternal life, which are secure no matter what tomorrow brings.

And so how will He not also give us all things? And so when you wake up tomorrow, do two things. Firstly, take a moment to listen to the birds because they'll still be singing to remind you who's in charge.

And secondly, resolve to trust in the same provider they trust in so that you can stop worrying about what you were never meant to worry about but you can rather seek first those things God has put you here to do.

[ 35 : 13 ] Well, let's pray and ask that that will be a reality in our lives. Oh Lord, we thank you that you are so happy to provide for your creatures.

Even in this broken world, even when humans have turned our back on you, we are still your creatures and you still love to give us what we need each and every day.

Thank you for the lesson of the birds that they actually are much wiser than we are in many ways, that they know that they don't need to worry about things. Lord, would you make us like that?

Would you make us trust you so much, realize that you are our provider, to realize that we are not our own providers, others, that we can trust you, and we thank you, Lord Jesus, that you came and died and rose so that we can enter into this relationship once more with our heavenly Father who cares for us.

Help us to do that. Day to day, help us to live out that relationship in a secure trust. And as we do, would you help us to realize we can now be free to seek after your kingdom and your righteousness, and that we would do that with all our energy, in first place, in Jesus' name, Amen.