

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

Alexis zipped up her three-year-old's winter jumper. "We're headed to Mrs. Williams' house."

Mrs. Williams, who lived only four blocks away, was excited to start babysitting Alexis's daughter.

"I'm retired. I'm lonely. I need something to do," Mrs. Williams had said.

When the two agreed on the pay for 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., five days a week, Alexis hugged and kissed the older woman.

"You're not taking advantage of me," she assured her. "You're not a wealthy woman, and you need to work. A little bit of extra money will be nice, and I am happy to be able to help you out."

As a single mother, Alexis was happy, even excited. But she was not surprised. God had been taking care of her all her life. When Alexis's husband divorced her, she was hurt, angry, and sad; but she was not scared. She knew who to call upon.

Alexis watched God provide again and again. So when paying day-care had become unsustainable, Alexis prayed and believed God for an economical way for her to keep working and have a safe place for her daughter to stay. "God is going to make a way for us, baby," Alexis had told her daughter. "I just know it!"

Then Alexis's aunt had told her about this wonderful woman, someone who went to her church and lived nearby.

"Let's go, baby," Alexis said, as she reached for her purse. "We've got to get to Mrs. Williams's. I know she has a good breakfast prepared for you."

1 What distractions limit your vision?

2 When has God provided for you in an unexpected way?

3 Is it getting easier or harder to train your gaze upon God? Why?

²⁴ No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

²⁵ Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? ²⁶ Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? ²⁷ Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

²⁴ “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.

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ 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? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

Who Do You Serve?

The scene is Jesus’ ministry in Galilee. He has called twelve disciples to follow Him while He heals numerous diseases and proclaims the good news: God’s kingdom has finally come (Matt. 4:23). Soon crowds of travelers come to Him, and Jesus climbs to the top of a hill, where He sits down to teach (Matt. 5:1). These are ordinary people whom Jesus is addressing, and He uses ordinary language.

He asks listeners to adopt a completely different relationship to money. Instead of looking to gain treasures of the world—which can deteriorate or be taken in an instant—Jesus speaks of “treasures in heaven” (Matt. 6:19–20). The heavenly Father has good things in store for His people and will keep those heavenly treasures safe.

But Jesus isn’t making a point about the need for better banks. God really cares about the heart of His people. It is hard to be ready for God to reshape the world if we are wrapped up in maintaining our financial security. Jesus invites His listeners to an attitude of freedom—freedom from concern so that we can freely serve God. How

we operate shows the attitude of our hearts. Thus, Jesus forces the choice: be devoted to earthly security or be devoted to God.

Jesus challenges followers to consider how tightly we possess our possessions. Have these become our “master,” or do we use them to serve God (v. 24)? Are we devoted to the new thing that God is doing, or are we chasing a comfortable standard of living? When the prophet Elijah challenged Israel, he said, “If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him” (1 Kings 18:21). In the same vein, Jesus says, “You cannot serve both God and money” (Matt. 6:24). Matthew gives the Aramaic word for wealth, *mammon*, a personification of this unfettered pursuit for material possessions.

Jesus is not talking about things that are “extra,” what we call wants versus needs. That would be too easy! Jesus says His followers have no need to take “thought of” (KJV) or “worry about” (NIV) needs either: “your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear” (v. 25). His audience must have included people without enough food to eat or clothes to wear. It is hard not to worry about basic essentials like these!

But God gave us life. He knows how to take care of our bodies. We don’t simply wait for food or clothes to fall from the skies, although God did feed His people with bread from heaven (Ex. 16:4). But as we do prudent things to keep our needs met, we can rest in the sure knowledge that we are seen by God. His concern for us is clear, even from the example of “birds of the air” (v. 26). These creatures build homes and search for food, but they do not worry about daily tasks. Somehow, God feeds them.

Jesus asks a rhetorical question: What good does worry bring? (v. 27). It can’t make us taller (KJV), nor can it give us any more time (NIV). It gives nothing, but it robs us of joy.

1 Why does God invite us to choose “treasures in heaven” instead of worldly treasures?

2 How can possessions or *mammon* come to be our master?

3 What (if any) are the limits on what we should ask God to provide?

²⁸ And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

²⁹ And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? ³¹ Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? ³² (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. ³³ But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. ³⁴ Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

²⁸ “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.

²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Who Do You Trust?

Jesus continues drawing analogies to the ordinary things around Him. Maybe it was spring when he was speaking, and the birds were flying overhead. Jesus might have gestured to his feet to point out the “flowers of the field” growing about (v. 28). God not only feeds the birds, which are of far less importance than humans, but He also “clothes” these flowers (v. 28). Flowers do not worry about growing; God takes care of that part. They do not weave their clothes or spin thread, which are steps to create handmade garments. Yet all around is God’s handiwork, and these flowers are clothed in more elegant garments than King Solomon, who was famously wealthy.

If the heavenly Father cares so much about transient things, He can be trusted to care for His people and to clothe them. Worry and

anxiety that God's children display over food or clothing reveals a "faith" issue (v. 30). We might think, *God is not anticipating my needs, so I will handle them.* Others may think, *While God created the universe, human needs are too hard or too minor for Him.*

To solve a faith problem, Jesus says that His followers must put priorities in order. Physical needs take second place to "[seeking] first his kingdom and his righteousness" (v. 33). In that way of life, the troubles of tomorrow take a backseat to the kingdom priorities of today (v. 34).

This is not the "don't worry" and "live your life" advice we might find on bumper stickers or in the choruses of popular music. Jesus is not criticizing foresight or planning, and He isn't making a single demand that He was not prepared to model.

Although Jesus is the Son of God, He was willing to leave heaven behind to live without a permanent home (Matt. 8:20). When tempted to put His physical needs first, He refrains from turning stones to bread and goes hungry instead (Matt. 4:3-4). When stripped of His clothing and subjected to the humiliation of the cross, Jesus chooses to save others and not Himself (Matt. 27:35, 42). In all circumstances, He expresses faith and confidence in the provision of the Father. God's kingdom is really coming and is already breaking through to our reality. Those who follow Jesus must learn to place radical trust in the Father, like Him.

1 What do the "flowers of the field" show us about worrying over what we shall wear (v. 28)?

2 When we try to handle our needs without relying on God, how does this choice affect our relationship with Him?

3 Why can we trust what Jesus says about facing hardships with confidence?

Trusting the God who Loves Us

I've been an avid pianist since childhood. When I first started learning how to play, my efforts were strained and heavy, which produced loud, plonking sounds. I was trying too hard to control the sound; I hadn't yet learned to listen to the instrument. When I grew as a musician, my teacher would say to me, "Less is more." Over time, my tense muscles relaxed, and my fingers found their places with far less effort, letting the natural beauty of the piano shine.

If there's one thing that has never helped me stop worrying, it is *being told to stop worrying*. Perhaps, like me, you read these verses and feel a pang of guilt or frustration. We try to overcome anxieties and keep our eyes fixed on heaven. But no matter how hard we try, we keep getting dragged back into life's difficulties. I have sometimes felt like I would never be strong enough to be one of the heroes of the faith, one of those special folks who masters their fears.

But that is not the heart of this text. By telling us that God knows and cares about what we need, before we realize it ourselves, Jesus anticipates that we will have worries arising in our lives. He wants us to know that God's concern isn't contingent upon our strength and fortitude. It's contingent upon God's eternal faithfulness.

This passage isn't really an admonition to overcome worries about our daily needs, perhaps through a powerful act of self-control. It is an affirmation that God's love is trustworthy. We don't need to do anything other than rest in God's love and commit ourselves to Him. His concern for us is like an adoring parent: unwavering, complete, not dependent on what we do, always ready to scoop us up when we run to Him.

1 Does trust in God mean not having worries or cares anymore? Why or why not?

2 Does placing trust in God mean leaving everything to Him? Why or why not?

3 How would resting in the unwavering love and provision of God alter our life at home, work, or in community at church?

Security Comes from Heaven

It is natural to seek safety and comfort. But Jesus challenges us *not* to get too comfortable. Our security is not dependent on our savings but on the faithfulness that God shows. What might you need to surrender to the protection of God?

Father in heaven, give me freedom to trust You to meet my needs in this particular area: _____.

(Examples: my finances, my basic needs, my relationships)

Key Text

Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. —Matthew 6:34 KJV

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. —Matthew 6:34 NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of December 15 through December 20

- Mon.** Psalm 110—The Messiah Sits at God's Side.
- Tue.** Romans 5:1–11—Christ Died for the Ungodly.
- Wed.** John 3:14–21—Christ Offers Eternal Life.
- Thu.** John 10:9–16—Christ Cares for the Sheep.
- Fri.** Isaiah 9:3–7—Welcome the Davidic Heir.
- Sat.** Psalm 2—The Messiah Reigns Victoriously.

Next Week: Luke 15:3–7; Romans 5:6–10

We will discuss the rationale for radical trust, based in God's love. Can you name a common misunderstanding of “love” this week?