

Matthew 6:25-32

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-6/matthew-625-32/>

Jesus teaches His disciples to trust in God to meet their needs and not live their lives worrying.

The parallel account of this teaching is found in Luke 12:22-30.

Jesus has just stated that it is impossible to serve both God and wealth. He assumes that His disciples will choose to serve God and *for this reason* gives two tangible implications of what this principle looks like. His examples concern the needs for *food* and *clothing*. What He shares, He shares according to His personal authority—*I say to you*. After Jesus finishes the Sermon on the Mount, those listening to Him are astonished that He teaches from His own authority (Matthew 7:28-29).

Throughout this chapter, Jesus has been talking about what motivates human behavior. His main focal point has been the heart. Our actions seen by other people do not necessarily reflect our heart. But unlike humans, God sees the heart, and judges based on our motives (1 Samuel 16:7, Hebrews 4:12-13). True righteousness and social harmony come from the heart, not by an outward keeping of the Law to be seen by men.

Until now Jesus has been discussing the motivation stemming from the reward and the positive outcomes we seek. Here Jesus continues teaching about the heart and its desires. He turns His attention to the motivation of fear or worry and the negative outcomes we should avoid.

Do not be worried, Jesus says. Notice the verb in Jesus's command is passive. It reflects a state of being instead of an active action. Jesus instructs His disciples to avoid living in a state of being *worried* or stressed out. It is difficult, if not impossible, to have a heart full of faith and full of worry at the same time. The stress and anxieties of worry consume our hearts and prevent us from fully embracing Christ's kingdom promises.

Jesus is specific in the object of what His disciples are to *not be worried about*. Jesus tells His disciples, *Do not be worried about your life*. The Greek word here for "life" is "psuché" (G5594).

Psuché is often translated "life" but just as frequently translated "soul." It has a broad range of meanings. It includes the inner and essential part of a person—their mind, heart, and will (Acts 2:41). It also includes human experience and activity of living and interacting. Our "psuché" requires a body. In this life, it is the mortal body that is destined to die. In the next life it will be a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:44).

In this context Jesus focuses upon one aspect of psuché: the external, physical aspect of *life*. Christ teaches His disciples not to be worried about these externalities of *life*: *what you will eat; what you will drink; nor for your body as to what you will put on*. This does not mean they don't matter. It means they should not be made a top priority.

Jesus then poses a rhetorical question: *Is not life (psuché) more than food, and the body more than clothing?* The rhetorical answer is “Absolutely! *Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing!*” *Life* (psuché) includes our spiritual realities as well as our relationships with others. The real joys in *life* usually involve sharing *life* with others in some sort of mutual endeavor. Accomplishing things that make a positive difference in the lives of others. Jesus admonishes His disciples to adopt a true perspective, and keep the bigger picture in mind. *Life* (psuché) is much more than satisfying appetites or measuring up to the latest fashion standard. The disciple should address the full range of *life* (psuché) but take care to focus on the aspects that matter the most. He will soon tell us that to *seek His kingdom and His righteousness* should be our top priority. We should place that *first*. That is the key to the best and most fulfilling *life*.

Jesus’s admonition, *do not be worried about your life* is another instance where He tells the disciples to focus on the things they can control. Again, the three things we can control are who we trust; our perspective; and our actions. Christ is making this point here in the negative by telling His disciples *not to* focus or worry *about* the things we cannot control.

Jesus addresses two external cares one at a time.

Look at (see and consider) *the birds of the air*, He tells His disciples. Given that Jesus is telling these things to His disciples on a mountainside overlooking the Sea of Galilee, it is probable that there were actual birds within eyesight. Jesus and the disciples likely saw them flying near, and heard their cries. For the word translated “air” Matthew uses the word “ouranos” (G3772). It is the same term translated as “heaven” throughout Matthew’s gospel, especially the phrase “kingdom of heaven.” Ouranos can mean both the physical air and sky, or the metaphysical heaven. In this instance, Matthew most likely means the physical air and sky, but might be deliberately making a play on words when he translates Jesus as saying, *Look at the birds of heaven (the air)*. The effect of Matthew’s pun being: the birds fly in the physical sky and belong to God.

In talking about *the birds*, Jesus observes that *they do not sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly (Ouranos) Father feeds them*. The birds do not stress or worry about storing up their next meal. *They do not* spend their time planting seeds, harvesting, or storing their crops in *barns*. *They do not* spend their energy *worried*. They simply take each moment as it comes, and *your heavenly Father* takes care of them.

The Messiah then asks two more rhetorical questions. *Are you not worth much more than they?* The rhetorical answer is “Of course *you are worth much more to your heavenly Father than the birds!*” The second rhetorical question asks “*And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?*” Its answer is “None of you can add a single hour to his life by worrying.” The implied application of both questions is simple—*Don’t worry about the external things of your life*. The positive version of Jesus’s application is “Be like *the birds* who trust *your Heavenly Father* to provide them with *the food* they need.”

The second external care Jesus mentions is *clothing*. He begins by asking, *And why are you worried about clothing?* This time He summons *the lilies of the field* as evidence for His case. Flowers likely decorated the hillside where the disciples sat as Jesus said these things. *Observe*

(study) *how the lilies of the field grow*, Jesus says. *They do not toil nor do they spin*. Flowers do not spend their time frantically trying to weave fabrics so that they look beautiful, and yet God makes them beautiful. *Yet I say to you*, Jesus says, *that not even King Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these beautiful flowers*. King Solomon was the richest man in Jewish history and spared no expense accumulating material possessions (Ecclesiastes 2:1-8).

Jesus follows this statement with another rhetorical question: *But if God so clothes the grass of the field* (better than *Solomon in all his glory* was able to clothe himself), *which is alive today and tomorrow is* (used as kindling and) *thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you?* The rhetorical answer is “Of course God will take better care of you than these temporary grass and flowers.” In due time, if we repent of our worry-filled kingdoms and overcome through living by faith, God will do a better job of dressing us than even Solomon himself was able to do (Luke 15:22; Revelation 3:5). The implication is that we should accept what clothing God provides as our best. We should not be a lily that complains because we want to be a rose.

Jesus then addresses everyone who worries about such external things like food or clothing as “oligopistos” (G4102) or “little faiths.” Jesus will playfully use this affectionate moniker to chastise His disciples whenever they stumble with worry or doubt (Matthew 8:26, 14:31, 16:8). Every recorded use of it comes when someone is worrying about a physical need. *You of little faith* (oligopistos!)

The Messiah’s kingdom is accessed through *faith* in the power and love of *God*. Jesus expects His disciples to trust Him and live by *faith* and *not worry about their life* (psuché). The opposite of *faith* in this passage is not presented as skepticism or doubt, but *worry*. *Faith* is portrayed here as actively trusting in the goodness of *God*. *Worry* is portrayed in this passage and others (Psalm 37) as actively trusting in ourselves. When our actions demonstrate that we trust in ourselves it evidences an internal belief that *God* is unable or unwilling to take care of us. Oligopistos “Little faiths” do not trust God to take care of their physical needs. Instead, they fret, fuss, and worry their way to emotional misery and physical sickness.

Jesus then summarizes the negative command of these statements. *Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’* For emphasis, He adds, *For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things*. *Gentiles* were non-Jews who held to pagan religions. For a Bible-believing audience of disciples following Jesus and sitting under His teaching, there would have been no honor in aspiring to Gentile behavior. Copying Gentile behavior would have been considered shameful. Jesus makes clear that *worry* is something they should be ashamed to engage in.

Jesus concludes this point with a comforting truth. *For your heavenly Father knows that you need all things*. He reminds His disciples that food and clothing are real needs. But only people of little or no faith spend their lives worrying about them. You have no need to worry about them, because *your heavenly Father* who loves you and is all-powerful *knows that you need them*. And He will provide you with everything you really need, just as He *feeds the birds of the air* and *clothes the grass of the field*. This attitude lays a foundation for a life that is full of contentment.

Biblical Text

For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! Do not worry then,