

Seek First

Matthew Chapter 6

The National Institute for Mental Health estimates 18.1 percent or 40 million people between the ages of 18 to 54 suffer from “anxiety disorders”. Many believe the number to be much higher, approximately 30 percent, or 66 million people because many people do not seek help, are misdiagnosed, or don’t know they have issues with anxiety. The Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA) commissioned a study entitled, “*The Economic Burden of Anxiety Disorders*” published in the Journal of Clinical Psychiatry identified anxiety disorders have cost the U.S. more than \$42 billion dollars a year. According to an article in the Mayo Clinic Proceedings, “antidepressants are the second most prescribed drug group (13%), particularly in middle-aged women. The increased prescription of antidepressants in recent years has occurred concurrently with a decreasing use of psychotherapy. However, many antidepressants are not prescribed by psychiatrists and are prescribed to patients who may not have a psychiatric diagnosis”. According to a report by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), the rate of antidepressant use in this country among teens and adults (people ages 12 and older) increased by almost 400% between 1988–1994 and 2005–2008. In the United States, statistics extracted in April 2018 from the IQVia Total Patient Tracker database for children between the ages of 0 - 17 indicate 7,213,599 are on psychiatric drugs, 3,655,472 are on ADHD meds, and 2,100,315 are on anti-depressants. Should we add those 18 to 65 years of age and the numbers jump significantly. There are over 22 international drug regulatory warnings on psychiatric drugs that cite effects of mania, hostility, violence, homicidal ideation and yet there is no federal investigation to determine if these medications can be tied to senseless acts of violence.

Up to the end of the 1800’s, resolving anxiety and other problems of human nature required pastoral care and were considered matters of theology, morality and philosophy. Psychiatrist Sigmund Freud, in his “*Postscript to the Question of Lay Analysis*” states, “The words, ‘secular pastoral worker’ might well serve as a general formula for describing the function of the analyst. We do not seek to bring relief by receiving him into the catholic, protestant, or socialist community. We seek rather to enrich him from his own internal sources....Such activity as this is pastoral work in the best sense of the word”. If you look in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th edition, you will not find a definition of mental illness. Daniel Berger II’s book, “*The Insanity of Madness, Defining Mental Illness*” concludes, “In contrast to secular theories of normalcy and madness, the Bible offers a clear unchanging understanding of humanity, which teaches that all people are by nature deeply deceived, impaired, frail, and hopeless apart from Christ. It offers not only clear definitions but also truth about the one, Jesus Christ, who is without deceit and is able to fully restore the soul to spiritual health by addressing false beliefs and offering saving faith”.

As we come to the closing verses of Matthew chapter 6, Jesus Christ says, “For this reason, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; or your body as to what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing?” For the very reason indicated in verse 24, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” Because God is your master, do not be anxious for your life. Jesus continues to address the fundamental needs of life eating, drinking and clothing. We see anxiety as a rational response to a need, problem, or situation. After all, some have labeled the 20th century the Age of Anxiety. The Cold War, the potential of a nuclear holocaust or war that could end life on the planet, or other events that affect our security are not arbitrary or irrational. However, Jesus commands, do not to be anxious about your life. *Pusche* (πυσχη) or life is a term that includes every aspect of a person’s being. Security in this world comes from the assurance of the next. Eyes focused on the world and everything contained therein are doomed to worry, doubt and be anxious about everything. This is not a new problem, however in our day and age we have multiplied the opportunities for anxiety making it a permanent reality instead of a temporary problem. Jesus’s solution is to assure his readers, “...your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.” At the heart of anxiety is a refusal to believe God will be faithful to His promises. As we trust God and His promises instead of trusting ourselves and our circumstances, anxiety may visit us but it should never take up residence in our lives. True contentment is found in God and God alone. After all, He owns everything but we must trust Him more by seeking His kingdom and righteousness to be content.

- 1. What do we learn about practicing our righteousness in verses 1-4? When and where should we practice our righteousness and how do we check on our motives? What are the rewards and how are they described? How does hypocrisy effect the church?**

- 2. What do we learn about prayer in verses 5-8? Who is Jesus talking about in verse 5, who are “they”? How does Jesus tell them to pray and why? What would be some examples of “meaningless repetition” and should all ritual prayers be avoided? How does attitude affect our prayers?**

- 3. The Lord’s Prayer is contained in verses 9 – 13, What are the component parts of the Lords prayer? How can it be used as a guide for our prayers? As you reflect on your prayers or the prayers of others, what components are often ignored or neglected? What do we learn about forgiveness in verses 14 & 15?**

- 4. In verses 16 - 21, What do we learn about fasting and what guidelines are given regarding fasting? What are some Old Testament examples of fasting? What rewards are described in these verses? What are we told about treasures and is there a way to determine where our treasures are being stored?**

- 5. How would you explain the statement “The eye is the lamp of the body;”? What is the meaning of a “clear eye” vs a “bad eye” and how does it affect one’s perspective and life?**

- 6. What do the closing verses of chapter 6 tell us about worry? What causes worry and how does it affect us? What should we do if we start to worry and how can worry be defeated?**