

Fall 2020 Sunday School and Small Groups



September 20, 2020 -- Part 1 of the Feelings Series: Anxiety **Dealing with Your Feelings – Part 1 – Anxiety – Matthew 6:25-33**

Many thanks to Beth Rhoton for pulling together these lesson notes.

Main Point: Principles must be backed by priorities.

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. 1 Peter 5:7 (NIV)

Scripture Passage: Matthew 6:25-33

Sermon Talking Points:

1. Shift providers. Matthew 6:25-27
2. Shift to common sense. Matthew 6:28-32
3. Shift to significance. Matthew 6:33

Other themes: Stewardship of life and possessions; Missional attitude vs. self.

Passage Background/Overview: The Sermon on the Mount – Matthew 5, 6 and 7:

At times, the world can be a very tough and wicked place in which to grow up and live. When we come to a rough spot in the road, it is only natural for us humans to feel worried or anxious. We need to keep in mind that despite what may be happening to us and despite what is happening around us, God is in control. God does not promise us skies always blue or flower-strewn pathways all our lives through. If the world did not treat Jesus so kindly, why would we as Christ followers expect it to treat us any differently than it treated Him? When we come to a tough spot in life, how should we handle it?

It would not be helpful to focus solely on verses 25 through 34 of chapter 6 without first considering the context (The Sermon on the Mount) in which these verses are presented. The gospel of Matthew is a message about Jesus, the Son of God, who has come to earth to be King. It has been said that Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5, 6 & 7) is the greatest sermon ever preached by the greatest preacher who ever lived. Of note, Pastor Chuck Smith calls the Sermon on the Mount the "Great Manifesto of the Kingdom of God."

Daniel L. Akin (*Exalting Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount*, 2019) writes that Jesus' words from his Sermon on the Mount to his disciples are not intended to teach men and women how to live to get into heaven, but are designed to teach Christ-followers how to live in this world. His Sermon is directed to his disciples, although it is thought that the multitudes were probably in earshot. Jesus' intention was for his disciples to understand this core doctrine so they could pass on his teaching to other faithful followers. The Sermon on the Mount is a change of perspective, a reversal of everything the world tells men and women to believe or to do. This is radical thinking when one considers what today's society and culture are currently like (This was radical thinking back in Jesus' day, too.).

The Bible student needs to recall that before Jesus came to earth, the Jews were working to follow the laws they had received through Moses in order to maintain a right relationship with God. And because no one (except Jesus) is capable of keeping the law perfectly, there were sacrifices and offerings which God required of them to compensate for their sins in order to restore their relationship with God. God intended the law to show the Jews that they were not able to lead a perfect sinless life. Because men and women were not able to keep the law, God provided another way; He sent Jesus to live an exemplary life on earth, to educate the people, and to be the perfect and willing sacrifice for their (our) sins.

Jesus used the Sermon on the Mount to instruct his followers to be like Him. He is the role model for his disciples. Jesus wanted his followers to be and live vastly different from other people, to live counter to the world's culture. Jesus held up these standards as principles of kingdom living. If one considers how the world treated Jesus (not very kindly and then crucified Him), it stands to reason that the world would/will also treat Jesus' followers in similar ways. Even so, He tells his followers not to worry, for God the Father will watch over them and care for them. It is not so much what happens to them in this world that they should care about; it is their spiritual well-being that is most important overall.

Below is a very basic outline of many of the topics Jesus addressed in his Sermon on the Mount. Consider all the topics He discussed before He talked about **worry and anxiety** (the focus of this lesson), why they are important, and how they relate to what Jesus had to say about worry/anxiety. It was no accident that Jesus spoke of the blessings of spiritual character and the behaviors of spiritual life before He addressed worry/anxiety.

- **MATTHEW 5:** Verses 3 – 15 emphasize what we are as opposed to what we do. Verses 17 – 48 address the relationship of Jesus Christ to the law.
 - **The Beatitudes** (NIV) – Jesus used the Beatitudes to describe eight aspects of Christian character; these are all about how He wanted his followers to be. It is important to note here that these are not written about eight separate and different kinds of disciples; they are eight **spiritual qualities** to be found in the same everyday Christ follower – one who is poor in spirit, mourning, meek, hungry and thirsty, merciful, pure in heart, a peacemaker, and persecuted – all at the same time.
 - Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 - Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
 - Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
 - Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled.
 - Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
 - Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
 - Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
 - Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 - **Salt and Light** – Christ followers are to be the Salt of the Earth (preservers of the faith) and the Light of the world (showing the way to Jesus).

- **The Fulfillment of the Law** – Jesus spoke of “the Law” (a comprehensive term used by Jesus as a revelation of the Old Testament), not of abolishing the law or the prophets, but of fulfilling them.
- **Murder** – The pharisees taught only if a person physically commits murder is it a sin, but Jesus said it is a sin just to think about killing someone or wanting someone to die.
- **Adultery** – Contrary to the teaching of the pharisees regarding the physical act of adultery, Jesus taught lusting in one’s mind or heart after a woman who is not one’s wife is a sin.
- **Divorce** – In the culture of Jesus’ day, divorce and remarriage were perfectly acceptable. Most women had no means of support except a husband, so if a man divorced his wife, she was forced to remarry for survival (causing her to commit adultery, too). To Jesus, divorce and remarriage is a departure from God’s intention for marriage. Of note, these two verses are not representative of all that Jesus and the New Testament writers had to say about divorce.
- **Oaths** – The pharisees had created a legal way of lying. Because man tends to lie, he had to swear to tell the truth. The bottom line: to bear false witness is a lie.
- **An Eye for an Eye** – The scribes and pharisees were wrongly teaching the people that it was their duty to retaliate. However, Jesus taught we are not to seek to get even in a personal way. If someone wrongs us we are to go to the proper authorities to seek justice.
- **Love for Enemies** – The Old Testament teaches us to love our neighbor, but does not define who our neighbor is. The pharisees added a definition for neighbor. Jesus taught all persons are our neighbors, and so we are to love all people, even our enemies.
- **MATTHEW 6:** Our relationship to God. Here Jesus presents three classifications of righteous acts: giving, prayer, and denial of the flesh.
 - **Giving to the Needy** – Our giving concerns how we relate to others.
 - **Prayer** – Our prayer life concerns our relationship to God.
 - **Fasting** – Fasting is concerned with our relationship to self (our flesh). If we were to feed our spirit as much as we feed our flesh, we would be much better off.
 - **Treasures in Heaven** – An earthly treasure can be anything that hinders our walk with God: a car, a house, a career. If we honestly examine what we treasure, we will identify where our heart truly lies.
 - **Do Not Worry** – See *Unpack the Scriptures which follows*.
- **MATTHEW 7:** Our relationship with man.
 - **Judging Others** – The judgment prohibited is that of judging the person rather than the action/behavior. We are not to condemn the person.
 - **Ask, Seek, Knock**– Jesus gives the promise that God will answer our prayers and give us good gifts according to his purpose. The key is to ask through prayer.
 - **The Narrow and Wide Gates**– Jesus is the straight and narrow way we must use to enter his kingdom. There is no other way to heaven.

- **A Tree and Its Fruit**– The fruit of a person’s ministry helps us to determine whether he is a false prophet/teacher or not. We are to be discerning.
- **The Wise and Foolish Builders**– These verses contain Jesus’ warning to us to consider upon which foundation our faith is built. The trials and tribulations that come to us show us where our strength lies as we go through them.

Unpack the Scripture – Matthew 6

Verses 1-4 – Giving to the Needy: These verses tell us that acts of religious devotion are first and foremost of all to come from the heart (not to show others how good or how benevolent a person is). [1 Samuel 16:7: *But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”*] All such deeds are to be done for God’s glory, not for human show or reputation.

Verses 5-15 – Prayer: God has no regard for people standing on a street corner and praying out loud for exhibition as the pharisees did. Prayer is an essential component of one’s relationship to God and should originate from the heart. In these verses Jesus also taught the disciples how to pray using the Lord’s prayer as a model (“pray **like** this”) rather than as something to be recited.

Verses 16-18 – Fasting: John Piper says, “Fasting is a temporary renunciation of something that is in itself good, like food, in order to intensify our expression of need for something greater — namely, God and his work in our lives.” Jesus insisted that our fasting not be for the sake of impressing other people. Instead, if we fast, we are to go out of our way to keep others from recognizing that we are fasting. We are to keep our fasting personal, between us and God.

Verses 19-24 – Treasures in Heaven: What the world recognizes as treasures on earth are not lasting. The riches of the earth are temporary and will pass away. What the Christ follower is to treasure are heavenly things that are important to God (e.g., character, attitude, behavior).

Verses 25-34 – Do Not Worry: 1 Peter 5:7: *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.* Note that in verse 25 the word therefore connects the verses on worry with the previous verses. It is only when we have made our choices relative to the preceding verses (for heavenly treasure, for light, for God) that the verses on worry make sense. Our choice regarding which of two masters (earthly or godly) we choose to serve will affect our anxiety. If we choose to seek first godly concerns, we will be much less likely to be concerned about earthly things. Jesus message here is that worry is not compatible with Christian faith.

Verse 25 – People in ancient times had little more than the basic necessities of life and plenty of reason to worry about food, clothing and shelter. They lived in a harsh dry climate and were dependent on seasonal rains for growing crops. Jesus tells us not to be anxious or to worry about what we will eat, drink or wear. However, He is not suggesting we do nothing about meeting our physical needs, but that we should keep our needs in the proper perspective and trust God rather than worry.

Verses 26-30 – Jesus is showing by example that if our heavenly Father takes care of lesser creatures like birds and flowers, will He not (all the more) take care of the needs of his greater creatures (his children) who love and worship Him?

Verse 31 – So Jesus tells us not to worry about our basic needs (what we will eat or drink, or what we will wear). Our life is more important than what we eat or drink and our body is more important than the clothing we wear.

Verse 32 – The word Gentiles in this verse refers to pagans (non-believers). The pagans eagerly seek these things, but God the Father knows his children need them.

Verses 33-34 – In chapter 6 Jesus devotes more words to the verses on worry than He does on any other subject. He has already made the point that worry is not consistent with faith in the Father's care. We are to live one day at a time. We should plan for the future, but not worry about it. Worry focuses on the future and at the same time it robs us of the joy of the present. Jesus is not telling us to lie back in laziness and not work. In 2 Thessalonians 3:10 Paul wrote: *For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat."* God's children are not given freedom from work. On the contrary, God provides for us through our work and expects us to provide for others in need. Likewise, we are not promised freedom from difficulties and troubles in life. People outside the Christian faith focus on material goals – a bigger house, a newer car, fame, and fortune – we only have to seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness.

The world causes us all kinds of stress and anxiety. However, Jesus offers us peace. He offers peace not by removing the stressful circumstances, but by giving us strength to endure the stressful circumstances along with a hope for our (anxiety-free) eternal future in heaven with Him and his Father. He also gives us fellow Christians (the church) to help us on our journey through life. Recall Romans 8:28: *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* So do not worry.

Opening:

1. Think about how the world expects us to live. Consider how Jesus wants us to live. How do these differ? Why would we worry less if we strive to pattern our life after Jesus?
2. Is it wrong to worry? Does Jesus command us not to worry?
3. How do you think God wants us to handle our worry/stress/anxiety?

Some Discussion Points (*NIV Quest Study Bible*, pp. 1430, 1540)

1. What are some events and practices that can influence us to worry? What are some daily stressors from one day to the next (deadlines, projects, personnel, etc.)? What is in your life today that causes you the most stress or worry (work, home, family)? How has COVID-19 made your life more stressful (caused you worry)?
2. What are some means that we can use to defeat the temptations to worry?
3. What does Jesus say about a person who worries?
4. What are some of the actions that Jesus tells us to take so we do not worry?
5. What are some of the things we know about God that will help us not to worry?

Some Application Points (*The NIV Serendipity Bible for Study Groups, Plus*, pp. 1334-1335)

1. Did you grow up in an openly “religious” home? Or was religion a private matter, unseen by you until later years?
2. Were you taught any prayers as a child? What was one of the earliest ones you can recall/remember?
3. How does your church handle the process of giving? How does that compare to other churches?
4. What does this passage tell you about the approach Jesus wants us to have toward giving?
5. Where do you go when you need to pray? What do you find yourself praying for most often?
6. When using the prayer (known as *The Lord’s Prayer*) as a model, what three things related to God are expressed first (vv. 9-10)? What three things related to our needs are expressed next (vv. 11-13)?
7. What do verses 12, 14 and 15 say to you about the relationship between forgiving and being forgiven?
8. What is the purpose of fasting? When (in what situations) might you find fasting helpful?
9. On a scale of 1 (out of obligation) to 10 (out of joy), how would you rate your usual attitude toward giving?
10. What “religious disciplines” are valued in your circles? In what way can they be used to impress others? When have you given in to that temptation?
11. In praying, what do you find is your biggest challenge?
12. In getting serious about your religious life, what is something you need to start doing?
13. If you were walking on a beach and found an ancient chest washed ashore, what would you hope to find inside?
14. When you were a teenager, what did your parents think of your clothes: Weird? Indecent? Tattered?
15. In our society, how is success generally measured? From what sources do you feel pressured to meet this standard?
16. What alternatives does Jesus propose with respect to **treasures** (vv. 19-21), **desires** (vv. 22-23) and **masters** (v. 24)?
17. Does saving for retirement show a lack of trust in God?
18. If Jesus were to analyze your life, what would He say your “treasure” is?
19. What is the connection between eye and body? What does it mean to have good eyes? Bad eyes?
20. According to Jesus, what are we to seek in place of food and clothes? What results from seeking this?
21. What is the one thing you can do this week to “seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness?”
22. Considering this past week, is your “bank” on earth or in heaven? What do you need to do to change accounts? Who has been your master lately?

23. What causes you the most worry? What is God saying to you through this passage about handling your particular worry or disappointment?

Additional Discussion/Application Points (from: *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount* by Daniel L. Akin, B and H Publishing Group, 2019, pp. 118-119)

1. How is worry sin? Have you considered worry a sin and repented of it?
2. How does Jesus' instruction not to worry about what you eat shape how you think about diets, eating lifestyles, and food choices? What is the difference between wise eating and worry eating?
3. What in your life creates the most worry? Why does that event or item cause you to worry? What does the Bible say about that issue that can help you trust God?
4. How does thinking about eternity help you not to worry about your life?
5. How does your culture and economic status shape what you consider to be the appropriate standard for God's feeding, clothing, and taking care of you? How might your perspective change if you lived in a different context?
6. Were first-century Christians less susceptible to the desire for clothing than Christians today? Why or why not?
7. How can our trust in God, at times when we would naturally worry, be an evangelistic witness to others?
8. Do you ask God more often for wants or for needs? How does God handle our requests for things that we want?
9. How can increasing our desire and concern for God's kingdom lessen our worry over (a) our present lives and (b) our future?
10. If your treasure is in heaven, how will that affect how much you are willing to sacrifice now on earth?

Looking Ahead: (Subject to Change)

September 27, 2020

Dealing with Your Feelings-Part 2 – Ephesian Anger – Ephesians 4: 26-27, 31

Main Point: You control anger, or it will control you. Prov. 29: 11

October 4, 2020

Dealing with Your Feelings- Part 3 – Grief and Loss – Luke 19: 41-44

Central Point: Jesus can redeem your grief like he did his own. Isa. 53: 3

October 11, 2020

Dealing with Your Feelings – Part 4 – Addiction Affliction – Nehemiah 4: 13-22

Big Idea: Recovery requires overcoming denial and shame. John 3: 21

October 18, 2020 – Call to Prayer Service in the Evening

Old and New – Ephesians 4: 17-24

Main Point: You're either in Christ, or in competition with Him. 2 Corinthians 5: 17

October 25, 2020 – Baptism

(Series on Key Relationship Groups and How the Gospel Speaks into Each One)

Freedom of Surrender – Part 1 – The Marriage – Ephesians 5: 22-28. 33

Big Idea: A supernatural marriage begins with supernatural surrender. James 4: 7

November 1, 2020

Freedom of Surrender – Part 2 – The Family – Ephesians 6: 1-4

Big Idea: You cannot submit to parents unless you submit first to Christ.

(Eph. 6: 1)

November 8, 2020 – Veterans Day

Freedom of Surrender – Part 3 – Authority Figures – Ephesians 6: 5-9

Big Idea: You cannot submit to someone if you don't submit to Christ.

(Eph. 6: 6)

November 15, 2020 – Stand Sunday (Foster/Adoption) & Children's Day

The New Generation – Psalm 71: 5-6, 17-18

Big Idea: Give kids what you had as a kid, or what you wish you had.

November 22, 2020 – Lord's Supper – Thanksgiving

Deep Gratitude – 1 Timothy 1: 12-14

Big Idea: Lordship always deepens your gratitude.