

7 DIFFERENT DEFENSES

Matthew 6:25-34

Trusting the One Who Knows

By

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Opening.

When our lives revolve around the tyrannical trinity of money, sex, and power {or any of the three} we will always experience an undue amount of anxiety. And we know how this is going to turn out, don't we? Anxiety becomes worry and worry becomes fear. **Living out of fear is the *antithesis* of living out of faith.** One always cancels out the other. So, Jesus turns to these daily distractions of the soul in the very next section of His brilliant Discourse.

“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 important than food, and the body more important than clothes? 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? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 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, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own,” Matthew 6:25-34 {NIV}.

In just ten vv. Jesus sets out *seven different defenses* against the stifling sin of worry. Let's see... worry doesn't affect you, though, does it? We don't have any worriers reading this paragraph, right? I mean, we're knowledgeable Christians with a thorough understanding of Scripture, we're Americans with an overabundance of material goods and technological toys, what could we possibly have to be worried about?

Those are very appropriate issues to raise. And from the amount of money spent on medications designed to alleviate stress and psychological pain in the U.S., from the enormous amount of time wasted fretting, fearing, and *misfiring* emotionally over a yesterday that's gone and a tomorrow which may never be, I'd say quite a lot! It's been said, “Yesterday is a canceled check {how 'bout this: a canceled credit card?}, tomorrow is an IOU, the only cash you have on hand, the only debit card you have in hand, is today!” *Live* like it's your *last* day; and even more importantly, *love* like it's your last moment.

Essay— Seven Different Defenses.

God— the Giver of Life.

So, Jesus begins in v. 25 by pointing out *God gave us the gift of Life* {and a gift it is}, *and if He gave us this gift, surely we can trust Him for the things which sustain it*. If He gave us this gift as the **“Author of Life,”** surely we can trust Him to write into the pages of our Story the air we need to breathe, the water we need to drink, the food we need to eat, and the warmth we need to survive.

If God gave us bodies, can we trust Him for **“clothes”** to clothe those bodies? Did you trust your father and mother for these things? Then why do you not trust your heavenly Father for these things? A Father who is incalculably more compassionate, immeasurably more merciful, more generous and more gracious than any human Father who has ever lived!

So, the first argument is if *Abba* gave us Life— first physical, then psychological, then spiritual and eternal— we can trust His heart for the things necessary to support it.

Trust the One Who Knows.

Next, Jesus goes on to point out the **“birds of the air,”** how **“they do not sow or reap or store away crops in barns,”** and yet they are fed each and every day by **“your heavenly Father,”** by your *Abba*— v. 26. There’s no worry in their lives, no fear in their hearts, no desperation to pile up goods— money, stocks, bonds, industrial-sized cans of spam from Sam’s— against an unforeseen future {and I might add, an unforeseeable future}. Contrary to popular Christian belief, you don’t have to know everything that’s going to happen in advance in order to be prepared, every twist and turn in the road of life before you ever get there. **You just have to know and trust in the One who does!** Our faith in the Father’s heart is the key to our survival, and to a deep intimacy with God along the Path of Life.

“In my life,” said a Jewish rabbi by the name of Simeon, “I have never seen a deer as a dryer of figs, or a lion as a porter, or a fox as a merchant, yet they are nourished without worry. How much more ought I, who am created to serve my Maker, to be nourished *without worry?*” Makes sense to me— from the lesser to the greater. The point Jesus is making is not that birds do not work {a wise man once pointed out, “No one works harder than the average sparrow to make a living!”}; the point is not birds do not work, it’s that *birds do not worry!* Nowhere in the animal kingdom is the weakness of worry found, this all-too-human failure of straining to see a future which cannot be seen, of agonizing over the failings of the past, and of seeking security in wealth and things stored up against the future.

Worry Is Worthless.

In v. 27 Jesus goes on to prove worry is *worthless*... utterly and unmistakably useless. The one thing I can guarantee you, without an ounce of hesitation whatsoever, is worry, anxiety, and the fear they foster have never solved a problem, corrected a misperception, or improved a life, in the history of the human Race! And that's a fact.

Jesus said there's not a man or woman alive who can add a single cubit to their height or a **"single hour to their"** lives **"by worrying."** But you can rob the joy from it while the hour is going on. Amen? What did Jesus say about **"the thief"** in John 10:10? Satan comes only to **"steal, kill, and destroy."** **"Steal"** what? Our joy. **"Kill"** what? Our hearts. **"Destroy"** what? Our lives. And he will do just that — *if* we let him.

Worry is worthless, it's useless, and the only one it damages is us. **Because the only problem worry solves is having too much joy in our lives and too much peace in our hearts!**

From the Lesser to the Greater {or From Lilies to Loved Ones}.

Next, Jesus goes on to speak about the beauty of the flowers, the **"lilies of the field,"** covering the hillside like a blanket of color: scarlet and purple and crimson and blue. There were poppies and anemones; they bloomed in a day and were gone tomorrow, and yet in this brief span of life were clothed with more beauty than the robes of kings. People gathered up these wild grasses and flowers to add heat to their ovens, clay ovens in which their **"daily bread"** was baked. These gorgeous flowers had but one day of life; and yet God — their Maker — clothes them with a beauty which is beyond human power to imitate. **"Will He not much more clothe us, 'O we of little faith?'"** Again, from the lesser to the greater.

If God gives such beauty to a 24 hour-flower, how much more will He care for us? Surely the lavish generosity given freely to the wildflower will not forget Mankind, the crown of all Creation, surely He will not neglect His very own Sons and Daughters.

The Love of God and the God of Love.

Jesus advances in vv. 31-32 a foundational argument against the weakness of worry. Worry, Jesus tells us unequivocally, is what characterizes **"the pagans"** {you know, those pot-smoking hippies who live down the street}, the Gentile nations surrounding Israel and scattered over the Earth. **It is *not* intrinsic to those who *know* what God is like and *trust* in what they know!** This kind of distrust in the heart of God is entirely understandable in Greeks and Romans, in Arabs and Egyptians, who believe in and

worship jealous, capricious gods, envious and lustful gods, gods who were angry and unpredictable. But it is beyond comprehension in those of us who have learned to call God by the name of Father, to re-orient our lives to the care and concern of *Abba*.

The Children of God refuse to worry because we *believe* with all our hearts in the love of God and the God of love. What you eat, what you drink, what you wear, and where you live so you can survive in the Battle, are all things **“your heavenly Father knows you need.”**

Seeking His Kingdom and Righteousness First.

Now, in these last two vv. Jesus lays out two divine directives about how worry, anxiety and fear can be defeated. The first is to **“seek first”** — from *protos* meaning- ‘first in *rank*, first in *priority*, first in *preeminence* and *importance*’ — above everything else we experience, **“His Kingdom and His righteousness.”**

We’ve already seen how God’s Kingdom runs counter to the kingdoms of this world, and His righteousness is both internal {bestowed by God through faith in His Son} and external {acted on by us for the benefit of others}. Think back to the Model Prayer, the Disciples’ Prayer, in ch. 6. Jesus say’s, **“Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven.”** Which would be a ridiculous thing to pray if God’s will were already done on Earth just as it is in Heaven, meaning perfectly, completely, without conflict or complaint. This line is critical because it’s what’s called grammatically an ‘appositive’ — the *opposite* of the opposite — meaning it’s another way of saying the same thing. **Where God’s Kingdom comes is where God’s will is done ...and where God’s will is done, His Kingdom comes!**

You tracking with this?

To **“seek first His Kingdom”** above all else in our lives is to seek and accept and embrace unconditionally God’s dream and desire for the way our Story should go. This can only happen as we surrender ourselves without reservation to the Spirit of God: to His presence, His power, His teaching and training, His intimate guidance in circumstances for which there is no rational solution!

We all know the **“will of God”** floating out there in Christian circles as a cloudy, nebulous concept can be used to cover a multitude of sins and justify any amount of inaction. Better to seek with sincere faith the Holy Spirit’s counsel and guidance every moment of every minute! This is how worry and fear are defeated. If you’re living in God’s desire for you, *in this moment*, in this place, **“in step with His Spirit,”** there is no time left for worry, no room in the soul to concentrate on fear.

Think about this. When you find someone whom you love deeply, something in life about which you're passionate, how it drives out every other concern in the soul. Literally, you can't stop thinking about them, or thinking about it. A love like this can inspire our labors, intensify our studies, purify our lives and dominate our entire being. Jesus' conviction was that worry and anxiety are banished when *Abba* alone is given the throne of our souls ...when God becomes the dominating love. *Ordos Amor*— the 'right ordering of the loves.' When we **"seek first"** His rule and reign over our hearts and lives, **"all these things"** {what to eat, what to drink, and what to wear} **"will be given to" us "as well."**

Today Is the Day.

Finally, Jesus say's worry can be defeated when we train in the discipline of living *one* day at a time. The Jews had a saying in Jesus' day, "Do not worry over tomorrow's evils, for you know not what today will bring forth. Perhaps tomorrow you will not be alive, and you will have worried over a world which will not be yours."

If each day is lived as a "love affair in the midst of a Life and Death Battle," if each task God appoints us is done as it appears, if we seek to live in the Spirit of Jesus and love others well— with thoughtfulness, gratitude, and grace— then this day is *holy* and *good* in the eyes of God. This is where Jesus' brilliance comes shining through, as He teaches us, His Followers, to handle the demands of each day as they come, without worrying about an unknown tomorrow and fearing the things which may never be. **"For each day has enough trouble of its own."** Is this a fact or what? Other than **"believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved,"** truer words were never spoken.

Finale.

I'm going to put this out there as plainly, as boldly and as Biblically as I can, and let the Spirit of God bring His clarity and conviction. We know worry is a sin or we wouldn't be commanded not to do it. **But at its very core, worry is essentially a faithless, godless act. Let this soak into the soul.** Worry is not the result of the situation which surrounds us. It's not the external, the circumstantial, which is the problem; it's the internal condition of the heart. Otherwise, two Believers in the same circumstance would not have radically different responses: one of anxiety and the other of serenity.

There may be more *damaging* sins than worry, but there is no more *disabling* sin for the soul. Or for the body, when you look at the *effect* of worry, fear, and anxiety— stress, high blood pressure, ulcers, neurosis, psychosis, the inability to live and love in

the moment. You can't sleep, you can't eat, you can't rest, you can't enjoy— by stealing your joy, the enemy has won! Here's how Peterson translates this section of Scripture in *The Message*.

“If you decide for God, living a life of God-worship [As opposed to what? *Self-worship*], it follows that you don't fuss about what's on the table at mealtimes or whether the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in the care of God. And you count far more to Him than birds. Has anyone by fussing in front of the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch?

All this time and money wasted on fashion— do you think it makes that much difference? Instead of looking at the fashions, walk out into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop, but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them. If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers— most of which are never even seen— don't you think He'll attend to you, take pride in you, do His best for you? What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God's giving.

People who don't know God and the way He works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how He works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes”— Matthew 6:25-34 {*Message*}.

Let me close with a story. This comes from Johann Tauler, the 14th century German mystic. One day Tauler met a beggar. “God give you a good day, my friend,” he said; the beggar answered, “I thank God I never had a bad one.” Then Tauler said, “God give you a happy life, my friend;” “I thank God I am never unhappy,” said the beggar. Tauler in amazement said, “What do you mean?” “Well,” said the beggar, “when it is fine, I thank God; when it rains, I thank God; when I have plenty, I thank God; when I am hungry, I thank God; and since God's will is my will, and whatever pleases Him pleases me, why should I say I am unhappy when I'm not?” Tauler looked at the man in astonishment, “Who are you?,” he asked. “I am a king,” he said. “Then where is your kingdom?” The beggar answered quietly, “*In my heart.*”