



Sermon Notes: Steve Stanis,
“Your Cares and Worries Matter to God”

02 Jun 2024

Readings: Matthew 6:25-34, Psalm 31:1-5, James 4:13-17

Do you use the Aussie expression ‘no worries’? I still hear myself use it as a throwaway line!
Do you think Aussies are truly ‘laid back’? It does not feel like that to me.
Many people I speak to, do not think so either? What about you?
What worries are you carrying in your life today?

In the culture and history of the Greeks, they acknowledge that all people have to manage their own concerns or worries.

Growing up for me it was a familiar sight to see the Greek community wearing beads loosely around their wrist. The Greek word for it is “Komboloi” (No not Columbines- not sweets!)

I did not see it at our 60th. Probably because there was nothing to worry about! It literally means ‘worry beads’. Have you ever noticed them?

Worry Beads evolved in ancient Greece from prayer beads.

They were most likely visible in Jesus’ time, just as we read in Matthew.

They are used to ground your cares and worries by holding them and spinning them as a form of comfort. They were also sometimes being used within their times of prayer.

If you are a person who struggles with chronic anxiety, my heart goes out to you. Please hear that God loves you and God cares.

I don’t want this message to disregard or diminish your anguish. I hope this message gives you a glimmer of light. It is into our cares and worries that Jesus speaks.

He is never judgemental. He speaks words of life.

Worry Brings Distraction:

In Matthew 6:25–34, Jesus commands us three times, “Do not worry”.

The root meaning of anxiety is ‘distraction’. We worry when we are distracted, when we take our eyes off God and His overarching reality for our lives: when instead, we focus on the reality of our circumstances.

We look at the threat these present within our lives, and we feel overwhelmed. We lose sight of the truth that life is in the hands of our good and wise God, who cares for us more than we can ever possibly know.

Worry causes guilt:

When we follow Jesus our worries do not just disappear. We do know Christ is sufficient in all things and we know we should not worry, yet still we worry. So, not only do we worry, but we feel guilty about worrying!

Not to worry is easier said than done. Worry can consume us.

Do you ever feel like that? No worries if you do!

A worry can consume us and cause us to lose our perspective on life.

To quote Tim Keller,

“Worry is looking out at the world and being afraid that God isn’t going to get it right...

You’re filled with anxiety because you think life is up to you.

You’re trying to take the place of God, but you are unqualified for the job.

And anyone who is in a job (paid or unpaid) they are unqualified for, feels really weird.”

While the Bible acknowledges the mental, physiological or social aspects of worry, this passage today makes it clear that worry is also a deeply spiritual issue.

Scott McNight sums up these verses in this way:

“These are words for radicals about a radical lifestyle of trusting God for the ordinary of life while devoting oneself unreservedly toward the kingdom mission.”

The antidote to anxiety is found in (Verse 33): *“But seek first his Kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well”*.

What does Jesus teach about worry?

1) Firstly, He invites us to get things in perspective.

In verses 26, 28, and 30 He invites us to consider the nature of God.

God looks after the finest details of nature: The food cycle of birds, the seasonal cycle of plants, and the growing of the grass....

If He looks after all these aspects of His created order, will He not care for the concerns of the pinnacle of all he created? Each one of our unique human lives?

(I am not going to mention (Luke 12:7) that tells me that God cares for every single hair on my head!)

God cares for every small, intricate detail. If worry is about fearing that our circumstances are out of control, then Jesus is reminding us who is in control. The creator of the universe is not thrown by your circumstances, no matter how great their worry may have become to you.

Worry is not the same as concern. It is appropriate to be concerned about things.

The two are not the same, and you can recognise the difference, because concern takes wise action and prays dependently. But worry, or over-concern, thinks and acts as though everything is up to you, or completely out of control, and prays desperately, if at all.

Prayerful concern and reflection, and sharing with other followers of Jesus, stares the situation in the face and brings the God who cares about you, into focus.

A *Kingdom* perspective is to recognise that our Creator God is in control of the world and cares for his creation.

2) Secondly, Jesus tells us that to worry is to question which Kingdom we serve

(Verses 25 and 31-32) reinforce the truth that we worry because our Kingdom values are confused. We worry about the things of this world. We focus on “*our kingdom*”, not God’s Kingdom. Are you living as if this life is all there is, or are you living your life for the kingdom of God?

Which God?

The essence of worry is in attempting to find your ultimate hope, comfort, and meaning in something that's temporal and fleeting. Give God the rightful place He deserves in your life.

Seek first His Kingdom, His forever, eternal Kingdom. Be obedient to Him and love Him.

As you trust Him, material concerns will find their true perspective. Put material things first and you will never have enough and always be dissatisfied. Put God first and you will be satisfied.

When God is at the centre of our lives, He shapes not just the material things in our lives, but He reshapes our desires, our hearts, what is important to us.

We get less overwhelmed by things, because we see they are not so important anymore.

He keeps those who trust in him in peace, because their hearts are fixed on him. Prayer is the best way to fix our hearts on him.

3) Thirdly, God always works in the present

The great Corrie Ten Boom once put it like this:

“Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow. It empties today of its strength.”

We're squandering God's grace that He has given us for today, on things we fear might happen tomorrow.

1 Peter 5:7 tells us what to do with our fear. We're to cast all our anxieties on Him, because He cares for us.

These words are preceded by **verse 6**.

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God.”

We are not God. We should stop acting like it. It doesn't just blaspheme Him.

It really hurts us. It saps our days of joy.

When we worry about all that may happen tomorrow, we are not present in God's purposes for us in today. Anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, it only drains today of its strength.

The future is yet to happen. The Psalmist writes in (31:15), *“My times are in your hands”*.

Whenever we try to second-guess the future and worry about it, we are, in effect, worrying about something that is non-existent.

We can never resolve that worry.

James writes in (4:13-17) *“Do not boast in the things of tomorrow”*.

He concludes, *“If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.”*

By being distracted about the possibilities of tomorrow, we miss out on the certain grace of God today. The God who has been faithful in the past can be relied on to be faithful in the future.

He does not change. He is not planning to leave us to cope in our own strength.

He is not planning to get tired or weary and so have insufficient resources to see us through.

The writer to the Hebrews says “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (13:8). Maybe we should remind ourselves of this verse every time we hear or say, “No worries”!

4) Fourthly, Jesus challenges our priorities

How can worry be an opportunity? When you worry, you have an opportunity to see what kinds of things tend to get your attention, more than God does: your over-concerns reveal your over-

loves. And this can be an opportunity to grow. Jesus has a way of cutting to the core of the problem and providing a deeper, more substantial solution:

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matt. 6:33).

You win some you lose more has become well known as an expression in advertising. Ironically it is the summary of gambling.

Is your faith in Jesus a gamble in your priorities to Him? Jesus is bringing us back to the right priorities.

“What are you living for?” He asks. He’s calling us to re-orient our lives around the living God and his priorities. We need to keep first things first and second things second. And as we do that, we will begin to be liberated from our worries.

Two Kingdoms: so today we are confronted by two visions for living; two masters; two kingdoms.

The life question for each of us is simply this.

Do I seek to trust my kingdom or God’s Kingdom?

Kingdom living is single-minded as Jesus teaches in (Verse 21)

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”.

The answer for God’s people can only be ‘the above’- the Heavenly, eternal realm that Jesus himself foreshadows as he teaches. The treasure that is Kingdom living.

German theologian Helmut Thielicke notes here,

“The issue about the God who cares for us is that we take all the gifts that he gives to us, and set them above him, which is not how he intended us to live within his Kingdom plan”.

It is little wonder then that life is filled with worry!

Conclusion:

What can we do to battle anxiety? Remember God’s providence. He is in control.

He loves us and He will graciously care for us one day at a time. We must seek His kingdom and go to Him in prayer with our needs.

I pray that Jesus teaching will give you real hope, and a confidence that helps you in your journey of faithful living as you carry the cares and concerns of the world. When we consciously give thanks to God it starts with us, in the moment, but it speaks to the God who made us and knows our eternity.

God’s plans cannot be defeated. He will overcome when we feel overwhelmed! In this fallen world, we’ll always have troubles, and we’ll always be tempted to fear. But we can see growth as His gospel takes grip on our souls. And we can point to His glory as we stand out in an anxious world.

Your cares and your worries matter to God, always!

Amen