

Don't Worry, Seek God's Kingdom

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[0 : 0 0] So ever since my first night youth group, I've had a passion for hearing God's word and I'm very privileged and excited to share that with you tonight. So if you've got your Bibles open already, you'll see that the passage tonight has a heading.

Do not worry. Do not worry. It seems simple. Yet both God and my fiancé have challenged me as I've been preparing this sermon over the past few weeks.

Because I don't know about you, but I worry a lot. I got engaged about two months ago and we're planning for a January wedding, as I said. That's like full on. Seems like there's a lot to worry about.

I need a cake. I need a suit. I need to book the honeymoon. I need to find a place to rent in Melbourne because I currently live in Bendigo. I need to not fail my uni exams. I need to prepare myself to be the head of the household because that's kind of a big deal.

The list goes on. And then even without a wedding, I still come from a non-Christian family and so I still worry about them. Sure, God is good and God saves people.

[1 : 0 2] God provides for people. But when it comes down to believing that for me and for my family, honestly, I struggle with that. And I know I'm not the only one here who worries. According to Beyond Blue, 16 to 24-year-olds have the highest prevalence of anxiety than any other age group.

See, worry and anxiety are real issues that we face. We worry about careers, providing for our families, our health. There's lots of things. And this is a really practical sermon that I'm bringing you here today because worrying is a real part of our everyday life.

So at the end of this message, we're going to have to respond one way or another. We're either going to leave here happy that we're good Christians because we went to church on Sunday, or we're going to have to think a little bit harder, a little bit deeper and apply this passage of scripture to our lives.

So some of the issues we're going to try and resolve tonight, should we take on things that cause us distress like planning a wedding? Is it even okay to worry? And if we understand this passage properly, will we be cured of our anxieties?

If you follow along closely, Jesus presents a solution to our worrying that goes deeper than just saying, don't worry. So yes, you'll see the heading of our passage is, do not worry or do not be anxious.

[2 : 2 1] And you'll see this phrase repeated in verses 26, 31 and 34. You might say, sure, okay, Ben, I won't worry. But when life is hectic and you have exams knocking on your door, it's a do list longer than the length of your phone, family, church, work, sport, university, etc., pulling you in five different directions, it can be easy to take this advice the wrong way or to disregard its relevance.

But come with me as we still ourselves, as we lean into exactly what Jesus is telling us here in this passage. The first point that I've got from this passage is that there's more to life than what we worry about.

And you'll see that in the outline as well. Reading verse 25, it starts with the word therefore, which instantly tells me that I don't have all the information I need. So if I go back one verse, the 24, Jesus says, no one can serve two masters.

Either he'll hate the one and love the other, or he'll be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. So in light of the fact that we serve God and not money, the commands, do not worry about your life, what you'll eat or drink, makes more sense.

See, we don't need to worry about the things money buys. We just need to keep serving God. So when we look at our situation, knowing that God is our master, we can be assured that there is more to life and more to our situation than what we worry about.

[3 : 51] There's God, our loving father, who is working for us. In verse 25, Jesus says, there is more to life than worrying about food, as there is more to the body than worrying about the clothes you put on it.

And I would suggest to you today that there is also more to life than whatever it is that you're worrying about. There is a God, our master, working in the background.

Because if we only focus on the things we worry about, the things we desire, we're missing something. There's more to life than the material things on our to-do list.

And you can see this in creation with the example in verse 26. It says, You see, if we neglect to consider God in our situation, we're missing a key component.

As the text said, birds aren't super forward thinking. They don't have worm farms set up in their backyard for food security. They just make it up as they go along. They just fly around. In the case of magpies, harass innocent pedestrians.

[4 : 58] Then go about their day and then eventually find something to eat. But yet God in his mercy provides for them their every need. There is more to life than what we worry about.

Behind the scenes, what we worry about in the natural, God is at work providing for his creation and doing it very well. What's more, God says via rhetorical question in verse 26 that you are more valuable than the birds of his creation.

God will surely look after you. And this God, by the way, is not a far off and distant spiritual entity. He lives in us and among us, holding everything together and working everything together for our good.

He's not a God that leaves us to our own devices or watches from a distance. He's our master and our father who cares for us so deeply that he says he will feed us and he'll clothe us.

He will give us what we need. And how good is that, hey? God is so good. And just as he meets the needs of the birds, now in verse 28 he meets the needs of the grass.

[6 : 02] It says, See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these.

When I first read the word lily, I, for some reason, imagined a green lily pad that sits in the water with a frog on top of it. But I then realised it's actually talking about a colourful flower.

And so that's important if you're like me. That helps in understanding the point made about beauty. Because in the eyes of God, the humble flower of the field is dressed better than King Solomon, even though he was extremely rich.

You see, these flowers are just around Jesus as he's preaching the famous Sermon on the Mount. And they look beautiful. But in certain months of the year, they will eventually dry up and then be thrown into a fire to heat people's ovens.

In a similar way to the birds, flowers do not go out hunting for food or building water tanks to make sure they have enough. They just sit there. Yet out of love, God looks after them and clothes them with beautiful flowers.

[7 : 08] And who here knows God's creation is good to look at, hey? God does a good job. And so when we think about that and we shift our attention from what we desire to chasing what God desires, things shift.

In verse 27, Jesus presents the point when he asks, Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? No. Worrying doesn't change your situation and it doesn't change your perspective or your hope.

But seeking God's kingdom and his righteousness does. So, because focusing on our concerns doesn't change anything, focus on God.

When you fix your eyes on God and his love for you, something shifts in your spirit and you begin to feel hope. You know, we've already seen that God provides food for the birds of the air who neither sow crops nor do anything to harvest them.

He clothes the flowers of the field which are here today and a month later will dry up and be thrown into a fire. And you are of far more value than both of those. And what's more, we know God cares about us and Jesus showed us that he cares about us because Jesus took our punishment of death on a cross and reconciled us with God.

[8 : 25] He showed us grace as Beck spoke about. So instead of focusing on the things we worry about, Jesus says, focus on God's kingdom and his righteousness, his establishment here on earth and his moral ways.

And one of the ways we can focus on God's kingdom and his righteousness is to remind ourselves of God's goodness from his word. There are countless verses that speak of God's goodness. I could stand here for hours actually if you let me.

It's important we remind ourselves how much God cares for us so that in the midst of our worry, we can remind ourselves of the goodness of our master who cares for us. If no verses are coming to mind immediately, I'm just going to give you a few for free.

He will never leave us or forsake us. He works all things together for our good. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. He will never permit the righteous to be moved. And in the end, he will wipe away every tear.

Whatever it is, see, that speaks to you and encourages you of God's love for you and his ability to care for you, that's what you need to focus on. If that's getting Bible verses on the back of your bedroom door, the lock screen of your phone, the back of the shower even, make it happen.

[9 : 37] For example, while I was writing this sermon, I grabbed a picture of some flowers instead of lilies and I made them my desktop background on my computer. So when I opened my computer to start working, I was confident the goal would be with me to help me do a good job of unpacking this text because he cares for me and he cares for you and he wants us to succeed, doesn't he?

There's also a point here being made about your value and it was in the last example too in verse 30. Sorry, now I'm reading verse 30. If that is how God closed the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, you of little faith?

See, in the context of worrying about clothing, God clothes the flowers of the field, which only have a temporary lifespan. If God cares for something as disposable as a flower, he cares for you too.

Whatever it is that you worry about, have confidence that God cares for you and that he will meet your needs far better than you ever could have. See, when God makes something, he makes it beautifully.

Even the man-made riches of Solomon did not result in something as beautiful as these simple God-made flowers. So seek God and he will deliver you through your worry. He cares for you.

[10 : 57] The point Jesus is making is that as much as God does for the birds and the flowers, he will do much, much more for you. You are a human, a person, created in the image of God and it's you that this Jesus, this Jesus he's speaking to us, died to save.

And we know our value because Jesus is God's perfect son. God's son who out of love was sent to earth to take the punishment of our imperfections and our mistakes, to bear our sins on a cross, to die and come back to life.

He cares enough to die for you. There is no greater love than that. We can trust this God with everything because he knows what we need.

So in light of the fact that God cares for his children, Jesus leads us from acknowledging that God cares for us into seeking his kingdom and righteousness. He says God cares for you.

So, or therefore, verse 31, do not worry, saying, what shall we eat or what shall we wear? For the pagans, that's the people who didn't know God, by the way, for the pagans run after all these things and your heavenly father knows that you need them.

[12 : 11] But, seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well. The pagans who didn't know God would search for and intensely demand the things they worried about.

In their case, clothing and food. See, the phrase to run after sounds directionless and chaotic. So, whenever one around you is frantically running, searching for answers to their anxieties, chasing jobs, chasing relationships, good grades, or for me, honeymoon destinations and wedding cake supplies, look at what Jesus says.

He says, seek God's kingdom and his righteousness. God's kingdom is his rule and his establishment here on earth. To seek God's kingdom is to seek that his will be done here on earth.

It's to recognize Jesus as the master, as the ruler, or as Kanye West would say, the king of this world. A few laughs there, it's good. To seek God's kingdom is to make God's priorities your priorities.

And then Jesus also says to seek God's righteousness. What is righteousness? It's just God's moral way. It's his ethics. So, seek it. Find out how God wants you to live.

[13 : 28] And if you want help understanding seeking God's kingdom and righteousness, well, conveniently, that's what this whole Sermon on the Mount from chapter 5 through 7 is all about. You know, he says, give in secret, pray in private, store up your treasures in heaven, build your life on the rock, the only firm foundation that is God's word.

This right here is God's solution to our worries. Stop running after your desires. Just stop. Instead, chase after God's desires.

And just watch everything work out. Seek God's kingdom and righteousness. Alright, so let's get real for a second.

If you're applying for a job and you're worrying about it, what should you do? Well, instructions. Two instructions. Seek God's kingdom.

Seek God's righteousness. Here are things that I think would go into seeking God's kingdom in this situation. It would be doing the job with the intention of seeing God's kingdom come and God's righteousness flowing out of your life.

[14 : 35] So you're doing it not first for the career or for the money or for the prestige, but as a natural part of serving God's kingdom. It's by making sure that this job won't stop you from doing what is morally right.

And also, because you care about God's kingdom and righteousness, it means that you'll be waiting for the opportunities God gives you to grow his kingdom. Firstly, by living and working in a godly way that is attractive to non-Christians, but also taking the opportunities that are presented to talk about the goodness of God's kingdom, having an answer ready.

To make God's kingdom our priority would be to make sure that we're here at church on Sunday, greeting people, preparing food, vacuuming the floor, serving the house, letting friends and family know that they're welcome here.

God's kingdom isn't bound to these walls or the day of Sunday, but it's a good place to start. Seeking God's kingdom is making sure we have time to be with our family. It's making sure we have time to serve the church by running or going to Bible studies, by doing working bees, the list goes on.

So, let your interviewer know that you won't be available Sundays or the day you have a Bible study. It sounds counter-cultural, doesn't it? But remember, God is in control.

[15 : 56] If you're seeking God's kingdom, these things we worry about, these things will be given to us. Moving on, what about a wedding?

How do we seek God and his righteousness in a wedding? Well, we start by establishing the context of our wedding day. It's important, it's an important day, but it is really just a shadow of another day, a day when Jesus will return for his church.

It's important that we seek God's kingdom on our wedding day because we want to make it known to those at our wedding that we have every intention of loving each other the way God sets out for us in his word, with submission, with service, and with sacrifice.

But to seek God's righteousness in a wedding, that goes a step further. That would mean being sexually pure, which is not having sex before marriage, but also not wishing you were having sex before marriage by looking at people with lust or by watching pornography.

I don't know if we talk about that here, but pornography is not what God considers righteous. And that's a sermon for Pastor Mark next week. The point is that even if it's uncomfortable or tempting not to, it's important to think about and act on prioritizing God's kingdom and his righteousness.

[17 : 19] Why? Because the things you're worrying about are just tiny pieces of God's plan. If you can still yourself, work to establish what God wants and live his way, he can sort your worries out.

So stop running after the things the world obsesses over. Just seek first his kingdom and righteousness. Because you know God loves you, you know God cares for you, you know God's working in the background.

So just seek his desires, and his ways, focus on his goodness and watch everything fall into place. For me, my wedding is in 68 days now, but there's still good things for me to be doing for God's kingdom and God's righteousness.

The wedding is important, it's not the most important thing in the world. I can be confident that everything will come together for our wedding because I know I've prioritized God's kingdom and his righteousness.

I'm in God's hand. Everything will sort itself out, I'm sure. Now, I don't mean to be another useless voice in the crowd telling someone with an anxiety disorder to not worry.

[18 : 23] I know plenty of people who trust God with their whole heart but still suffer social anxiety and that is fine. The chances are focusing on God's plan and his ways won't change the chemical levels in your brain, but I do think it can give you hope and it can give you peace and confidence when you're under attack.

I know it's hard but to the person with diagnosed anxiety and the one without, when you are under trial you must remind yourself how deeply God cares for you. If you can, stir yourself to do something small but something positive for God's kingdom.

Write Jesus loves you on a sticky note and pray for its recipient. Smile at someone in the street. Pick up a bit of rubbish and put it in the bin. See, I'm aware that anxiety is often simply a chemical imbalance and I'm not proposing that reminding yourself God cares for you and doing something for his kingdom will cure an anxiety disorder but I am convinced that these things will give you hope and they will give you assurance that God cares for you.

It doesn't matter if you've been diagnosed with anxiety or diagnosed with the flu, the point stays the same. Seek God's kingdom and his righteousness and then let God do his thing.

God knows what you need and he says all these things will be given to you. So trust him. Seek him first and gradually over time you never know what God might do.

[19 : 52] To wrap up, we know that worry and anxiety are real. Careers, families, health, relationships, money and much more but God knows what we need and God promises to give us what we need.

So put his kingdom and his righteousness first. Yes, it's okay to plan. Just plan with his kingdom as your first priority and plan to be righteous as a priority.

Also, this might all be new for you. You might be visiting or a friend brought you along or you've realised something today you've never realised before. If you like the sound of a life where God is in control, where you can lay down your worries, where you can trust God, that God will give you what you need, I would actually love to chat more with you about that and so would the people, the person that brought you or lots of people here actually would be willing to help you with that but I'm just going to be standing right here after the service.

If you want to come and chat more to me, please feel welcome to do that. Yes, so I would like to finish with just a few reminders. Verse 25, 28 and 32, do not worry.

Verse 26, if God cares for the birds, he will surely look after you. Verse 30, if God clothes the flowers of the field, are you not of more value than that?

[21 : 15] And 33, but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you. I'm going to pray for us now.

Heavenly Father, thank you that you're a good father to us. Thank you that you care so much about us. Father, please help us to remember your goodness in the midst of our worry and our trials.

Help us to seek out your kingdom and your righteousness first, to seek out your rule and your moral way. Father, I pray that your kingdom would come, that your will be done, not ours, here on earth, Father, as you give us the needs, the things that we need to face each day.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.