

week

#23



UPSIDE DOWN
AFFECTIONS

SMALL GROUPS

Fasting in Secret	Coram Deo	Study
<p>“Contentment with piety for the Lord’s sake and not as a show for others will bring us far more than the fleeting praises of men.”</p>	<p>“Going without food helps remind us how much we depend on God for our sustenance and, indeed, for all things.”</p>	<p>Open It</p> <p>Explore It</p> <p>Get It</p>

“When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face.... And your Father who sees in secret will reward YOU.” Matthew 6:17-18

Fasting in Secret

Before we look at Jesus’ teaching on fasting in today’s passage, we need to provide a few closing comments on the Lord’s Prayer, the prayer He has given to His disciples (Matt. 6:9–15). Most believers have prayed this prayer verbatim at some point, which is not inappropriate if it is said with thoughtful reflection. Yet this prayer is to be used primarily as a guide for structuring our communion with God. We are to pray like Jesus teaches us (v. 9; Luke 11:1–4). In other words, it is good to compose our prayers

after the format of the Lord’s Prayer, using it as a model to follow. Taking each petition and applying it more directly to our own lives, we are to pray for our own particular needs, sins, and the extension of His kingdom among our friends and families.

Praying for the extension of God’s kingdom is especially important (Matt. 6:10). Since our Creator already rules over all (Ps. 97:1), this is a prayer for His rule to be recognized, not established. It is a prayer that we and those around us cease to rebel against our Father and do His will just as it is done in heaven (Matt. 6:9–10) —

spontaneously, not begrudgingly — and with full acknowledgment and respect of His holiness. Augustine said that to pray for the kingdom to come is to pray for it to be manifested on earth (Sermon on the Mount, 2.6.20). Today’s passage records our Savior’s teaching on avoiding hypocrisy when fasting, a major act of Jewish piety in His day. During Jesus’ lifetime, fasting is an opportune time for displaying one’s piety; many go about disheveled and visibly hungry to show others their “spirituality.” Some even dirty themselves with ashes to show how much they have “given up for God.” As with prayer and almsgiving, the



Messiah’s solution is not to forbid fasting altogether, but to make sure that it is done in secret so that His disciples will receive a lasting reward (Matt. 6:16–18). Our fasting is to be so secretive that we show forth our cleanliness and joy, which was often done with oil in first-century Israel (Ps. 104:14–15). If we are clean and happy, who but God will know we are fasting? **Contentment with piety for the Lord’s sake and not as a show for others will bring us far more than the fleeting praises of men (Matt. 6:18).**

Coram Deo (before the face of God)

Fasting is extremely beneficial to our spiritual growth and our prayer lives. Going without food helps remind us how much we depend on God for our sustenance and, indeed, for all things. This helps us seek Him fervently, for we know that the only

hope we have to see our loved ones saved and our lives changed is through His working. Consider taking some time to fast and pray this week so that you may know what it means to rely wholly on the Lord.¹

Passages for Further Study

Esther 4

Isaiah 58:1–12

Matthew 9:10–13

Acts 14:19–23

Open It!

1. Name some modern conveniences that you can't live without. What makes them so important to you that you cannot live without them?

2. What experience, if any, do you have with fasting?

Read It | Matthew 6:16-18

Read the entire passage before proceeding to the questions below.

Explore It

1. What types of things do hypocrites do to be noticed during a fast?
2. What things should we do when we fast?
3. Who should see our fasting?

Get It

Fasting has been practiced by many different religions for centuries. It is personal self-discipline in which a person denies himself a normal need in order to learn to restrain his passions and desires, and to express his devotion. Often God's people have fasted in order to express humility before the Lord, and to show an earnest desire for the Lord to work in a particular way. Most commonly, fasting involves denying oneself a meal or meals in order to give oneself to the purpose of seeking God's face.

-Phil Newton

Jesus
on
fasting

1. In verse 16 Jesus assumes that Christians will fast, yet it seems that few Christians practice this spiritual discipline. What factors may contribute to this trend?
2. Read 2 Samuel 12:15-23; Nehemiah 9:1; Acts 13:2, 14:23. Under what circumstances might fasting be a helpful spiritual discipline for you?
3. Jesus addresses ways that the hypocrites of His day fasted (vs.16-17). In what ways might hypocrites fast today?
4. How hard has it been (or would it be) for you to go on a fast and not let other people know?

"By fasting, the body learns to obey the soul; by praying the soul learns to obey the body."

-William Secker

prayer and fasting

5. Throughout the scriptures we see that fasting is accompanied by prayer. How might these two work in tandem?
6. Read Daniel 9:3. What significance does the ancient practice of fasting and praying in sackcloth and ashes tell us about our disposition when we fast?
7. What does fasting teach us about the connection of the physical and the spiritual?
8. Read Nehemiah 9:1 and Judges 20:26. If Jesus calls us to fast in secret then is all corporate or public fasting wrong? Explain your answer.
9. Just as with fasting, the Christian is called to abstain from many different things. (1 Thessalonians 5:22) What are some differences between fasting and abstaining?
10. Read Isaiah 58:1-9. How does this passage reinforce the teaching of Jesus on fasting?

Fasting, if we conceive of it truly, must not... be confined to the question of food and drink; fasting should really be made to include temporary abstinence from anything which is legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some special spiritual purpose. There are many bodily functions which are right and normal and perfectly legitimate, but which for special peculiar reasons in certain circumstances should be controlled. That is fasting.²

11. In ancient times people would fast their meals because of the time and energy a daily meal might take to prepare. In an age of fast food and with so many things on demand, what contemporary activities can we give up for the sake of greater times of fellowship with God?

12. In light of Jesus' teaching, should all Christians fast? If God is not leading you to fast, do you feel guilty? Explain.

The weakness of our hunger for God is not because He is unsavory, but because we keep ourselves stuffed with "other things."

- John Piper, *A Hunger for God*

13. How does the world's stuff keep us too full to hunger for God? How can fasting counteract such pursuits of the wrong things? In what ways does fasting lead us to savor God?

14. What are some takeaways from this passage on fasting? After reading this passage are you more or less inclined to fast in the future? Explain your answer.

¹ R.C. Sproul, Fasting in Secret *From Ligonier Ministries, the teaching fellowship of R.C. Sproul. All rights reserved. Website: www.ligonier.org*

² Lloyd Jones, D. M., Studies in the Sermon on the Mount.

week #24



Treasures on Earth

Money and possessions are a big part of life, and therefore God intends them to be a big part of worship.

Study

Open It

Explore It

Get It

“But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (vv.20-21) Matthew 6:19-24

Treasures on Earth

John Piper

The inner essence of worship is treasuring Jesus as infinitely valuable above everything. The outer forms of worship are the acts that show how much we treasure God. Therefore, all of life is meant to be worship because God said whether you eat or drink or whatever you do — all of life — do it all to show how valuable the glory of God is to you (1 Cor. 10:31).

Money and possessions are a big part of life, and therefore God intends them to be a big part of worship. So the way we worship with our money

and our possessions is to get them and use them and lose them in a way that shows how much we treasure Jesus, not money.

Luke 12:33–34 has to do with the big pattern of how we worship with our money (and by implication it relates to what we do with our money in corporate worship, as we’ll see below). “Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be

also.” Observe three things from this important text on money.

First, embracing Jesus as our great Treasure carries a strong impulse toward simplicity rather than accumulation. Focus for a moment on the words “sell your possessions” in verse 33. Who is Jesus talking to? Verse 22 earlier in the passage gives the answer: “his disciples.” Now these people were, by and large, not wealthy. They didn’t have a lot of possessions. But still He says, “Sell your possessions.” He doesn’t say how many possessions to sell. To the rich ruler in Luke 18:22 Jesus said,

(Continued)

“Sell everything you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” In this instance, Jesus directs the man to sell all of his possessions.

When Zaccheus met Jesus, he said, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold” (Luke 19:8). So Zaccheus gave fifty percent of his possessions. Acts 4:36–37 says, “Barnabas...sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.” So Barnabas sold at least one field. Thus, the Bible doesn’t tell us how many possessions to sell. But why does it say sell possessions at all? Giving alms — using your money to show love for those without the necessities of life and without the gospel (the necessity for eternal life) — is so important that if you don’t have any liquid assets to give, you should sell something so you can give.

But now think what this means in context. These disciples are not cash-poor rich people whose money is all tied up in bonds or real estate. Most people like that do, in fact, usually have fairly deep savings. But Jesus didn’t say, “Take some of your savings and give alms.” He said, “Sell something, and give alms.” Why? The simplest assumption is that these folks lived close enough to the edge that they did not have cash to give and had to sell something so they could give. And Jesus wanted His people to move toward simplification, not accumulation.

So what’s the point? The point is that there is a powerful impulse in the Christian life toward simplicity rather than accumulation. The impulse comes from treasuring God as Shepherd and Father and King more than we treasure all our possessions. And the impulse is a strong impulse for two reasons.

One is that Jesus said, “How difficult it is for those who have wealth [literally: those who have things] to enter the kingdom of God!” (Luke 18:24). In Luke 8:14 Jesus said that riches “choke” the Word of God. But we want to enter the kingdom vastly more than we want things. And we don’t want the gospel choked in our lives.

The other reason is that we want the preciousness of God to be manifest to the world. And Jesus tells us here that selling things and giving alms is one way to show that God is real and precious as Shepherd, Father, and King.

So the first point from Luke 12 is that trusting God as Shepherd, Father, and King carries a strong impulse toward simplicity rather than accumulation. And this brings worship out from the inner, hidden place of the heart into more visible actions for the glory of God.

But there’s a second point to see here in verse 33: the purpose of money is to maximize our treasure in heaven, not on the earth. “Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.” What’s the connection between selling possessions here so you can meet the needs of others (the first part of the verse) and accumulating treasure in heaven for yourself (the end of the verse)?

The connection seems to be this: The way you make money bags that don’t grow old and the way you gather a treasure in the heavens that never fails is by selling your possessions to meet the needs of others. In other words, simplifying for the sake of love on earth maximizes your joy in heaven.

(Continued)

Don't miss this utterly radical point. It's the way Jesus thinks and talks all the time. Being heavenly-minded makes a radically loving difference in this world. The people who are most powerfully persuaded that what matters is treasure in heaven, not big accumulations of money here, are the people who will constantly dream of ways to simplify and serve, simplify and serve, simplify and serve. They will give and give and give. And of course, they will work and work and work, as Paul says in Ephesians 4:28: "so that [they] may have something to share with anyone in need."

The connection with worship — in life and on Sundays — is this: Jesus commands us to accumulate treasure in heaven, that is, to maximize our joy in God. He says that the way to do this is to sell and simplify for the sake of others. So He motivates simplicity and service by our desire to maximize our joy in God, which means that all of our use of money becomes a manifestation of how much we delight in God above money and things. And that is worship.

But there's a third and final point to make from Luke 12: Your heart moves toward what you cherish, and God wants you to move toward Him. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (v. 34). This is given as the reason why we should pursue treasure in heaven that does not fail. If your treasure is in heaven where God is, then that is where your heart will be also.

Now what is this seemingly simple verse really saying? The word *treasure* I take to mean "the object cherished." And the word *heart* I take to mean "the organ that cherishes." So read the verse like this: "Where the object that you cherish is, there will be the organ that cherishes." If the object you cherish is God in heaven, your heart will be with God in heaven. You will be with God. But if the object that you cherish is money and things on the earth, then your heart will be on the earth. You will be on the earth, cut off from God.

This is what Jesus meant in Luke 16:13 when He said, "No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." To serve money is to cherish money and pursue all the benefits money can give. In this case, the heart goes after money. But to serve God means to cherish God and to pursue all the benefits God can give. Here, the heart goes after God. And that is worship: the heart's cherishing God and seeking Him as the treasure above all treasures.

In conclusion, let's relate these three points from Luke 12:33–34 to the corporate act of worship we call "the offering." This moment and this act will be worship for you, regardless of the amount — from the widow's mite to the millionaire's thousands — if by giving you say from the heart: "One, I hereby trust you, God, as my happy, generous Shepherd, Father, and King so that I will not be afraid when I have less money for myself in supplying the needs of others. Two, I hereby resist the incredible pressure in our culture to accumulate more and more and cast my lot with the impulse to simplicity for the sake of others. Three, I hereby lay up treasure in heaven and not on earth so that my joy in God will be maximized forever. And four, with this offering I declare that since my treasure is in heaven, my heart goes after God."

Open It!

1. What was something that you saved up to buy? How long did you save? How did you earn the money? Was the purchase worth it?

2. What was the best gift you ever received? Why was it so significant to you?

Read It | Matthew 6:19- 24

Read the entire passage before proceeding to the questions below.

Explore It

1. In what two places can a person find treasure?

2. What is the main difference between the two types of treasure Jesus speaks about?

3. Between which two masters must we choose to serve? (verse 24)

Get It

Materialism will enslave the heart (Matt. 6:19-21), the mind (Matt. 6:22-23), and the will (Matt 6:24). We can become shackled by the material things of life, but we ought instead be liberated and controlled by the Spirit of God. If the heart loves material things, and puts earthly gain above heavenly investments, then the result can only be tragic loss. The treasures of earth may be used for God. But if we gather material things for ourselves, we will lose them; and we will lose our hearts with them. Instead of spiritual enrichment, we will experience impoverishment².

As background to help understanding Jesus' words in this section it is notable that in Jesus' day men would invest in possessions like clothing, grain, gold, and precious stones, which then comprised a source of security with which they sought to lessen anxiety about the future. The irony of possessions is that instead of minimizing anxiety, the possessions become a source of anxiety - sometimes even great angst! - since they are always vulnerable to the vagaries of decay and loss! How true is the paradox of insecure security!³

anx·ious

'aNG(k)SHəs/
adjective

1. experiencing worry, unease, or nervousness, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome.

1. In Matthew 6:19, Jesus tells us not to lay up treasures for ourselves on earth. What are some treasures that people try to store up for themselves?

2. Why should we store up heavenly treasures rather than earthly ones?

Destroy (**aphanizo**) means to cause to vanish, make disappear, to make unseen, to render invisible or unrecognizable. It can also mean to destroy in the active voice and in the passive voice to be removed out of sight or to become invisible.

3. What do Jesus' examples of the things that destroy earthly treasures tell us about how they can destroy what one has?



Nothing we own is completely safe from destruction or theft. And even if we keep our possessions perfectly secure during our entire lives, we are certainly separated from them at death. Many millionaires will be heavenly paupers, and many paupers will be heavenly millionaires. But when our time, energy, and possessions are used to serve others and to further the Lord's work, they build up heavenly resources that are completely free from destruction or theft. Heavenly security is the only absolute security.⁴

4. We are told by Jesus "do not lay up treasures on earth." What implications does this have on our personal property, financial investments, or insurance policies?

5. Why do you think we are so prone to materialism when Jesus speaks so clearly against it?

"You cannot serve both God and money," says Jesus. We like to think we can; we are great compromisers. Or we think we are serving God by making money. True, we can use our money to serve God. Some do. But if our hearts are set on our possessions, which is probably an accurate description of most of us, we are not actually serving God whatever we may suppose we are doing.⁵

6. How are we to go about laying up treasures in heaven?

7. Why do you suppose that Jesus included verses 22-23 in a teaching about treasures?

If God grants riches, and we use them for His glory, then riches are a blessing.
But if we will to get rich, and live with that outlook, we will pay a great price for those riches.⁶

8. Practically speaking, why is it impossible to serve both God and money? How does our love of money cause us to hate God?

We cannot be a slave to material possessions and at the same time own the lordship of Christ in our lives. No compromise is possible. We have to decide which world we are going to live for and which master we are going to serve. - John Philips

9. When have earthly treasures gotten the best of you? In what ways can we help one another to defend against this powerful and subtle temptation?

Read It | Matthew 6:1-11; 17-19

Read the entire passage before proceeding to the questions below.

10. What does Paul teach us about a life that is dedicated to the accumulation of earthly things?

11. How do the pursuits of earthly things cause trouble for the believer? Why is this so?

12. In verse 17-19 Paul seems to allow for one to have lots of earthly things. According to this passage what kind of life are Christians with stuff to be active in?

13. Knowing that we are rich according to the world's standard, what keeps most believers from being generous to God and others?

14. How does systematic and sacrificial giving to God defend against worshipping the god of materialism?

15. Paul says that a life that is generous with God and others stores up treasures and allows us to live the "true life." In what practical ways can we start to despise materialism and devote our time and treasures to the things of God?

¹ Piper, John. Treasures on Earth *From Ligonier Ministries, the teaching fellowship of R.C. Sproul. All rights reserved. Website: www.ligonier.org*

² Wiersbe, W: Bible Exposition Commentary. 1989. Victor

³ www.preceptaustin.org


⁴ MacArthur, J: Matthew 1-7 Macarthur New Testament Commentary Chicago: Moody Press

⁵ James M. Boice, Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount

⁶ Wiersbe, W: Bible Exposition Commentary. 1989. Victor

week

#25



UPSIDE DOWN
AFFECTIONS

SMALL GROUPS

Dealing with Anxiety	Coram Deo	Study
<p>“We cannot control or predict what is coming, and that is what terrifies us most of all.”</p>	<p>“Are you troubled incessantly by what might happen in the days ahead?”</p>	<p>Open It</p> <p>Explore It</p> <p>Get It</p>

“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (v 34). Matthew 6:25–34

Dealing with Anxiety

Despite our attempts to create security for ourselves with savings, insurance, a strong police force, and so on, we cannot eliminate the fears plaguing our society. The potential dangers of terrorism, various diseases, rising crime rates, natural disasters, and so on bombard us daily, making it impossible to escape our culture of anxiety.

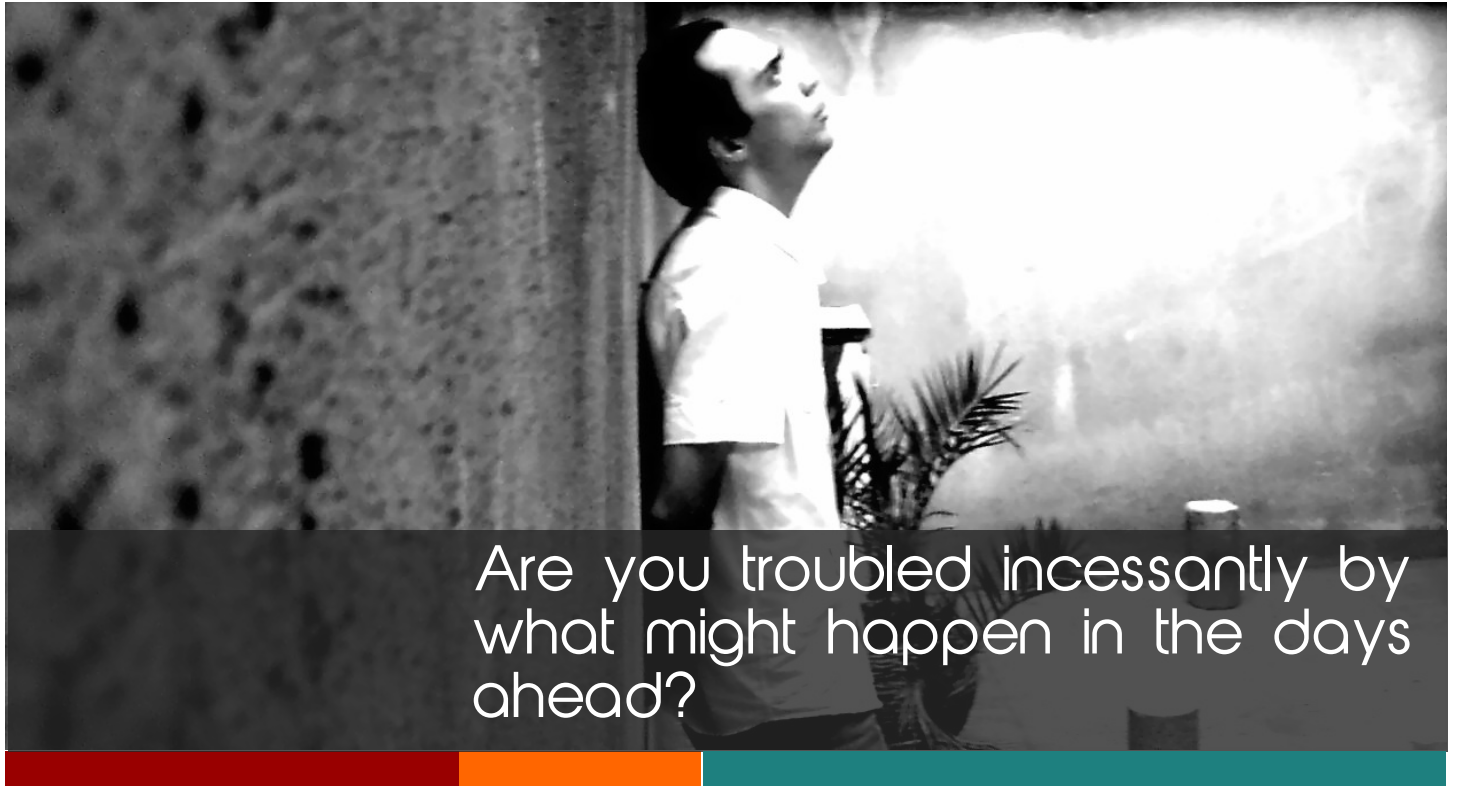
Such fear is nothing new; people have always found something to be afraid of. Some have phobias regarding heights, snakes — you name it. Surveys routinely tell us

that the number-one fear of most Americans is the fear of having to speak in public.

Whatever the catalyst may be, all of our fears manifest our apprehensions about the future. If we fear heights, we are afraid that we will fall at some future point. Extreme weather frightens us because we know it might cause great destruction or death, moments or years from now. **We cannot control or predict what is coming, and that is what terrifies us most of all.**

Jesus knows our tendencies toward

anxiety, and that is why we find “fear not” coming from His lips on many occasions (for example, Luke 12:32). Yet persistent fear is fundamentally linked to a lack of faith, and so Jesus rebukes us in today’s passage for worrying incessantly about what tomorrow will bring. If God cares for the birds and the flowers, aspects of creation with less worth than humanity, certainly we can trust Him to provide for us in the future (Matt. 6:25–33). We are not to worry about tomorrow, for we can trust our Father to take care of it (v. 34).



Are you troubled incessantly by what might happen in the days ahead?

Jesus is not telling us that we should not plan for the future, as Scripture commends prudent measures to deal with what may come (Prov. 21:5). The problem comes when we place confidence in our own machinations (Luke 12:13–21). We fear the future because we trust in our own abilities, and then we realize that we have no real power over what lies ahead of us. However, the Lord holds the future in His hand (Prov. 16:1, 9), and we must trust Him for our security. God does not promise us a life free of trouble, but He does pledge to be with us always, and He will not break this promise (Matt. 28:16–20).

Coram Deo (before the face of God)

Tomorrow we will look at some of the practical steps we can take to overcome fear and trust God for the future. Today, take some time to consider where you put your trust. Do you adapt well when things do not

go as planned? Are you troubled incessantly by what might happen in the days ahead? If you have difficulty adapting to circumstances that you are not expecting or are constantly worried, it may be a sign you are having trouble trusting the Lord. Trust Him today.

Open It!

1. What things cause you anxiety or worry? How do you deal with these moments and areas of concern?



2. When have you worried about something only to have everything work out as it was supposed to? How did you feel afterward? What did you learn from that experience?

Read It | Matthew 6:25-34

Read the entire passage before proceeding to the questions below.

Explore It

1. What four things does Jesus tell us not to worry about in verse 25?
2. According to verses 26-30 what specific things should we focus on when worry grips us?
3. What should be the priority of all believers in verse 33?

4. Where should our worries stop according to verse 34? Why should this be so?

Get It

1. What is it about worry that makes it a universal human struggle?
2. What factors cause one to be overtaken by worry and anxiety?

worry

Worry is excessive concern over the affairs of life. The key obviously is the word "excessive." Worry happens when you are so concerned about the problems of life that you can think of nothing else. It is an all-consuming feeling of uncertainty and fear. And it is a sin. Worry is a sin for two reasons:

First, because it displaces God in your life. When you commit the sin of worry, you are living as though God did not exist. And you are living as though you alone can solve your problems.

Second, because it distracts you from the things that really matter in life. As long as you are worrying, you can't do anything else. You are strangled by worry.

But how can we tell when the legitimate concerns of life have become sinful worries? Here are three practical guidelines. **You are probably well into worry...**

- When the thing you are concerned about is the first thing you think about in the morning and the last thing you think about at night.
- When you find yourself thinking about it during every spare moment.
- When you find yourself bringing it up in every conversation you have.

Seen in that light, most of us worry a lot more than we would like to admit!

- Ray Pritchard, *And When You Pray*

3. This passage begins with the word “therefore” which causes us to look at the previous verses. How will the decisions we make regarding Jesus’ words in verses 19-24 affect our ability to live free from worry?
4. The definition of the word anxious in this passage is a combination of two smaller words meaning “to divide the mind.” Discuss how worry divides the mind.
5. What are some real side effects of worry in a person’s life? How can worry directly affect our relationship with God?
6. According to Jesus why is it unnecessary for us to be anxious about our physical and material concerns?
7. Is worry or anxiety always wrong? Does the Bible ever say anxiety or worry is something we should engage in? (see Philippians 4:6-7) Why would this be so?
8. How does our focusing on God’s relationship with nature help combat against being anxious?

max
lucado

grace
for the
moment

Consider the earth! Our globe’s weight has been estimated at six sextillion tons (a six with twenty-one zeroes). Yet it is precisely tilted at twenty-three degrees - any more or any less and our seasons would be lost in a melted polar flood. Though our globe revolves at the rate of one-thousand miles per hour or twenty-five thousand miles per day or nine million miles per year, none of us tumbles into orbit. As you stand observing God’s workshop, let me pose a few questions. If He is able to place the stars in their sockets and suspend the sky like a curtain, do you think it is remotely possible that God is able to guide your life? If your God is mighty enough to ignite the sun, could it be that He is mighty enough to light your path? If He cares enough about the planet Saturn to give it rings or Venus to make it sparkle, is there an outside chance that He cares enough about you to meet your needs?

9. If Jesus says that He will address the material needs of His children, why then are there so many in this world undernourished and naked? (Matthew 25:41-45) How should this truth motivate our care and concern for others over ourselves?
10. According to verse 30, Jesus concludes by saying that we worry because we are people of "little faith." How does the measure of our faith play a role in the grip that worry has on our lives?

Seek (gr. zeteo) means to try to learn where something is or try to find as a searching for what is lost through careful investigation or searching. Seeking in the present context speaks of a single-minded focus, as when one's eye is "single" (clear). **Seek** (zeteo) is in the **present imperative** so what Jesus is saying is that the antidote to worrying is to make a daily choice to prioritize God's kingdom and righteousness. Make it the habit of your life to prioritize seeking God's Kingdom and righteousness. The world won't stop tempting you to seek its passing pleasures, and one of the best defenses is a good offense, in this case seeking the things above where the King sits at the right hand of His Father. Seeking is a heart issue and if we seek an audience with the King of kings, fellowship with Him will serve to gird and protect our hearts from the allure of the futile kingdoms of this world.

Notice then that Jesus is not suggesting but **commanding** all citizens of the Kingdom of heaven who still live on earth to cease making material things the center of their life ("stop worrying" Mt 6:25-32). Instead the believer's lifelong pursuit is not for **things** but the presence, pleasure and **Person of Jesus Christ our Lord and our King.**²

11. How does one go about seeking the Kingdom of God? What should this seeking do to our pursuits and priorities?
12. What has Jesus said so far in the Sermon on the Mount that might give us an idea of what seeking His kingdom might look like? In what areas do you struggle to put God and His agenda and priorities first?
13. How are we to help one another in the pursuit of God's Kingdom? What role do you play in encouraging, exhorting, and equipping others to fulfill this command?
14. What worries in life are holding you back from a confident faith in God? Take some time to pray about these

¹ Sproul. R.C. Dealing with Anxiety From Ligonier Ministries, the teaching fellowship of R.C. Sproul. All rights reserved. Website: www.ligonier.org

² www.preceptaustin.org

week #26

Upside Down Aspirations

SMALL GROUPS

Avoiding Improper Judgments

“Human beings are naturally prone to focus on the failings of others and ignore their own heinous sins.”

Coram Deo

“No earthly judge is perfect, but we can make judgments without hypocrisy if we live a life of repentance and endeavor to mortify our own sin.”

Study

Open It
Explore It
Get It

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you” (vv. 1–2). Matthew 7:1–6

Avoiding Improper Judgments

Today’s passage from the gospel of Matthew opens with probably the most misused text in our day. More often than not, any ethical evaluation the church makes is countered with “judge not,” as if Jesus tells His people not to make any judgments whatsoever. This misinterpretation of our Lord’s teaching in Matthew 7:1–6 is employed by unbelievers and professing Christians alike, and it contributes to the moral and doctrinal anarchy evident in our culture.

However, Christ is most certainly not forbidding His people from issuing judgments altogether. In

fact, Jesus in this same gospel orders us to discriminate between good and evil. We must differentiate those receptive to us from the dogs and the swine in order to obey Jesus and hold back what is sacred from those who are proud to hate our Lord (v. 6). We cannot approach those who have honest questions about the Gospel like we do those who seek instruction in order to use it against Christ and His church. Our Lord’s directions for church discipline (18:15–20) call us to evaluate others. Exercising discernment and making sound judgments is part of Christian discipleship.

Jesus is actually warning us to be fair and humble when we make our evaluations. **Human beings are naturally prone to focus on the failings of others and ignore their own heinous sins.** Consider David’s reaction to Nathan after he slept with Bathsheba and had Uriah murdered (2 Sam. 11:1–12:15a). The king did more evil than the man in Nathan’s parable, but David wanted to chase after the speck in that man’s eye, so blinded was he by the plank of his own sin. Today, church leaders who have gossiped might come down mercilessly on someone who has occasionally



Coram Deo

Before the face of God

John Calvin says that the one “who judges according to the word and law of the Lord, and forms his judgment by the rule of charity, always begins with subjecting himself to examination, and preserves a proper medium and order in his judgments.” No earthly judge is perfect, but we can make judgments without hypocrisy if we live a life of repentance and endeavor to mortify our own sin. Are you more critical of others than you are of yourself?¹

(Continued)

used lewd language. This latter sin is real and inexcusable, but we have done wrong when we who judge do not hold ourselves to the same standard by which we judge others (Matt. 7:2).

John Chrysostom says, “Jesus does not forbid judging but commands that one first remove the plank from one’s own eye” (*Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, 23.2). We must be harsher on ourselves than we are on others. Let us make sure our consciences are clear before we judge our brothers and sisters.

Open It!

- 1) Which one represents you best in times of conflict: judge, prosecutor or defense attorney?

- 2) Describe a time when you had to go to court. What were you there for? What feelings did you have while there?

Read It | Matthew 7:1- 6

Read the entire passage before proceeding to the questions below.

Explore It

1. To what extent does Jesus say we will be judged?
2. What should we do before we go around looking to remove specks from others' eyes?
3. According to Jesus, what things must we not give to animals?

Get It

This is the Bible verse that seems to be most popular in our present day. But most of the people who quote this verse don't understand what Jesus said. They seem to think Jesus commanded a universal acceptance of any lifestyle or teaching. If we see what Jesus said in Matthew 7:15-16, He commands us to know people by the fruit of their life, and some sort of assessment is necessary for that. The Christian is called to unconditionally love. But the Christian is not called to unconditional approval. We really can love people who do things that should not be approved of. Instead, Jesus is speaking against being judgmental, that is, judging motives and the inner man, which only God can know. We can judge the fruit of a man, but we can rarely judge their motives with accuracy.²


(Continued)

Jesus is not saying we should never pass any sort of judgment. Every day we make hundreds of judgments about things around us. It is not wrong, for instance, to sit on a jury and render a verdict. Nor is it wrong for an admissions committee to decide which students to accept and which to reject. Nor is it wrong for an employer to decide who gets a promotion and who doesn't. Nor is it wrong for schools to judge certain students worthy of high honor at graduation. Nor is it wrong for Glenbrook North High School to expel the students who participated in that ugly hazing incident and to ban them from attending graduation ceremonies. We all have to make decisions every day that involve other people. We pass judgment on appearance, behavior, speech, deportment, attitude, work ethic, productivity, keeping or breaking a promise, guilt or innocence, which person we believe and which person we do not believe. Whatever the words of Jesus mean, they can't mean that we never pass judgment in any sense at any time.³

1. How have you heard or seen people use verse 3 wrongly? Why are people so quick to use this verse when confronted about something?
2. In what way will we be judged if we judge others hypocritically? Will this judging come from others, God or both?
3. Amidst the dozens of judgments we make on a weekly basis, how do we know if our judgments are biblical?

Sermon on the Mount, Kent Hughes

We set the standard and tone for our own final judgment by our judgmental conduct in life. And we prove by our judging of others that we know what is right. So if we do not do what is right, we condemn ourselves. Do I claim to have an exceptional knowledge and grasp of Scripture? I will be judged accordingly. Do I claim to have been an especially wise and discerning servant? I will be judged according to the position I have assumed. If we set ourselves as authorities and judges over others, we should not be surprised or complain when we are judged by our own standard. We need to face and apply this text with all its fearful force.



4. Based on the statement above from Kent Hughes, do you want to be judged by others and God with the same measure you judge? Explain your answer.

5. Consider three possible reasons someone might take a judgmental attitude toward others:

- to feel better about themselves
- to avoid thinking about their own faults
- because they see similar weaknesses in themselves

Have you ever been judgmental toward someone for one of these reasons? Talk about how you could have done things differently.

6. Does this passage mean we should never approach or confront someone who is doing something wrong? Why or why not?

7. Read the following passages and talk about what each teaches us regarding confrontation:

- Proverbs 9:8
- Proverbs 13:1
- Proverbs 25:12
- Proverbs 28:23

8. What specks bother you about others? Why do they cause you such consternation?

9. Assuming “the speck” Jesus refers to is a particle of dust that irritates the eye compared to the long plank of wood in our own eye, what does this say about what we see in others and what we see in our own life? Why is this so?

10. What are the planks in your eye (areas in your life needing correction)? What causes you to not notice them?

Dogs and swine describe profane people who treat spiritual matters with contempt. They are unbelievers who are enemies of the gospel and are people to avoid. This verse does not mean that the blessings of the gospel are not to be offered to the Gentiles (remembering that Jews in Jesus' day frequently referred to Gentiles as dogs), but rather that precious spiritual truths should not be pressed upon

those who are either unready or unwilling to accept or appreciate their value. The verse continues logically in the train of thought developed in the sayings which immediately precede it. While judging others is not the prerogative of man, there are, nonetheless, those whose uncleanness and violence prevent the sharing of the most noble truths of the Christian faith.

11. What implications does verse 6 make in our interactions when it comes to judging the unbeliever? Should we call out every sin or injustice? How do we know when to speak up about sin?

12. In what practical ways can we begin to show more balanced judgment that has both grace and truth? Which one do you need to show more of to others this week?

¹ R.C. Sproul, *Blessed Are The Persecuted From Ligonier Ministries, the teaching fellowship of R.C. Sproul. All rights reserved. Website: www.ligonier.org*

² David Guzik Commentary on Matthew.

³ Ray Pritchard, *Matthew 7:1-5 Judge Not!*