

“The Way Out of Worry”

Matthew 6:25-34

Series: Deeper Week 7. Seek First the Kingdom

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I celebrated my 55th birthday while I was in Armenia. That evening I was treated to a shish kebab dinner just like my grandmother used to make. They surprised me with a birthday cake topped by sparklers! Flames literally shot out of the cake. It's an Armenian tradition for dinner guests to stand and give toasts. So I stood and thanked everyone for traveling 6,000 miles just to celebrate my birthday.

Now I love my birthday. But it makes my head spin to realize how rapidly I reached the second half of the fifties. It seems like yesterday that I crossed the half-century mark. Back then my friends gave me these cards:

- You have vision, fortitude, and character (on the inside) who needs hair?
- Don't sweat turning 50! (on the inside) Nobody likes a sweaty senior citizen.
- The Classic Rock Way to Look at Turning 50 (on the inside) You're halfway up the stairway to heaven.

What's so bad about 55? It feels strange to hear someone shout, “Hey gramps” and they're talking to me. It feels weird to worry more about a retirement fund than a college fund. It's starting to hit me I have more years behind me than ahead. On my fiftieth birthday the church staff gave me a card which said, “Each Day is a Gift from God.” That is certainly true. But I could also take it as a warning: “Don't take it for granted buddy, you're living on borrowed time.” That's also true. Every day is borrowed from God.

Here is a question which applies to you whether you're fifteen, fifty-five or ninety-five: What are you doing with your days? Every day God gives you another twenty-four hours – how are you spending it? Time is precious. How are you investing it?

We've reached the third part of our series on going Deeper with God. We learned to Long for God and Listen to God and now we arrive at how to Live for God. Who or what are you living for? Want to find out what's really important? Consider this question: “What if you live today like there's no tomorrow?” That simple question has the power to radically change everything. If this is your last day you won't waste it watching television or surfing facebook or putting in overtime because you're basically out of time. Sure, you want to put your financial affairs in order. There will be some loose ends to tie up. But I doubt you will spend your last 24 hours playing Pokemon Go or binge watching. Isn't it strange how a deadline can change your decisions?

If this is your last day, I bet people will rise to the top of your list. You will want to see your loved ones one more time and say, “I'm sorry. I forgive you. I love you. Take care of him or her for me. Goodbye.” I once visited an elderly woman in the hospital near

the end of life. She was estranged from her grown son and his wife. The break up was over possessions and misunderstandings. “If you want to make peace with you mom,” I said to the son, “now is the time to go before it’s too late.” He surrendered his hurt feelings and went to her. Thankfully they forgave each other before she passed. When you read an obituary you rarely see a catalogue of the deceased’s possessions or portfolios. What they list are the people they leave behind. When time is short, people become more valuable than possessions.

If this is your last day, I bet God will also become very important. I’ve had conversations about the Lord with people in hospital rooms and hospice facilities who did not seem very interested before. Some want to confess their sins. Most seek reassurance there is a life beyond this one and a God who loves them.

God and people: those two relationships suddenly come into sharper focus when our final day approaches. Why does the thought of death make me finally discover what I was supposed to do with my life? Jesus lays it out in the simplest possible terms. The purpose of your life is this:

‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commands. Matthew 22:37-40.

Loving God and people that’s the way to spend your life So why don’t we do that today?

Because of one word: Tomorrow. Some live in yesterday. But more of us are so fixated on tomorrow we miss today. I bet you’re not here right now. While I’m talking you’re already thinking about brunch, the grocery store or the Eagle’s game. We are rarely in now. Later is where we live. We worry about tomorrow. Jesus said,

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? Matthew 6:25-26.

Now you may say, “Jesus, that’s nice for the birds and the grass. But I don’t want to wear petals and live on worms. So that’s why I worry about food and clothing.” It’s easy to misunderstand Jesus’ point. He does not say become like the birds and the grass. He does not say, “Lie back and do nothing. Let God do the work.” Rather He tells us to sow, reap, store, spin, and work, but don’t worry about it. Fear that produces positive action is powerful. Fear that paralyzes you in worry is a waste.

What’s the way out of worry? Realize that **Worry is Worthless**. It accomplishes nothing. Jesus points out, “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?” (v.27). Worry does not add to your life. In fact, anxiety and stress take years off your life. Worry is spinning your wheels. “But I have to worry,” you say, “because it gives me

something to do.” That comment says it all. Worry is our useless attempt to control something which is beyond our power. When the average person is anxious:

- 40% is focused on things that will never happen
- 30% about things in the past that can't be changed
- 12% on criticism by others which are mostly untrue
- 10% on their health which gets worse with stress
- 8% about real problems that will be faced

Your efforts will be more effective if you use the 92% of energy you waste on empty things to fix the real problems. Worry is worthless.

Second, remember **You are Valuable**. Jesus asks, “Are you not much more valuable than (the birds and the grass)” (v. 26) to your heavenly Father? “Your heavenly Father knows that you need (these necessities of life)” (v. 32). You are precious and valuable in God’s eyes. Do you believe that? The real solution to worry is faith. Jesus is not teaching us about little birds, seeds, grass or lilies but little faith.

If this 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?
(Matthew 6:30)

If God pays such great attention to details like birds and grass, He can be trusted to take care of the bigger things. When we worry about tomorrow, in essence we are saying to God, ‘I don’t think you can handle this one.’ But He can. What’s more: He wants to. He’s not just Almighty God. Jesus says He’s also your heavenly Father. You are precious in His eyes. God is with you always. He shows up in the most unexpected ways.

Five years ago when we were raising money to launch our satellite campus which became Parkland Church, Gary LaSasso made a series of videos in which he wore a spacesuit. He filmed one of them over at Lockheed Martin in Newtown. Gary writes,

I decided to shoot the video outside of Lockheed. Well, unbeknownst to me, that is Government property. As I tried to leave the area outside Lockheed, a security truck raced in front of me and slammed on his brakes. I was ready to throw the car in reverse when an unmarked car boxed me in from behind. As I was being questioned by security pleading for my life, a scary man got out of the unmarked car and walked up behind me. In a stern voice, he said, “Step out of the vehicle and put your hands where I can see...Oh it’s you, knucklehead.” That scary man was John Hughes. Whew. My life was spared.

It doesn’t end there. John Hughes writes,

When I got back to my control center the nuns at Holy Family College next door had called Lockheed and said a "crazy man" wearing an "aluminum suit" was standing in their driveway taking pictures. I called Sister Mary Katherine back and said that "aluminum man" was actually a good friend of mine and he was

taking photos and wearing his "astronaut" gear to help raise money for our Church. She said which one and I said, "Woodside Presbyterian around the corner from the College." She said she would pray for us.

Just as John was there for Gary, so God is there for you. He can take care of the supernova and the sparrow. And you are more valuable than both of them. You are precious to Him. How do I know? He gave His Son for you. When you pay that price for something, you'll do everything in your power to protect it and keep it.

So let's address the issue which may be on your mind: why didn't God stop the massacre of worshipers in the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, Texas or the concert goers outside the Mandalay Bay Hotel in Las Vegas? Let's go further. Why didn't he prevent the genocide of a million and a half Armenians or six million Jews in the holocaust? The loss of every life, of even one single life through such massacres is a horrific tragedy. There is great evil in this world. It is right for us to grieve, to mourn and even to cry out, "How long O Lord?" (Psalm 13:1). We cannot assume God's love and care mean our lives will be easy and pain free. Nowhere do you find such promises in Scripture. The opposite is true:

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (2 Timothy 3:12)

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

The New Testament was written to congregations which died for their faith. The symbol of Christianity is the cross – a man-made instrument of torture, persecution and death which Jesus transformed into a sign of power, peace and hope. This is why it is essential, now more than ever, not to put our faith in the things of this world, to run after the things of this world or live as citizens of the kingdoms of this world. Rather, we must seek first the Kingdom of God and put our faith in the King. In this world we grieve. Of course we grieve. Yet, as Paul says, we do not grieve like those who have no hope (I Thessalonians 4:13). For this world is not the end. This world is not our home. If you put your faith in the things of this world, all you will ultimately have is violence, war, terror, destruction and death. If you put your faith in God, you will be part of the only Kingdom that transcends death, that no genocide can destroy, that no insane shooter can take from you.

That's why the ultimate way out of worry is to **Live His Way**. Jesus says, 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 6:32-34

We think, "If I have money in the bank, if I have stuff in my home, life will be good." So we run after all these things. But Jesus says we have it backwards. If you put stuff first, if you put tomorrow's troubles first, you'll miss out on God and people today. But if you

first love God and love people, you also receive the stuff you need. Real life comes not from stuff but from putting God first.

You don't have to push your family, your work, your school, your community, your hobbies and sports out of first place. Jesus wants you to put God first *in* your family, put God first *at* your work place and school, put God first *in* your neighborhood and on the soccer field and everywhere else. Ask God, "How do you want me to raise my family, pursue my career or school work, handle my finances, play on the sports field, hang out with my friends?" When worry rears its ugly head, that's a sign to turn that situation over to God and ask Him how to handle it. Sometimes the answer is easy. Sometimes the answer is clear but it may take courage and God's power to do it. And in some areas, God's will is not certain – that's usually a sign to wait for further instructions.

Charlie Duke was baffled and bored by life. That's surprising because on the outside it looked like he had the right stuff. He was the tenth person to walk on the moon on Apollo 16 – a record 72 hours which is still unbroken. But he soon found that even the moon was not enough. Charlie Duke writes,

What can top 11 days in space? I had it all: Fame, fortune, a spot in the history books. I was 36 and I began to wonder, "What now?" I was bored. If you were a fly on the wall in my home, you would see I wasn't so hot. I was failing miserably as a husband and father. But instead of addressing my problems, I took my eyes off the moon and put them on money. Surely, that would bring the satisfaction even the moon failed to deliver.

Marriage certainly hadn't delivered any satisfaction. Within a few years Dottie and I were heading full-speed toward divorce. There were a lot of good-looking women in the world, and a lot of them liked astronauts. I hoped Dottie would decide to leave me. Instead, she told me she was depressed and thinking about suicide.

About that time, our church hosted a "spiritual renewal weekend," and we attended. While Dottie was engrossed in the testimonies of how Christ changed people's lives, my mind was on the million-and-a-half dollars I'd just borrowed from the bank for my new business. I figured it better work or I'd be in trouble. My money worries drowned out most of the weekend seminar. Though I had gone to church all my life, I wasn't looking for God. My business succeeded. The money rolled in. After six months, I sold it at a handsome profit. Again I was bored.

But Dottie wasn't. She had changed. Her depression lifted, and she demonstrated a new, believing faith. She turned to God—not me—for answers to her problems. It was appealing, and our marriage improved. One night we attended a Bible study that focused on one penetrating question: Who is Jesus? All my life I said, 'the Son of God,' but I never thought about it in a deep way. That night I came face-to-face with the option of following Him. I prayed with Dottie in our car and gave my life over to Christ.

I didn't see angels. Didn't hear music. No blinding lights. But I knew what I knew. It was real. The next day, I awoke with an insatiable desire to read the Bible. I had

a lot of mending to do. I asked God, Dottie and my sons to forgive me. I asked God for the strength to love my wife. My love for her grows daily. I'm more in love with Dottie today than (the day we married). God also restored my relationship with my sons.

Watching God heal our family and pull us off the road to divorce has been true adventure. It cost the government \$400 million for me to walk three days on the moon—and it's over. But to walk with Jesus is free, and it lasts forever.¹

Walk with Jesus, let Him lead the way out of worry.

¹ <http://www.lovehalifax.com/changed/cduke.html>.