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Speaker: Paul McIlwraith, Teaching Pastor

Scripture: Matthew 6:25-34, Worry

I have shared with you on more than one occasion this sort of love/indifference relationship that I have with our family dogs. Currently, we have two dogs. One is a ten-year-old black lab named, Jazz. The other is a nine-year-old German/Lab mix named Yebo. She gets her name from an African greeting.

For most of our 35 years of married life, Carolyn and I have had any combination of dogs and cats almost entirely because my wife adores animals. She loves them and dotes on them, I endure them. Which is okay. There is give and take in any marriage.

Jazz is Carolyn's dog. She is always by her side and I am constantly amazed how perceptive she is to Carolyn's feelings. She senses when Carolyn is happy and I swear, Jazz smiles. She perceives those times when Carolyn is sad and she cuddles up to her to soothe her. She is a very smart dog.

Then there is Yebo. She is not so smart and that may explain why she has for some strange reason, taken a real shine for me. No matter how hard I have tried to stymie her affections, she likes me, she really does. Now before you start siding with the dog and calling me heartless, you should at least know this, Yebo is afraid of loud noises. It took us a while to figure it out. Maybe a hint should have been the time we came home and the seats of our two recliner chairs in the living room were ripped to shreds. I was not happy.

Since it appeared to be rather unusual behavior for her, I gave her the benefit of the doubt. But when she did the same thing to the two recliners at the cottage, we realized we had a problem. We put two and two together and it occurred to us that both times she did the damage, it had been stormy outside. So we bought a steel dog pen, one of those calming vests for dogs, and some anti-anxiety

medication from Pet Smart. Every time we knew there would be a bad storm, we would be prepared with one or the other or all three. Which seemed okay. Last September, Yebo ate through the laundry room and into the finished basement family room. She literally chewed the drywall away leaving a 2 foot by 3 foot hole. I was not happy. That is when we discovered that Yebo was not just frightened by thunder but also loud airplanes and that is when we also discovered that London has an airshow. We live close to the airport. This past summer, Yebo ate a wall in a room at the cottage. She chewed the drywall leaving another large hole for me to repair. I wasn't happy. That is when we discovered that she isn't just frightened by thunder. She isn't just frightened by airplanes but she is also frightened of fireworks. In fact, in the summer at the cottage, she has come to associate darkness with fireworks and just getting here outside to do her business before bed is a major undertaking. It is like the anxiety or worry of the prospect of a loud sound paralyzes and causes her to look for some sort of an escape. This behavior has prompted Carolyn and I to observed our two dogs a little more carefully over the past few years. You can learn a lot by watching your dogs.

Jazz spends most of her mornings lying around outside in the sun and inside on their cushions. She sleeps or looks out the window or lays at Carolyn's feet. When it is meal time, she will follow me down the stairs giving me *that* look until I feed her. Then she is off for more sleeping, playing or lazing around. She doesn't seem to ponder for one moment that I won't feed her. She doesn't ever concern herself with the fact that she could be hit by a car or get lost or be sprayed by a skunk outside. When taken for a walk, she stops and smells every flower. She zig zags in and out of all the trees and bushes joyfully content in the moment, confident that all her needs will be taken care of.

Some of these qualities describe Yebo as well but she is more tentative and hesitant. When out for a walk, she puts her head down and gives off the vibe, *let's just get this over with so I can get back to the safety of home.* She always chooses the shortest route and pulls toward home if we want to extend the walk. If she is walking and hears a loud noise like a car backfiring, she just stops and lays down. Immovable. Paralyzed by worry and fear. I can't budge her. It is only Carolyn's gentle and encouraging voice that prompts her to continue walking so we can go home.

As I have contemplated the different personalities of my two dogs, I have come to a rather startling conclusion, I am Yebo! Or she is me! Maybe that is why she likes me so much, she knows. See, I tend to be a planner. I am not so much a "live in the moment" kind of guy, like Jazz. I feel the need to prepare in advance for everything. One of the ways that I find myself trying to prepare for the future is by imaging all the various scenarios that could go wrong so I can know how to respond. Just like Yebo with loud noises. In short, I tend to be a worrier.

Recently, I came across this quote from Holocaust Survivor, Corrie Ten Boom,

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

The more I have pondered this, the more I realize that more often than not, this is true in my life. As I image a crisis or negative situation, I find my heart rate increases and my stomach churns. Worry saps my strength and my positive outlook and it alienates me because I mistakenly come to believe that I only have myself to rely on. I can forget that I have a heavenly Father who loves me and cares for me and wants the best for me. Anyone else in here struggle with worry? I think almost all of us could raise our hands. Studies indicate at one time or another, everyone will battle with worry and anxiety.

Younger people tend to worry most about school, relationships, work, finances, an aimless future and lack of confidence. For older people it is marriage, family, finances, work and their health.

Do you know where most of our worrying happens? In the bedroom. Between the hours of 9pm-3am. This is the time when things slow down and quiet sets in and we are left alone with our thoughts.

Sleep alludes us as worry can consume us. Can anyone relate to this?

What is it that you are worried about even now? Can you think of a few things? Why are you worried about those things? For some, worrying is your way to problem solve but for 10% of the population worry is a mental health issue driven by the need to make everything okay and it negatively affects every area of their lives. Perhaps you know exactly what I am talking about.

Two weeks ago, we launched a new message series at North Park that we have entitled, *On The Way*. The premise of this series is that we can come to church each week and hopefully hear a well--crafted sermon. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can learn a lot and grow in our faith.

But if we think the only time Jesus wants to teach us something is limited to one hour on Saturday night or Sunday in here, we are missing the everyday, spontaneous moments that he has for us each and every day. In this series, we are going to go back and forth between Jesus' teachings in the gospels that were a little more intentional and those that appeared to be more spontaneous. One of the goals of this series is to be more perceptive to the teachable moments Jesus has for us, *On The Way*, every day. Did you have any of those moments with Jesus this week?

Today we come to another of Jesus' intentional teachings found in what we have come to know as "The Sermon on the Mount" in the gospel of Matthew. It is located between chapters 5-7. This one as you may have guessed is about worry.

If you have your bibles, I would invite you to turn to the first book of the New Testament, the gospel of Matthew 6.

Let me just give you a little context before we jump into the text. It is interesting that Jesus chooses to teach about worry just after he has spent some time teaching about, anyone know? Money.

I looked at several lists of the top things that people worry about and do you know what was at or near the top of every list?

Money. Bills. Their financial future. These things can consume us. But notice what Jesus says in,

Matthew 6:24

“No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money.

Jesus leaves it there but you just know that he has left his audience with a hanging question. So who is the master of your life? God or Money. Do you know one way you can tell? Which one occupies more of your thoughts, time and efforts? God or money. That is an important transition into Jesus' teaching on worry in Matthew 6:25-34.

Just to be totally transparent with you, as I was preparing this sermon this week, there was more than one occasion when I just thought, I wonder if anyone would notice if I just changed the topic. I wanted to skip this passage and move on to one that was a little easier. I even checked last week's bulletin. *Ugh*, it already stated I would be preaching about worry. Our “app” also had already advertised the topic for this week. I was stuck and I found myself worrying about worry. I felt paralyzed.

How can I approach this text in a way that doesn't sound like a pat answer and actually gives genuine hope to those whose lives are deeply effected by this very real issue? As I have read, prayed and ponder the text and the subject this week, I hope something in what I have prepared is helpful to you.

Look at Matthew 6:25 again from the text I read earlier. This is Jesus teaching those around him. He says,

That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life

I think it was this line that threw me for a bit of a loop at the beginning of the week.

Jesus begins his teaching on worry by saying in essence, “*don't worry*”. I mean I know he is God but let me ask you something, whenever anyone has ever said to you, don't worry, how did that work out for you? *Oh, okay. Thank you. I think I will just switch that worry button off.* There have been times when Carolyn has been laying her heart out to me about something that she is concerned about and I have made the fatal mistake of uttering those two words, *don't worry*.

She will get that look on her face. Husbands do you know that look? It is the look that says, *thank you*

very much. I'm telling you my deepest worries and concerns, and you tell me not to worry. Thank you so much for your riveting insight.”

In this text, however that is the number one reason Jesus says for not worrying,

1. Because Jesus (I) says so.

In fact, three times in this passage Jesus says, *don't worry*. He says it in verse 25, in verse 31, “*So don't worry about these things*” and again in Verse 34, “*So don't worry about tomorrow.*”

We just want to say, *why Jesus? Why shouldn't we worry?* He responds, *because I say so*. That may trigger all sorts of emotions in us.

Do you remember when you were child and that is the response you got from your parents. In fact, it felt like that was the only response you got from your parents some days, *because I said so*.

Or maybe you are a parent of younger children and you said that to them even today. “hurry up and get dressed for church”. “Why?” *Because I said so*. “Finish eating your brussels sprouts”. “Why?” *Because I said so*.

It is a statement of authority but as we grow older, we learn that these words don't carry as much clout. *Because I say so. Well who are you?*

When it comes from Jesus though, I think we have to take notice. When Jesus says, *do not worry*, he says it as God incarnate, the sovereign, all knowing, all powerful, unchanging King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The one who wants nothing but the best for our lives.

Can we really trust God to bring comfort to the many people who are consume with worry in our world? I think we can. Remember, it was God who kept faith by sending his only son to this earth to die for the sins of humanity and restore us back into relationship with him. Jesus taught us to trust God and believe that when he tells us to not worry, he has something more for us and he does. Jesus doesn't stop with telling us not to worry *because he says so*. He could have because, hey, he's God, but he goes on to explain the reasons for not worrying.

The second reason Jesus says don't worry is because,

2. Our lives are too important.

Matthew 6:25

“That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing?”

Notice these three things that Jesus chooses to highlight here. These are the things we shouldn't worry about, what we eat, what we drink and what we wear. Make no mistake about it, in this day, those were very real concerns. Most people didn't know from one day to the next whether they would have enough food or drink or clothing on their back.

Jesus is also using these three things to represent everything else that we worry about in everyday life. He knows there are so many things that cause us stress and anxiety. When I asked you earlier, what it is that you worry about, what did you think of?

Do you want to know what takes up too much time and energy each weekend as I prepare to come here? What will I wear. I know that is hard for you to believe looking at me. *Paul, you worry so much about what to wear and you show up like that?! I think the clergy should just go back to wearing robes when they preach, it would save me a lot of time!*

Each Saturday, I stew about whether what I am wearing that day is the same as what I wore last week or the week before. Or did I wear something Saturday night so I can wear it at next week at the Sunday service. It is crazy. Let me ask you a question. *Does anyone know what I wore last week? No? Then why do I worry so much about it? It is ridiculous. Oh but you do remember when I wore the red pants, don't you?!*

Think of the things you worry about. Would you say they are more important than life itself? No? Than why do we act like it is sometimes? Our minds can get so stuck on these things that we can forget what really matters most.

Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing?

It is God that has given us life. Can he not be trusted to handle the other things? God says, *don't worry* because our lives are too important to waste time

and energy worrying about those things that are less significant or just plain trivial.

The third reason Jesus says not to worry ties in closely with the second reason. Jesus says not to worry because,

3. Our lives are valuable.

Matthew 6:26

Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are?

Our lives are important but they are also valuable and as much as it may startle some of you “birders” out there, there is a pecking order (did you see what I did there?). Humanity is far more valuable to God than birds. Jesus uses another illustration to strengthen the point.

Matthew 6:28-30

“And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?”

This is the brilliance of Jesus' teaching that we have talked about in the past. These lilies of the field that he refers to here would have been growing all around him and he draws the crowd's attention to them to make a point. If God even cares for these beautiful flowers that have such a short shelf life, they would last a season, shrivel up and die and then be bundled up and used as fuel for the fire. If God cares for them and the birds in the sky, how much more will he care for humanity that is much more valuable to him?

It is important for us to note what Jesus is not saying here. He is not saying that all we have to do is sit back and God will wait on us, hand and foot. *Don't worry, God will clothe you, feed you and take care of you. just take life easy.*

He is not saying that we aren't to work or even store up a nest egg or RSP's for retirement. We can definitely become a little obsessed with those things and make them idols, which causes worry but Jesus

is not saying that we can't have a plan on how to provide for ourselves now and into the future.

Think his example of birds. I have watched birds feed themselves, feed their young and build their nests. They work hard. What Jesus is saying is that we do not have to be anxious because God will provide. Work, but don't worry about what the outcome will be. God values you much more than the birds and flowers and He will provide for your needs. Work and plan ahead yes, but don't fret.

I sometimes think we forget who we are. Here is a little homework for you this week. Go for a walk in nature. Go on a path or through the woods, especially as we have entered the fall season in Ontario. The leaves are changing colour and everything around us will be so beautiful. God created it all. But do we understand that we are the pinnacle of all of God's creation? We are the most important and most valued part of everything he has made. We are made in His image. No other creature on earth can make that claim.

Tuesday September 10 was World Suicide Prevention day. Do you know that? The day before, September 9, a well-known pastor and mental health advocate in California died by suicide. He was 30. He was a husband and father to young children. That one, shook me.

I like many of you have been touched personally by suicide. For those struggling with thoughts of suicide, I know how complicated it is but this is one thing that I would love for you, for all of us to understand. That is, just how much we are valued, loved and cherished by our heavenly Father.

We are his crowning achievement and he has a purpose and plan for our lives. We are important and valuable to him. If he takes care of all the other stuff such as the birds and the flowers, he will certainly take care of us. Do we believe that?

The fourth reason Jesus says not to worry is because,

4. Worrying is useless.

Jesus asks in,

Matthew 6:27

Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?

Notice, Jesus isn't asking the question to get an answer. He is making a point.

"Worry is like a good rocking chair. It gives you something to do, but it doesn't get you anywhere." Worrying in and of itself, does nothing to help us. Jesus isn't telling us to not have concerns. He isn't saying that we are all to be waves and just go with the flow and whatever life throws our way we are just supposed to roll with it. No. As Christians we are not to be careless and carefree like nothing really matters. There are some very legitimate things that can cause us concern.

Just this week, I chatted with people that were experiencing relationship issues with their child, marriage problems, money issues and someone who had just received a dire medical diagnosis, stage 4 cancer. These things matter. They are legit. To not be concerned about them would reveal a completely different issue but concern is different from worry that causes anxiety.

Anxiety is not being able to get things off our mind. It is about letting things keep us up at night. This is not good for our mental or physical health. Chronic stress, caused by worry and anxiety is linked to the six leading causes of death: heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis of the liver and suicide. Worry can shorten your life. Maybe what I just said has now caused you to worry. Stay with me. Jesus says worrying is useless. It achieves nothing, at least nothing worth achieving.

The fifth reason Jesus says not to worry is because,

5. Worrying is for those who have no faith.

Matthew 6:31-32

"So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs."

Worrying makes sense for those who don't know Jesus. There is no guarantee for their future, so they better grab on to all they can to control their own destiny and that comes with a lot of worry, doesn't it? I have sat at the death bed of those who have a faith in Jesus and those who have a faith in

themselves and I can tell you there is generally a huge difference. One is peaceful and expectant and the other is anxious and uncertain.

On Friday, I met with a woman who has been given a terminal diagnosis. This is what she said to me. *I am not afraid to die, Paul. I know the Lord. I know where I am going.* Her eyes then welled up with tears as she shared that her sadness comes only when thinking of those she will leave behind. That is concern motivated by love not worry motivated by fear. Do you understand the difference?

For Christians, we know Jesus and we know our heavenly Father, and that Father knows everything we need. Do you believe that because here is the problem; sometimes we talk or sing like Christians but we worry like pagans. We say we believe in this great God, our heavenly Father and then we act like our lives and destinies are in our own hands and not his. The best way to remedy this is to continue to get to know God through his son, Jesus. Continue to discover who he truly is and the promises and hope he has given to us. We do not have to cross our fingers and hope that he comes through for us. His character is such that He literally cannot break the promises he has made to us. Leave the worrying up to those with no faith, and trust that your heavenly Father already knows all of your needs and is faithful to provide.

The sixth reason Jesus says not to worry is because,

6. Worrying is a distraction

Matthew 6:33 is the key point in this whole passage. *Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.*

I don't know whether you noticed but up to this point, Jesus has been using the negative command, *not to worry* but here he flips it around to a positive.

Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

As we have made our way through this whole passage, I hope that you are beginning to see that worry is just a distraction from what the focus of our lives should be as followers of Jesus.

Worry is a smokescreen set up by who? The evil one. It can stymie us or even throw us off course from pursuing our number one calling which is, to seek the Kingdom of God and live righteously. To surrender control of our lives to Jesus and listen and obey his teachings and then share that good news with others. To go and be salt and light to our world. When we have that singularity of focus, we won't have the time or energy for worry. Jesus says if we make this one thing our priority, God will take care of the rest. Again, it doesn't mean that we won't ever think of concerns we have, but when the focus is on him there is no need to worry.

What are those things that are consuming your thoughts today and causing you to worry? I would be willing to guess that almost all of them, at their very core are because we are seeking things of the world and not the Kingdom of God. *What will people think?* That's pride. *How do I look?* That is vanity. *I want to have control.* That is self-dependence. We have made those things our objects of worship and remember what Jesus said just before this, *no one can serve two masters.*

As we devote our attention and energy to seeking the Kingdom of God, do you know what we find? Genuine contentment. Hope. Many of you know that because you have been there. Oh, you may not be there now because you have let worry fester but you can get there again when you turn and surrender it all back to Jesus.

The seventh and final reason for now, that Jesus says not to worry is because,

7. Today is enough

Matthew 6:34

"So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today.

Jesus isn't saying here that we should eat, drink and be merry because tomorrow we die. He isn't pushing the mantra of *YOLO* (You Only Live Once) so live in the moment and do what feels good now.

No. He is saying that today has enough trouble of its own. Why worry about things that have not even come yet or may not even come? Why worry about things that we can't control?

Planning for the future is time well spent. Worrying about the future is time well, wasted. I know many of us are worried about our country and the coming election. We are worried about the crime rate in our city and the poor and homeless on the streets and we should be concerned with these things and speak up about them. In fact, more Christians should be concerned and take an interest in these things but we don't have to worry or consistently be agitated about everything that is going on.

How great is our God? He is the God of today and He is the God of tomorrow. We don't know what tomorrow will bring but we can lean on God today and trust him for tomorrow.

Again, I don't say this flippantly. Some of you are dealing with big concerns and troubles. There are those who are facing an uncertain future because of health concerns. Others are tied up in messy marriage situations or relationship strains. Some of you are desiring to be pregnant but it is not happening and there are some of you out here who are so lonely. You have been praying to God for a friend or even for a spouse. For those and other situations that can cause you to worry, I want you to know this, tomorrow belongs to God. God has a plan, a plan that is far greater than anything we could ever come up with ourselves or anything that we could try and force. Be encouraged in knowing he's not just the God of today but he's the God of the future, your future, as well.

I love the way the author of Hebrews puts it in,

Hebrews 13:8

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

There you have it. Jesus' seven reasons for why not to worry in Matthew 6:25-35.

1. **Because Jesus says so.**
2. **Our lives are too important.**
3. **Our lives are valuable.**
4. **Worrying is useless.**
5. **Worrying is for those who have no faith.**
6. **Worrying is a distraction**
7. **Today is enough.**

I don't know what worries you today. Maybe it is your marriage, your children, grandchildren, your finances, a friend or family member's health, your job or future career, school and maybe it is loneliness. Whatever it is that can cause you to worry, Jesus wants us to know through this teaching, that our heavenly Father is aware. In fact, more than aware, he is actively caring for us in the midst of these concerns, *On The Way*, everyday.

So, the question that needs to be asked is, do you see him? Have you experienced him and his provision in those times when worry starts to consume you? I encourage you this week to take some time to ponder and reflect on the ways that He is there with you in the everyday.

If you know that worry is a major distraction in your life, let me challenge you with something, *are you surrendering it to Jesus*. Maybe each night as you lay awake, name your worries and fears and surrender them to him, one by one. Exchange that anxiety for the peace he can offer through his Spirit.

If you are here today, and you have never invited Jesus to take control of your life, what is stopping you? He has your today and your tomorrow. He will lead you to a more fulfilling and purposeful life than you ever knew was possible. All you have to do is ask him and he will meet you on the way.

Let's pray

Points to Ponder

On The Way ~ Worry

Matthew 6:25-34

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. Are you a worrier? As you feel comfortable, share with one another the things that tend to cause you the most worry. Why? What is the root cause of the worry?
2. What do you think of the statement, “Because I say so”? Do you have any negative experiences related to it? Would it be enough for Jesus to say to us, “don’t worry because I say so”? Why or why not?
3. Do you feel that your life is important and valuable to God? What are some things that make you feel important and valued? In what ways do you struggle to believe that you are so valuable and important that God will take care of your needs?
4. Describe a situation when you have been consumed with worry about a scenario only to have it not happen. What did you learn through that experience? Why do you think Jesus said worrying is useless?
5. Do you think there is a difference between the way that you handle a worrisome situation and the way you have observed those without a faith in Jesus handle it? Can you share any examples?
6. What would it mean in your life to “lean on God today and trust in him for tomorrow”? Where have you seen this to be true in your life, that God has a plan for your future?

Prayer and Action Item

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed. What are some practical steps you are going to take this week so that you worry less and trust God more?