

Our Heavenly Father

Devotional Reading: Ephesians 1:3–10

Background Scripture: Exodus 34:4–7; Psalm 103:10–14; Isaiah 40:27–31

Today's Scripture: Matthew 6:24–34

I. Serve or Despise the Father?

Matthew 6:24

24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

24. Jesus continues His teaching about living as citizens of the kingdom of heaven, a teaching He began in Matthew 6:19. The word *master* in this context implies a singular individual who has overall charge of a group and its mission.

Can any group function smoothly with *two masters* who are equal in authority? Those who attempt to do so will find themselves constantly torn between who or what receives their attention.

The contrast that Jesus depicts is service to *God* versus service to *mammon*. The word *mammon* comes from an Aramaic word that refers to wealth and riches. It is found elsewhere in the New Testament (Luke 16:9, 11, 13). Jesus is saying it is impossible for a person to give their total allegiance both to God and wealth. We note that financial wealth can be used to serve God and the church. However, these things are secondary to serving God.

II. Worry or Trust the Father?

Matthew 6:25–32

25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no

thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

25. By saying *take no thought*, Jesus is

not expressing His opposition to careful planning. Instead, the phrase is connected to the concept of worry. We should try to provide for ourselves, our families, and others. However, concerns regarding these necessities should not create worry or anxiety—which is sometimes easier said than done.

It can be challenging in today's culture to hear Jesus' words above the barrage of sounds and allure of sights in advertisements that encourage us to "take much thought" about life's needs. Jesus encourages us to see the more significant, heaven-oriented picture regarding such matters: there is more to life than food and clothing.

26. In a lesser-to-greater argument, Jesus illustrates His point with an image familiar to anyone in His audience: birds. Humans *sow, reap, and gather into barns*, but birds do not. Since the *heavenly Father* nonetheless feeds them, will He not also provide for those who are created in His image, who labor at sowing, harvesting, and storing?

In declaring God to be heavenly Father, Jesus reinforces Old Testament teaching about God. This is just one of the numerous times Jesus refers to God this way in the Sermon on the Mount. No matter how much we labor to meet our needs, we should never forget that our heavenly Father is ultimately the one who provides for us. Ignoring that truth can lead to yet another "two-master" situation, against which Jesus has just warned.

27. The phrase *taking thought* translates the same Greek word used by Jesus two verses earlier. Of additional interest here is the translation regarding adding *one cubit unto his stature*. The underlying Greek word translated as *stature* refers to physical height. But it may also refer to one's "age," as it is translated in John 9:21, 23 and Hebrews 11:11. The idea either way is to

ask the rhetorical question: *Why be overly concerned about things beyond your control?*

28–29. Jesus now addresses the issue of clothing (*raiment*). To illustrate the counterproductive nature of worry, He again uses a lesser-to-greater comparison. This one involves a word picture of flowers, specifically *lilies of the field*. God provides what is necessary for them to grow and develop. He is responsible for their beauty.

The *glory of Solomon*—referring to the wealth and splendor of his kingdom—was known and admired throughout the world of his day (see 1 Kings 10:7). Yet nothing produced by human wisdom or creativity can match the simple beauty seen in the flowers God has created and provides for. The God who invests such care regarding flowers is the same heavenly Father who created and cares for us.

30. The life expectancy of most plants is relatively short compared to humans. And so it is with *the grass of the field*. That is true in terms of both natural life expectancy and the use of flowers and grass to heat the ovens for baking bread. Once again, Jesus' point is that if God bestows such beauty upon items in nature that are so short-lived, how much more will He care for human beings? Even so, we must do what flowers and grass are incapable of doing: exercise faith that God will provide such care for us.

31–32. With His repeat of *take no thought*, Jesus returns to the challenge He issued in the first verse of today's study. In the first century, pagan worshipers often sacrificed to their gods, hoping to appease them and receive blessings. However, for followers of Jesus, the situation is different. Jesus demands nothing besides faith, highlighting the stark contrast between pagan practices and the assurance provided by faith in Him.

A tunnel-vision focus on the necessi-

ties of life is characteristic of the *Gentiles*. The underlying Greek word is also translated as “nations” (Matthew 24:9). The term points to non-Jewish peoples. Jesus calls His followers to possess an outlook or mindset different from theirs. The new mindset is based on acknowledging the awareness of the *heavenly Father*. He knows that we need the necessities of life (*all these things*). The question is whether we possess the faith to trust in His provision for us.

That does not imply that God endorses carelessness regarding our earthly responsibilities. Followers of Jesus should be known for their diligence (Hebrews 6:11–12), respected for their honest work (2 Thessalonians 3:7–10), and worthy examples of loving service (Acts 6:1–4).

III. Kingdom Living Matthew 6:33–34

33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

33a. This verse switches the instruction from the negative (what to avoid) to the positive (what to seek as *first* priority). That priority is *the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*. Jesus does not want His followers to be so consumed by the concerns of this world that those concerns influence the priorities they set, the decisions they make, and the time they spend. There is something else worth seeking that is of far greater, more lasting value.

33b. The phrase *all these things* refers to the food, drink, and clothing previously discussed. Jesus promises that when we dedicate ourselves to the pursuit of the

kingdom of God, the things that consume so much of the world’s attention will no longer dominate our thoughts since they will be provided. As Jesus has already clarified, our loving heavenly Father will be the provider.

We note, however, that countless Christians throughout history and from around the world have suffered and died from dehydration, malnourishment, and starvation. This verse is not saying that these things result from a lack of faith. Instead, it is a promise that God is the ultimate provider for His people. One way that He provides for His people in need is through the generosity of others. As believers “seek . . . first the kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33a, above), they will show generosity to others in need.

34. The degree to which we hoard *for the morrow* may indicate the degree to which we trust God to provide for our daily needs. An excellent example of this problem is found in Exodus 16:4, where the Israelites were instructed to gather enough manna only for the day (except for the sixth day). Most followed the instructions, but some didn’t.

Fear of the future can keep us from seeking first the kingdom of God by making us overly earth-centered. We cannot be servants of “two masters”!

Each *day* will likely include some measure of *evil* or tragic, unpleasant circumstances. That’s because we continue to live in a world reeling from the curse of sin. Yet, to discipline our thinking and focus our attention on kingdom priorities, we must maintain our intent. Paul’s words challenge us: “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:2). This is also part of being “transformed by the renewing of your mind” and living all of life as an act of service to God (see Romans 12:1–2).

Involvement Learning

Our Heavenly Father

Into the Lesson

How often do you think about your fears?

How often do you let your fears consume your thinking?

How do you handle your fears?

We all feel fear and worry. Sometimes, these things take up a significant part of our thoughts and concerns. Today's study on Matthew's Gospel will recount a teaching from Jesus regarding our trust in God's provision.

Into the Word

Read Matthew 6:24–34. Explain Jesus' claim in verse 24.

What is the significance of God caring about "the grass of the field" (v. 30)?

What does it mean to seek God's kingdom and righteousness?

What reasons does Jesus give as to why we don't need to worry?

What do these verses teach us about God?

Key Text

Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

—Matthew 6:34

Into Life

One way we can deal with worry is to notice the needs of others in our community. List difficulties that people in your community may face.

What is already being done to help with these difficulties?

How can we partner with those already addressing these difficulties?

Thought to Remember

No one knows our earthly needs better than our heavenly Father.