

Carefree in the Care of God

Mother's Day -

I want to add my Happy Mother's Day to all you moms. I know you work hard all day, day in and day out, often with little acknowledgement from the world around you. You do incredible and amazing things all the time; caring and cleaning and kissing and cooking, encouraging, teaching, training and chauffeuring, comforting and counseling, and a host of other things with little ones and even grown ones. 100% I know!

I believe it is one of the most profoundly significant and shaping roles for our children and us. It is extremely challenging and rewarding. So from the bottom of my heart, sincerely I say, God bless you! I'd love to hug all of you and say bravo and keep going!!

I also know that for many Mother's Day brings some sadness. Life looks different than we thought it would around Motherhood. We've experienced a world of heartache, of dashed hopes longing for a mother's love, longing to be moms, heartache of deep loss missing beloved children, tiny and grown to broken relationships, even death.

Today in the midst of celebrating, my heart grieves and misses my mom who first talked to me of Jesus and my son whose laughter and kisses stopped way too soon. My heart hurts with you. I hope you are knowing the comfort of Christ. I pray that His grace and faithful love will comfort and carry you through. I'd love to hug you too ... long ... and say, I know and I'm sorry.

Let's pray –

Holy Spirit, on a special day of celebration and mixed emotions would you help us to be a good family who rejoices with those who rejoice and grieves with those who grieve, help us to seek understanding and to love each other well.

God bless moms today, draw them close to you, under your wings affirm them and love them, fill them with wisdom and a heart like yours for their children, encourage them and strengthen them, fill them with joy and hope in Your fierce unfailing love for them and their children.

Thank You for the gift of Motherhood and how it reflects Your heart of tenderness to the world... comfort those who grieve, carry them, hold them long in Your embrace, secured in the spaciousness of Your presence while they learn to keep breathing ...

Jesus, heal bodies and hearts, make us fertile places where life and kingdom life can grow and be nurtured for Your name sake.... Amen.

If you're joining us this week, we're in a series called **Picture Perfect**.

I don't know about you but I certainly had my picture perfect world all sketched out ... in color.

I have to confess I totally fell for the big yellow house and wrap-around porch with a couple rocking chairs to welcome company, the manicured yard with blooming flowers and beautiful

trees ... and, yes, the white picket fence that kept my laughing, carefree children safe from the world.

I fell for the picture of a peaceful, beautiful, magazine home where I would read books and tell stories of Jesus to cute attentive children.

I fell for picture perfect picnics, adventures in the park with only slightly dirty children, catching frogs, kissing booboos and blowing dandelions - which of course would be found at the park.

And I pictured myself loving and kind, laughing, calm, cool and collected ...

I fell for the picture perfect evenings quietly nestled in the arms of my husband while we shared our hearts and deepest thoughts around life and God and ministry and family.

Oh My Goodness!!! I busted out laughing even writing this down!! And I wanted to cry a little too. 😊

What on earth, right?! What planet was I living on? And it's not like my growing up had been like that either. I had chores; cleaning, laundry, some cooking and I knew the yard required long hard sweaty work. My parents struggled relationally and financially. I'd done LOTS of babysitting; kids are stinky and messy and stubborn and they cry ...

But, somehow I thought my picture would be different. My kids would hardly even be sticky and always sweet and I would never be angry, frustrated or unkind. And marriage ... well, have you met Bill and me? We learned pretty quickly that magnets have 2 sides...32 yrs later, still together and getting better.

I don't know what your picture perfect would be, perhaps of world travel, the peaks of athletics or academia, the top of the corporate ladder, owning your own business...

But I do know that life has a way of shattering our pictures and that Jesus came opening our eyes to experience a perfect God and the way into His picture perfect kingdom. A kingdom that no matter where you grew up on planet earth or what century you were born in, shifts everything.

Is 55:9 says, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

God's ways are higher, better, perfect ... but we're stubborn and just like Adam and Eve, we think we know better. Thus the ongoing battle over our hearts - choosing God's ways or ours.

You know what else is as high as the heavens?

Ps 103:11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him

Can I simply say that God's heart for us starts with sinless people in a picture perfect garden and ends with a restored sinless people in a picture perfect kingdom.

Jesus came breaking through our dark world, our dark hearts, our self-prescribed pictures and forever shifts our perspectives, attitudes and actions inviting us into a kingdom altogether different. We called it an Inside Out Upside Down Kingdom as we started the Sermon on the Mount back in January.

We discovered blessed are the **meek**, those that **mourn**, the **persecuted** and the **pure in heart**.

No longer would the law be an eye for an eye, but love your enemies. No longer was God one of many, distant, manipulative, or a presence to appease, but Our Heavenly Father who hears our cries, forgives and deeply loves His children.

In this series, we've looked at a couple pictures Jesus uses to describe life following Him, life in the kingdom of God. Andy's talked of:

- Knocking on Heaven's **Door** – that it's not about getting anything you want, name it and claim it! But rather persisting in a prayer life that shapes your character.
- And the **Road** less traveled, illustrating the choice we have to accept Jesus' path of following Him and living for God or the path of following self and living for whatever pleases us.

In **Matt 6:25-34** Jesus paints another picture ... look at the birds of the air.

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 than food, and the body more 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? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that 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—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 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.

"do not worry about your life" Wait, what?! How can Jesus say that? What does He mean? In a life where each day has its trouble, isn't it pretty impossible not to worry?!

I've looked at it every which way and you know what I found?

He means don't worry. Don't fret and fuss and stew. Don't wring your hands over what's ahead! Don't be distraught, getting all worked up and sick inside.

Granted most of us aren't worried about food and clothes. Our cupboards and closets are fairly full and if they aren't, a trip to the store will fix that.

We're more likely to stand in front of semi-stocked cupboards and proclaim there's nothing to eat or in front of the mirror with strewn cloths about the floor saying, I don't have anything to wear!

Most of us have other worries.

We worry about getting jobs. Keeping jobs. Having enough money to pay the bills and making enough to outlast our lives.

We worry about what college to go to and what will be our major? Will we be accepted? How will I afford it? If trade school is a better option or maybe taking a year off?

We worry about our career paths, better opportunities, making strategic moves and investments? Moving our families? What school will be the best for our children? Will they be safe? What about their friendships? Will they have friends? Do we allow sleepovers? Do we give them cell phones?

And what about driving and dating?

We worry about if we'll marry and who we'll marry? When to have children? Or, if we'll have children? How will we raise them well? How will we juggle infants and income? Does mom stay home? Does dad? Do we hire a nanny? Find Daycare?

We worry about our families and friend who are dealing with all the same worries and making choices, choices that can cause disruption, chaos or hurt? What will happen to the neighborhood? What will Christmas dinner be like?

And I haven't even mentioned the worries we have around our health, the foods we eat, the air we breathe, the water we drink, issues around our aging minds and bodies, or that of our parents, the wellness of our children. We worry through food intolerances, allergies, sickness and not just colds and flu, as bad as they can be, but serious issues with mental illness and devastating diseases like cancer.

If the circumference of your life all is well, just scroll through twitter or facebook for five minutes. Our world is not well and worries are too many to count!

So ... how are you feeling? A little stressed?

Maybe you're starting to think ... Oh! I'd like to be a bird – I don't think they worry about organic worms or the toxicity of building materials used in their nests. They build their nest up high, then kick the kids out and go south for the winter!

One of the most common daily destructive habits that people face is worry.

Our troubles are real, and many, and every day. How we navigate them is important. Jesus isn't saying don't worry about your life, that all these things aren't important. They are important!

He's not condescendingly patting our heads with a there, there, don't worry. Nor, is He being demanding or insensitive.

He knows we're human and meets us right where we are in the midst of our worries and concerns about everyday life.

He doesn't just say stop worrying. We know how well does that works? Right!

He gives some strategy, something else to consider that speaks truth into our lives.

He says ... here is something to think on, to ponder in your problems ...

Consider 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?

If that 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?

We have a Heavenly Father!

Let me say that again... We have a Heavenly Father ... And who tells us that? Jesus!! Jesus says, YOU HAVE A HEAVENLY FATHER! Who knows you, loves you, cares for you, values you.

What can shut down a whirlwind of worry, is remembering that God is our Heavenly Father, loving and kind, forgiving and gracious, with you in your day.

We must remind ourselves of His faithfulness even today in the very breath that we breathe. Even if our today has been really hard, we're here. His presence is alongside our hardship. Trust Him and keep trusting that He will bring us through moment by moment until we are face to face.

I think of **Ruth and Naomi**, two women from the Old Testament, mother and daughter-in-law who lost husbands and sons, their inheritance and their means to livelihood. Their situation utterly desperate. The way ahead dangerous and uncertain.

Naomi wonders if God has forsaken her and Ruth goes gleaning for scraps in the fields. Yet, little by little, events unfold and these women keep stepping with faith into what God has orchestrated behind the scenes. Events that land these women with provision and a legacy they could have never dreamed and no one would have ever thought possible. They did what they could and trusted God.

A worry free life doesn't meaning quitting on responsibilities, dancing to hakuna matata – a trouble free philosophy ...

When Jesus says, don't worry about your life, it doesn't mean you have a free pass to not care about your life, to not be responsible for yourself or your family and expect God to hand you everything on a silver platter.

Look what Paul says to some in the church at Thessalonica who quit working thinking Jesus is coming back any day so why work?

2 Thess. 3:10-12, "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat." We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat.

We can't forget that this passage sits in a larger text about living in God's kingdom. We're supposed to consider our ways in light of Jesus' teaching. The point here is that **With God as our Heavenly Father, it ought to be uncharacteristic of His children to worry.**

We trust that He is a good Father and that His ways our best for us, that His word brings wisdom and life.

The Bible gives perfect wisdom and guidance and it's important to take great care in seeking God's ways! Shifting our pictures to His perfect picture.

The Psalmist says, "**When I am afraid, I will put my trust in you.** Ps. 56:3 and "**blessed is the one who trusts you, Lord Almighty**" Ps. 84:12

So in the midst of your troubles do you have some "go-to" truths?

Here's mine. **The Lord is my strength and shield, my heart trusts in Him and I am helped.** Ps 28:7

The Lord is my strength with in me and the shield about me, my heart trusts in Him and I am helped. I repeat it over and over again.

So what's the difference between caring and worrying?

Worry paralyzes! Care moves!

Worrying feels suffocating. It stops us with fear, frozen in thoughts that only crystalize worst case scenarios in our brains.

Care moves us to action, to pray, gather wisdom, plan, work, get help ... and then rests in God's care.

Worry spins in despair. Care waits with hope.

Worry cripples us emotionally, mentally and physically, consuming our thinking, giving us heart issues, gut issues and more. Worry actually makes us sick.

Dr Charles Mayo, of Mayo Clinic, affirms, "*Worry affects the circulation, the heart, the glands and the whole nervous system. I have never met a man or known a man to die of overwork, but I have known a lot who died of worry.*"

Worry does damage!

I've recently read that when we see "Do not" or "Don't" in the Bible we ought to think of it as – Don't hurt yourself.

For example, Don't hurt yourself by storing up treasure on earth. Don't hurt yourself by making money your master. Don't hurt yourself by wanting what your neighbor has. Don't hurt yourself by taking what isn't yours.

So when Jesus says do not worry. He's saying don't hurt yourself by worrying. He asks, "**can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?**" No, of course not! Worry is a robber, a taker not a giver.

Look at these.



Aren't those so true?!

Worry never works! It's a serious matter. It makes our bodies sick and it makes our souls sick. It steals our faith, turning our eyes inward with distrust in God and reliance on self which leaves us feeling hopeless because we know our troubles are bigger than we can manage.

Jesus said, **So do not worry,** (As if God is absent) **saying** (to yourselves), **'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'** **For the pagans** (those who have no hope in God) **run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.**

Look up child! Where does your help come from? Your help comes from the Lord! You're not like those who have no Heavenly Father, you have Someone who loves you and will care for you ... you're not out on a limb by yourself. Trust Him! Trust that He will be your help for whatever comes, when you're there.

Have you noticed that worry is always about the future beyond our control? Sending our heads go to a hundred "what ifs" all with bad endings.

What will people think of me? What if there's not enough? What if I don't pass? What if the test comes back positive? What if, what if, what if ... and our imaginations are playing out all sorts of options absent of God.

What if evil withholds food? What if evil strips me naked?

If anyone had reason to worry Paul did.

Paul who experienced beatings, shipwrecks, a night in the open sea, days without food and sleep, nakedness, cold and more writes from prison...

The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Phil 4:5b-7

“Don’t fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God’s wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It’s wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life.” Phil 4:6-7 Msg

The Lord is near! Go to Him, 1000x over ... Don’t worry, pray. Pray about everything! Worry about nothing! Worrying will do you ZERO good. Prayer brings His peace.

God’s grace, mercy and help will meet you today, and again tomorrow for tomorrow’s troubles. We don’t get tomorrow’s grace, today. We get today’s grace for today’s trouble.

His mercies never fail. They are new every morning. Great is His faithfulness. I will say to myself, “The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for Him.” Lam 3:22b-24

I don’t know how God will take you through tomorrow. He is way more capable and creative than I am.

We’ve certainly heard stories of surprise checks in the mail, the orchestration of events that landed so timely in someone’s favor. The mystery person with a perfectly timed word or help. How God will walk you through your valley of the shadow of death, the death of a loved one, death of a dream, death of relationship, loss of opportunities, health or resources?

I don’t know, but I do know that He will be with you, that His rod and staff will comfort you, that He will prepare a table for you, sustaining you, each day in the presence of trouble.

God promises His child that He will never leave you. He can never forget you. He is always for you. He cares for you. He loves you.

Sometimes the very thing we don’t want, come and the journey is slow and long through the valley. The comfort that comes as His gift to you, will be the very gift you can share with those who will need the hope you’ve been given.

So, call worry what it is, a liar that says, God won’t be there for me. Don’t bite the apple. Don’t take the bait. Don’t hurt yourself. The mercies of God are writing and rewriting our stories every day.

What if we simply let worry be a warning, like the light on your dashboard that says “engine check” calling us to stop and see what’s going on in our heart? Calling us to pray!

Think, what lie am I believing? What is the enemy trying to stir up – confusion, fear, doubts? Stop! Do not let your mind race off to worries. Redirect your thoughts. You have a Heavenly Father! What does He tell you? Don’t worry! I’m with you!

Think about what you’re thinking about.

Paul goes on in Philippians to say ...

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Let these things be the guardians of your mind. Don’t just let anything fill it. Stop. Redirect your worries. Shift your perspective.

Think about what you’re thinking about.

Joni Tada, a quadriplegic for over 50 years, talks about her real struggle with quadriplegia and chronic pain, how it can wear at her resolve, erode her joy, eat at her peace and cast doubt on God’s goodness.

Her strategy for making it out of bed these past 50+ years? She’s thinks about what she’s thinking about.

In an interview, she tells about rehearsing the promises of God and calling into focus Truth more captivating and intriguing than her pain, pushing the pain to the back of her mind and allowing Truth to occupy her focus.

She repeats to herself **Is 60:1 Arise shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.** And many of God’s promises reminding herself that the same God that raised Jesus, lives in her and He can get her up to live another day.

Worrying about how she will make it through the day is zero help but focused on her Heavenly Father, she has not only gotten out of bed but lived a very extraordinary life that spreads the kingdom of God and hope in Him.

Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear.
Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?

Your lives are so much more than food and clothing, you have value and worth and impact as you follow Jesus to bring the kingdom of God to earth.

We rub shoulders with people in our families, at work, in our neighborhoods, at the gym ... who are struggling with the same things we are, all the same troubles we are facing and more...

People worried sick with no hope in God running after what the world tells them is their life – their jobs, their money, their appearance, their health, their homes, all the stuff, all the things.

Not bad things, but if we think those are our life, there is so much fear and worry around losing them. The world runs after these because without them, they think they've got nothing, that they are nothing.

Jesus said, **Is not your life more?** more than your money, more than your strength, more than a house, more than a trophy, more than appearance, more than you name it...

YES – Your life is so much more!

Children of God have no need to live fretting and fearful, focused on having and constantly securing our things. It makes our lives small and close handed, like Scrooge, hanging onto all we have as if that's all there will ever be...

We are people of eternal inheritance, living in the guarantees of God. Live open handed.

A worry free life deeply trusts the care and love of the Father. Your worry free life is a beacon of light and hope to a worried world that invites others to know our Heavenly Father whose pleased to give the kingdom.

Jesus said, **If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers – most of which are never even seen- don't you think He'll attend to you, take pride in you, do His best for you?**
Jesus said

What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax(stop worrying), to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God's giving. Mt 6:30-31Msg

You're kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you." Mt 5:48 Msg

Shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven. Mt 5:16 Msg

Picture Perfect is about the landscape of our hearts.

- The body is not primarily about the food you put into it but what comes from the life you're given.
- It's not primarily about the clothes on your back but God's character on display through you that invites the world into His kingdom.

This is the picture we run after. Our first priority – that we would live as Jesus has spoken. Trusting our good Heavenly Father.

Seeking His ways, His character, His kingdom to grow in our hearts, and minds and bodies, will bring the colorful picture perfect we were made for - His kingdom on display in and through us.

Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.
Mt 6:28-34Msg

A worry free life is the life God's children GET TO live because our Heavenly Father is that good!!!

Jesus said **You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept, were going public with this ... Mt 5:14**

So, my friends, Soar! Be like the birds – to a worried world – demonstrate your trust in God. Be the beacon of light who points others to our caring Heavenly Father who's with us today and in our tomorrows.

Don't worry! Pray ~
