

02

Life is More

WHAT'S THE SAME | DO NOT BE ANXIOUS

Last week we learned how deeply the Father values us. This week, Jesus gives a very clear warning to not undermine that care by opting into the cares of the world. Both verses begin exactly the same way: therefore. In the Bible, therefore is code for “pay attention.” Jesus is giving us the signal to pick up our mitts and be ready for whatever is coming.



And here it is: *I tell you, do not be anxious.*

Yep. That's it. Jesus doesn't beat around the bush. He doesn't give circumstantial justification. He doesn't open up the floor for input. Quite simply, Jesus' answer to the issue of worry and anxiety is just not to do it.

I'll be honest. It seems a little insensitive. Basic needs like food, hydration, and clothes seem like reasonable things to be concerned about. And Jesus doesn't even mention things like hard days, bad news, trauma, abuse, financial straits, death of loved ones, infidelity, infertility, divorce, low self-esteem, depression, or any of the incredibly hard and true things that people carry in their lives.

So, why the cut and dry commandment right out of the gate?

One commentator made this observation, “It is necessary that a person gives basic attention to having food and shelter. The fact that the same words for ‘care’ are also translated ‘anxiety’ or ‘worry’ shows that the derivation of anxiety could be a reasonable care turned awry.”¹

A reasonable care turned awry.

That’s what Jesus is telling us not to do. To not let a reasonable concern become magnified to the point of believing God lacks in his care for us.

Another place we see this interchangeable use of “care” and “anxiety” is in 1 Peter 5:7. In that verse on anxiety, we are told to wind up our worries and pitch them as far away from us as possible: “Cast all your anxiety (*merimna*) on him, because he cares (*melō*) for you” (NRSV).² The sentence structure itself is incredibly profound.

Notice how the subject of the sentence, anxiety (*merimna*), is inanimate. It does nothing on its own. But when that very same anxiety is “forcefully thrown”³ onto God, he springs into caring action (*melō*) on our behalf. Our ineffectual anxiety is transformed into divine care in the hands of a loving and perfect God when we choose to hurl it away from our hearts onto his.

God never has “reasonable care go awry.” His care always goes according to plan. If we truly understood that God is the only one suited to handle our anxiety, maybe we could more readily accept Jesus’ charge not to be anxious ourselves. And I wonder if we would be more apt to accept Jesus as the ultimate authority on this topic, if we knew that his title was of expert pedigree.

GOD IS THE ONLY ONE SUITED TO HANDLE OUR ANXIETY.

When we think of an expert, we think of the letters after their name. A psychologist is known for their PhD and a doctor is known for their MD. So what’s Jesus known for?

We find it in the very beginning of the Jesus story in Matthew 1:23, “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel’ (which means, God with us).”

Jesus, *God with us*. Those are the letters after his name: Jesus, GWU. If you’re looking for an expert on this topic, you’ve found one. And if you need a specialist in certain areas of your heart, he’s prophesied to be just that too:

And his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.⁴

Jesus is exactly the voice we need to hear as Wonderful Counselor. He is power when we are powerless as Mighty God. He is the eternal perspective we need as the Son of the Everlasting Father. And he is the serenity we seek as the Prince of Peace.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT | THE CHOKE POINT

The difference between these two passages is very small. Punctuation.

In Luke, Jesus puts a period on avoiding anxiousness for the disciple. And in Matthew, Jesus uses a question to invite the outsider into the challenge. *Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?* Like any great teacher, Jesus repeated content that was very important to him.

So let's be sure we know what Jesus is repeating.

First, we already know that the word anxious is synonymous with the word *care*.⁵ But the act of engaging in it is to “brood or think moodily.”⁶ We are told not to ride the carousel of bad thoughts, especially those that put emphasis on external or physical needs. But why? What's so harmful about worrying over things that are worthy of worry?

Jesus loved to tell stories to explain confounding things.

So let's flip over to Matthew 13 to let him. In that chapter, Jesus talks about different kinds of soils that a farmer throws seed onto. And here is what happens when worry is our soil: “The worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.”⁷

The worries of this life *choke the word*, making it unfruitful.

WORRY IS AN ASSAULT ON OUR FAITH.

When the worries of this world have a stranglehold on the power of Jesus' words in our life, the very thing that is supposed to set us free is silenced. Worry is an assault on our faith. It cuts off what Paul says is our birthright in Romans 10:17, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

Even if you have written God's words on the tablets of your heart or have bound them around your neck, worry can begin to erase the etchings. Worry

*The Father cares for us
more than we can care
for ourselves.*

twists itself around the seed that God's planted in your heart and chokes the life right out of it.

In that type of soil, faith can't thrive. Panic sets in and the thorns grow wild.

WHAT THAT MEANS | AT THE HEART OF IT

Jesus confidently and lovingly commands us not to be anxious, because he knows the Father cares for us more than we can care for ourselves. He also knows what is at stake: living a life choked by the thorns of worry *or* living an abundant life where you lack nothing.

When we commit to following Christ with our lives, God makes sure we have access to a lack-nothing life by doing an invisible work inside each of us. "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."⁸

GOD MAKES SURE WE HAVE ACCESS TO A LACK- NOTHING LIFE. God's role in causing us to follow his commandments is quite involved. First, he removes the old heart, gives us a new heart, installs a new Spirit, and causes us to walk in the ways that are best for us. He *causes us*. Just like worry causes the word to be choked out of us, our newly installed innerworkings cause that very same word to *change us*.

If God puts his Spirit *within us*, and Jesus' title is God *with us*, then what is our role? To believe that God is *for us*.

What made Jesus such a revolutionary rabbi was that he never intended things like, do not be anxious, to be hard and fast actions to take. Instead, they are always meant to be exercised daily; to be slow and steady; to be improved upon over time; to be curated by the caring hand of the Creator so we can learn to walk in obedience.

We will gain more and more authority over worry in our lives when we flex the Spirit-motivated muscle God has placed inside our new hearts. When Jesus is at work in us, he always deals with the whole heart instead of isolated habits. The precedent is being set for the rest of our study: there won't be any part of our hearts left inflexed in this process.

So let's keep pumping.



DISCUSS

In what areas of your life do you need Jesus to be the expert on the topic of worry and anxiety?

Which of his specialities would you most benefit from: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace?

In what ways have you seen worry choke the Word out of the new heart God has given you?

What isolated habits are you tempted to modify in order to manage your worry instead of surrendering your whole heart to God?

Have you ever prayed for God to *cause* your new heart to be obedient to his commandments when you are struggling?



READ & REFLECT

Read Matthew 13:20-23. What “seed” do you most identify with?

In the first part of verse 23, what is the good soil identified by?

Read Luke 8:15. What characteristics of the good soil do you find in this account?

What do you hold fast to in your life when you are feeling anxious?

PEACE PRACTICE | THOUGHT STOP WITH SCRIPTURE

Every time you have an anxious thought this week, stop it with Jesus’ words and reclaim your identity as the good soil: As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.

First Look

Luke 12:24

Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!

Second Look

Matthew 6:26

Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?