



Consider the Ravens

The Jesus way to be free of worry and anxiety



TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----------|
| JUST A NOTE | Page 5 |
| VERSE-BY-VERSE | Page 7 |
| INTRO | Page 11 |
| WEEK 1: UNFORGOTTEN | Page 19 |
| WEEK 2: LIFE IS MORE | Page 29 |
| WEEK 3: GOD THE BIRDFEEDER | Page 39 |
| WEEK 4: ADDING UP THE HOURS | Page 49 |
| WEEK 5: GOD & GRASS SKIRTS | Page 59 |
| WEEK 6: OFF THE MENU | Page 69 |
| WEEK 7: KEYS TO THE KINGDOM | Page 79 |
| WEEK 8: SHEEPISH | Page 89 |
| WEEK 9: THE SAFETY NET | Page 99 |
| WEEK 10: HEART SHAPED BOX | Page 109 |
| NOTES | Page 119 |

A FEW THOUGHTS

FOR YOU

Just a Note

I'll be honest.

Nothing has made me more anxious than developing the study you are holding in your hands right now. (Except, perhaps, flying internationally with an infant who decided to scream the entire way. I broke out in hives. It was so fun.)

I realize how ironic it sounds that a study on worry and anxiety was developed by someone who experienced those very things while writing it. But, I also see how Jesus used it to enable me to empathize and understand the intricacies of this topic through his words in ways I hadn't before.

Before I wrote this study, I sat down with licensed Reach counselor, Josh Loy, who has a Master of Arts in Counseling from Western Seminary and an undergraduate degree in Youth Ministry and Bible from Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. He specializes in counseling clients all along the spectrum of worry and anxiety, including those who have been clinically diagnosed.

Josh's insight, compounded by many late night prayer, research, and writing sessions, led me to this truth: Jesus has some incredibly freeing things to say to every single one of us, no matter where we are at. But here's what I want you to know if you are someone who has been diagnosed with clinical anxiety:

1. Jesus has something for you in these pages.
2. You are not alone.
3. God's not done with you, just like he's not done with the

rest of us.

4. You are welcome here.

5. Please keep coming.

6. Stay surrounded by those who want to support you.

7. Tell your DNA about your diagnosis, if you feel compelled, so they can encourage you.

This is a study that is intended to reveal how immensely valued we are by God and how Jesus demonstrates ways for us to claim that value. Whether you have felt hopeless and trapped for a very long time, have spent a lot of money, energy, resources, and time desperate for hope, or have been burdened by shame from others because you require medication and counseling to cope—you are seen. You are loved. You are welcome. You are family.

Jesus wants to walk you through this. I know, because he did it for me.

We're in this together,

Megan

RESOURCES FOR THOSE WHO NEED ADDITIONAL SUPPORT WHILE DOING THIS STUDY:

Trusting God by Jeff Bridges

New Morning Mercies by Paul David Tripp

Safe in the Storm scripture cards by Phil Moser

Running Scared by Ed Welch

If I'm a Christian, Why Am I Depressed? By Dr. Robert B. Somerville¹

My Name is Hope: Anxiety, Depression and Life After Melancholy by John Mark Comer



MIRROR STUDY | VERSE-BY-VERSE

WEEK 1 | LUKE 12:6-7, MATTHEW 10:29-31

Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

WEEK 2 | LUKE 12:22-23, MATTHEW 6:25

And he said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”

WEEK 3 | LUKE 12:24, MATTHEW 6:26

Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!

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?

WEEK 4 | LUKE 12:25-26, MATTHEW 6:27

And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?

And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?

WEEK 5 | LUKE 12:27-28, MATTHEW 6:28-30

Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!

And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

WEEK 6 | LUKE 12:29-30, MATTHEW 6:31-32

And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them.

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

WEEK 7 | LUKE 12:31, MATTHEW 6:33

Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

WEEK 8 | LUKE 12:32, MATTHEW 6:34

Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

WEEK 9 | LUKE 12:33, MATTHEW 6:19-20

Sell your possessions and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

WEEK 10 | LUKE 12:34, MATTHEW 6:21

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

LET'S READ THE BIBLE.

TOGETHER.



Consider the Ravens

One morning I woke up with this phrase on my mind, *consider the ravens*.

I wasn't sure why. I'd never really thought about it before. Vaguely, I understood it to mean that God meets our basic needs. But my needs were met, so I was good. I whispered, "thank you" and figured that was that.

Until. I heard it again.

Consider the ravens.

Whenever I walked to the mailbox, hopped in my car, or ran an errand, the phrase would follow me. It was no respecter of my personal space or time. Apparently, there were some ravens somewhere I wasn't considering as seriously as I should.

I wasn't even sure I had ever seen a raven. Is it a crow? A blackbird? Were they different? The same?

Obviously, I'm not a bird expert.

But it got to the point I couldn't ignore it any longer.

When I went to the Bible, I found the passage in Luke and a near identical message in Matthew. As I studied them, I realized the richness of reading similar passages together. It was like surround sound; a mirror held up for me to see God's heart for my heart.

Both accounts were radically charged with the upside-down kingdom that Jesus championed. Both focused on what it looks like to live in a right relationship with God and not just doing the right things. Both proved that Jesus clearly came to dismantle the Pharisaic works-based, outward-focused religious regime that had kept God's kids at arm's length.

But, I didn't realize how much of it hinged upon our freedom from worry and anxiety. Until I considered the ravens.

In the middle of studying one day, a crow swooped down and landed on our garden shed. I watched him, trying to consider his every move. It was just a crow, but it was a big crow. A representation of a raven for sure. My heart quickened and I realized, *There must be something in this moment I am supposed to see. God must be speaking to me!*

As I looked more intently, I began to notice something strange about its behavior. There was something in its beak that it was pulling at. As I looked closer, to my horror, I realized it was picking at a dead animal of some kind.

I was immediately mad at God. And totally grossed out. I don't like creepy things. I don't enjoy rodents. And I didn't like this type of *consideration* at all. That couldn't have been God. He doesn't speak in that way.

Does he?

It seems more like God to speak in rainbows and roses and baby snuggles and sunshine. But bloodthirsty crows? Scavengers? Death?

It felt off.

But, as the Spirit began to speak, I slowly began to understand once again that Jesus is always the brilliant caretaker of our souls. He began to reveal ways I was clinging to my worry and anxiety just like the crow was to his kill. He showed me that there was no life to be found in something that was already dead. He reminded me there has only ever been one death that produced life: *his*.

As I dove deeper, I found that in Luke 12:24 the Greek word for raven is actually *korax*, which translates into crow. Crows are a bird I know a little more about (because I don't like them). But it still seemed strange that Jesus would urge the disciples and us to consider, "to contemplate; to take note of; to look more closely at" them.¹

Why does Jesus want us to consider scavenging crows when we are tempted to worry and be anxious? Even God says that crows are unclean birds and that we shouldn't use them for food (Leviticus. 11:15, Deuteronomy. 14:14).² We still don't eat them to this day. In fact, the colloquial saying of "eating crow" means we have to admit we've been wrong.

So an openly wrong, unclean, humbled trash-bird is what Jesus wants us to consider?

It is.

And here comes the freeing part: even the most stigmatized, most unclean, most likely among us to be denied care is cared for by our heavenly Father. The raven is the least deserving, least pretty, least liked, least wanted bird—and yet, Jesus says, "Consider them. Because I do."

In Jesus' time, considering the ravens blurred the man-made lines between who deserves to be in God's presence and who doesn't. It instituted a standard of certain heart-sown characteristics like humility, reliance, and trust in the Father who cares.

In our time, it does the same, but it also removes any excuse that God has forgotten us. It silences the lie that we have to fend for ourselves. It eradicates the error that we aren't good enough to be free from what plagues us. It ceases the scavenging we are dead set on, outside of the finished work of Jesus.

To consider the ravens draws our attention away from what worries us and lead us to the one who *wants us*. Anxiety and worry are not the topic of this study: Jesus is.

THE JESUS WAY | THE MAN IN THE MIRROR

Jesus was the least anxious person that has ever walked the earth.

How do we know this?

He slept through life-threatening storms (Matthew 8:23-27, Mark 4:35-41).

He didn't freak out when thousands needed to be fed and had very limited money and food himself (Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:30-44, Luke 9:10-17, John 6:1-15, John 13:29).

He spoke with authority instead of insecurity in the presence of people more

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superpower against
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politically powerful than he was (Matthew 7:29, Mark 1:22).

He was constantly surrounded by very sick and needy people and he never called in sick himself (Matthew 14:14, Matthew 15:30).

He dealt with death a lot, and was moved to miraculous measures (John 11:33).

Even when he tried to be alone, crowds of people followed him everywhere asking for everything under the sun (Mark 3:7, John 6:2-3).

If that wasn't enough to send him into a breakdown, a very close friend betrayed him to the point of murder, and Jesus gave him permission to do so (John 13:27).

He also spent a large portion of his time on earth knowing full well that his life was in danger, and ultimately said yes to death in order that we might have life (Matthew 2:16, Matthew 16:21).

If any other human walked a mile in Jesus' shoes, they would self-destruct. The worrisome cocktail of physical demands, endless interactions, socio-political resistance, and an impending death sentence could only have been taken if Jesus walked with God in the absence of anxiety (Luke 22:42, Mark 14:36).

And yet Jesus said, "By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me" (John 5:30, NIV). Jesus didn't have a superpower against anxiety. He had a trusting relationship with his Father and he wanted to please him.

When we choose to pay close attention to what Jesus says about worry and anxiety, we also pay close attention to what our heavenly Father has to say about setting us free from it. The Jesus way to be free of worry and anxiety is the most powerful way, because it is the way our Father intended us to live.

HOW IT WORKS | A MIRROR STUDY

So how is this study going to work?

Each week we will examine two different, yet similar passages in Luke and in Matthew where Jesus addresses worry and anxiety.

Amazingly, we will discover that all of the "mirror" verses are not perfect replications of each other, but have unique inflections and nuances that will

deepen our understanding of how Jesus intended his listeners to hear.

Week by week, we will break each passage down into three sections: **what's the same**, **what's different**, and **what that means**. So, let's do that now to help us better understand the overall purpose of this study.

What's the same: In this study, Jesus' motivation is always to teach us about a new kingdom and the heart attitudes necessary to be fully functional in that new kingdom.³

What's different: The audience. In Luke's passages, Jesus' words were meant specifically for the disciples. The word disciple means, "learner" or "pupil". The disciples were friends of Jesus who were willing to learn what he had come to teach. In Matthew, Jesus is again speaking to the disciples, but is also addressing crowds. All throughout the New Testament, Jesus would draw crowds of people. He doesn't send them away. Instead, Jesus invites all of us to this new way of kingdom living; the seeker and the found; the close-up and the far-flung.

What that means: The Jesus way to be free of worry and anxiety is for everyone. The first time Jesus spoke these words still holds weight for anyone willing to listen. This is a message he wanted thousands of people to hear, but his followers to put into practice. If you have chosen to follow Jesus, his words on anxiety and worry are no longer something to experience as a spectator, but something to be lived out.

THE JESUS WAY TO BE FREE | LOOK INTENTLY

There is so much freedom to be found in the larger context of these scriptures, but be warned: it will require that we don't dismiss what we often overlook.

When Jesus asks us to consider the unpopular raven, he doesn't stop there. He leads us into a series of things we're not in the habit of noticing: the unremarkable sparrow, the grass on the ground, the rust around the edges, the moth-eaten moneybags, the shattered windows where the thief has broken in.

All throughout these passages, Jesus is clear that we are to look in very unexpected places to be awakened to a new way of living—the kingdom way of living. The Jesus way to be free of worry and anxiety is simply the Jesus way. And the best news about the Jesus way is that it always leads to freedom.

Let's get studying.

First Look

Luke 12:6-7

Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Why, even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are worth more than many sparrows.

Second Look

Matthew 10:29-31

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.

But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.