



Day thirty

For the next 40 days we are offering us all a challenge to consider 40 things that are sucking the life out of us. The challenge is to examine these and through confronting God's word, his Spirit, and his community of faith as we seek to be filled with his life and his love again. At the conclusion of each challenge there will be an opportunity to engage about this with another person and/or the larger community.

Today the thing we are asking us to explore giving up is:

worry.

Confronting the text

¹⁹ "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²² "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

²⁴ "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

²⁵ "Therefore 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 important than food, and the body more important than clothes? ²⁶ 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? ²⁷ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

²⁸ “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ 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, O you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matt. 6:19-34)

Confronting my self with God

This is one of those “difficult” texts. So, like all scripture it cannot simply be ripped bleeding from its context. We can't toss out the *rest* of Jesus' teaching in favor of a vague bent toward monasticism.

We're not being told to be unconcerned about material possessions or the material world.

We're being told to hold them in a *proper* concern.

God created a real world. Ours is not a Matrix-like existence where *someday* the *real world* will be unveiled in some revealed conflagration.

We don't have to look any further than the beginning of this chapter to know that Jesus cares about the material. It was he who taught us to pray for . . . “*our daily bread.*”

In chapter fourteen he fed five-thousand people.

In chapter fifteen he fed four-thousand.

Jesus doesn't say . . .

“Let your hunger lead you to a better knowledge of God.”

No, he gives overflowing baskets of fish and bread.”

When he changed the water into wine, (Jn. 2), it was of the finest vintage. The world is overflowing with good food, wonderful relationships, beautiful places. God cares for the material things of life.

So when Jesus says . . . *don't worry about your life, what you'll eat or drink; or about your body, what you'll wear, . . .* Any thinking person knows he isn't

counseling against prudent concern for life, food, water and clothing. How horribly cruel it would be to tell a poor man, "Don't care about your hungry family."

But there are starving people. Hunger, dehydration, and poverty make this is a tough teaching in desperate need of an honest confrontation and unpacking.

In his commentary on Matthew, Swiss Professor Ulrich Luz wrote . . . "Every starving sparrow and, even more, every famine, plague, or war flies in the face of Jesus' teaching. Believers suffer deprivation, too. God's poor do everywhere, hauntingly. I do not know what to do about this contradiction except to attempt to be a deeper, more economically-concerned-for others-disciple, and to teach Jesus' radically counter cultural economic ethic more faithfully," (Luz, 1:482).

What do people of faith do about the 34,000 children who die every day from hunger related causes and preventable diseases? That's twenty-four children every *minute*, more than three 747 airliners, each holding 430 children, crashing every hour, every day, year-round and leaving no survivors. What do we say to them? . . . *don't worry about your life?*

What should people of faith do when *their* ordinary needs for life, food, clothing, and shelter don't appear to be met, when they've cut every budget line item, cut expenses, frozen their spending, canceled every "luxury" and still have creditors calling? . . . *don't worry about your life?*

No.

Jesus isn't telling us not to worry. He's saying hold your worry in proper focus.

There's a difference between *concern* and *anxiety*. When Jesus says . . . *don't worry about your life*, . . . he's saying, *do worry appropriately, practice careful concern*.

The word he uses (*marimnao*) means, "don't involve yourself in *anxious* worry."

Writing in the study resource *Our Daily Bread*, which our Deacons provide for us, pastor and writer Bill Crowder says . . . "I was scheduled to teach at a Bible conference outside the U.S. and was waiting for my visa to be approved. It had been rejected once, and time was slipping away. Without the visa, I would lose the opportunity for ministry and my colleagues in that country would have to find another speaker at the last minute. During those stressful days, a co-worker asked how I felt about it all. I told him I was experiencing 'peaceful anxiety.' When he looked at me rather quizzically, I explained, 'I have had anxiety

because I need the visa and there is nothing I can do about it. But I have great peace because I know that, after all, there is nothing I can do about it!”

Peaceful anxiety flows from a faith-filled trust that God has built into Creation the means by which all things can be cared for. But that it's not all in God's hands, we too have responsibility. Though the phrase . . . “God helps (him) who helps (himself)” isn't in the Bible, the concept is.

How do birds get fed?

They work every day to maintain their food supply.

Flowers and plants, the lilies, grow day-by-day through natural process. But *they* need to grow. God provides the water, food and sun, but we must do *our* part for God's part to have any benefit.

We must give prudent thought and work to our future, not just sit around worrying.

In our better moments we know that when Jesus says . . . ²⁷ *Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?* It is a “Duh” statement.

We *know* that worrying won't *add* any amount of time, not a single hour to our life.

In fact, worry will take time *away*.

So, we need to do our part, we need to take adequate personal steps. We need to be in reality about our situation, abandon “magic thinking,” listen and learn from others who speak the truth in love, (Eph. 4:15).

As fun as it might be to imagine winning the lottery, hitting it big in Vegas, or discovering we've a long-lost rich uncle, we can't plan for that.

We *can* cut our budget line items, cut expenses, freeze our spending, and cancel “luxury” items. We also can take advantage of some of our society’s *assistance* programs.

I know a couple who had more than \$100,000 in credit card debt. They weren’t spendthrifts. They just could never get to a position of creating any savings, so all those unplanned events, cars breaking down, trips to the emergency room, root canals and the like, *had to* be put on credit. While they were never late with a payment, they were only able to pay the minimum.

Consequently, the credit card companies kept increasing the finance charge. One of them eventually reached 31%! At 31% you could be paying the minimum credit card payment for the rest of your life and *never* pay off what you owe.

The couple broke this cycle when they broke their silence of shame, opening their pain to a brother in Christ who pointed them in the direction of a reputable debt reduction service. Though it was a hard road, they honored their responsibility *and* completely paid off their debt in five years.

We need to be open to the graceful help of others. Much of our brokenness, in all the areas we worry about, not just money, come from trying to do things alone.

Ann LaMotte says . . . “A mind is a terrible place to go alone.”

Bringing someone in to listen to our worrisome situations *can* open up creative new possibilities of healing.

Obviously, another source of our worry is trying to keep up with the Jones’. In not all, but in many cases, it is our unexamined desire for stuff which creates and then drives our worry.

Have you ever heard of the word surfeit (surf-it)? Surfeit is an illness caused by excessive eating or drinking. It comes from two Latin words, *super*, meaning “above,” and *facere*, ‘do’.

Our societal lust for the next new thing has become psychotic, it has lost touch with external reality. It is abnormally sensitive, anxious, and obsessive, thus neurotic. Do you know the difference between the two? A psychotic knows that $2+2=5$. A neurotic knows that $2+2=4$. . . but they don’t like it.

God needs to be the God of our worry *and* our material possessions.

Someone once said God doesn't have hold of a man until he has him by the wallet. We need to redeem our consumerism.

Finally, freedom from anxiety flows from giving things away. Martin Luther said . . .

"If our goods are not available to the community, then they are stolen."

If we believe our goods to be ours alone we'll cling to them. If what we have is viewed as a gift from God, we'll let go to be *appropriately* used to help others.

When Jesus said . . . ²⁵ *"I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear . . . He was talking about our not worrying about our life and showing a proper concern for others. That's the Biblical ethic, appropriate concern for others. Paul wisely wrote the Galatians . . . ² Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*

Two verses later he wrote . . . ⁵ *for each one should carry his own load, (Gal. 6:2,5).*

This isn't a contradiction.

It's a recipe for appropriate worry.

There are differences between burdens and loads. It's comprehending the brokenness of the world and taking *appropriate* responsibility.

The motto of Mad Magazine's icon, Alfred E. Newman was . . . "What, me worry?" Easy to say, incredibly hard to do. But, if we're a people who trust God with our worry, who open ourselves to care from others, who take *proper* responsibility for ourselves and who give generously to others, one day we too may be able to say . . . "What, me worry?" And mean it.

Listening to God's people

Listen.

Breathe.