



Living Under A Cloud

Matthew 6:25-34, Philippians 4:6-7

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For almost a year, we've been living under a cloud. It started with the cloud of Covid. We were introduced to a virus we had never heard of and told to stay home. If we dared to go outside our homes, we had to wear a mask. We're still living under that cloud. We have friends or family who have tested positive. Thankfully, most have or will survive, yet tragically, 365,000 Americans have died from Covid in the last year.

Lockdowns meant isolation. Masks meant anxiety. After months of this, a lot of people are feeling lonely and depressed. The statistics for mental health problems are higher than the statistics for the actual infection. Add to Covid fears, our problems at home. Some of us have health problems, some scary health problems. Some of us have family problems, broken and estranged relationships within your family that are breaking your heart. The burdens many of us are carrying are very heavy. Add to all that, this week's political eruption at the U. S. Capitol as the climax to a long year of uncertainty and instability, anxiety and fear, and even depression. As I said, we've been living under a cloud for the last year.

So, what can we do? We can open our Bibles and turn to the words of God. Psalm 46:1 is one of the most comforting promises in the Bible. It simply declares, ***"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble."*** He promises to help when we're in trouble. He promises comfort when we're hurting. He promises strength when we're weak. He promises guidance when we're confused. He promises His presence when we are lonely, anxious, or depressed. So, whatever you're going through, you can know that ***God promises to be there when you need Him most.***

MATTHEW 6

Matthew 6 records the Sermon on the Mount. On a hillside crowded with people, Jesus talked about worry and encouraged them, and encourages us, to trust His Father.

²⁵Do not worry about everyday life – whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are?

²⁷Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? ²⁸And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, ²⁹yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. ³⁰And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith? ³¹So don't worry about these things, saying, "What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?"

³²These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. ³³Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. ³⁴So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today. (Matthew 6:25-34, NLT).

Three times, Jesus said, "Do not worry." To people who really were worried about their next meal, Jesus said, "Do not worry." Was He being insensitive? No. He was speaking to their greatest need, to what they were worried about most. He was addressing real life. And He is addressing real life for us as well. Covid is real. Cancer is real. Depression is real. Jesus is not insensitive when He says do not worry. He is asking us to trust Him. To trust that God promises to be there when we need Him most.

So let's walk through Matthew 6 and let Jesus teach us how to cope with worry.

When you're worried, keep things in perspective. Jesus said, "Do not worry about everyday life – whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing?" (Matthew 6:25, NLT). The word for "worry" means to rip apart. That's exactly what it does. Worry tears us up inside. According to Jesus, that's no way to live. He tells us not to worry about everyday life. He tells us not to worry about what we'll eat or what we'll wear.

And here's His argument. God's greater gifts include His lesser gifts.¹ "Isn't life more than food?" If God gave us life, then surely we can trust Him to give us food to eat. If God gave us bodies, then surely we can trust Him to give us clothes to wear. The cross punctuates this principle, that His greater gifts include His lesser gifts. Paul said, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32, NAS). If the Father gave His Son, then there is nothing He won't give us.

Years ago, when we moved from Atlanta to Austin, I learned a big lesson about perspective. When we moved, our house in Atlanta would not sell ... for 19 months! So, for 19 months, I was frustrated and worried and angry about our house not selling in Atlanta. But, on October 8, 2010, selling our house was not a priority. Within the span of one hour, three things happened. That Friday, my son Adam and I were sitting in the waiting room at M. D. Anderson after hearing his cancer diagnosis. Selling the house was not on my mind. While we were sitting in the hospital, my son Andy called and told me that our first granddaughter Brooke had been born, and selling the house was not one my mind. Within the span of one hour, I also got an email from my realtor in Atlanta saying that after 19 months, our house had finally sold. I was so filled with concern over Adam's cancer and so filled with joy over the birth of our granddaughter, that I forgot to tell Kathy that our house sold. She didn't find out until a week later when I mentioned in a sermon at church. Adam's cancer and Brooke's birth put not selling the house in perspective. It put it way down my worry list.

We believe God has the power to create the universe. We believe He has the power to raise Jesus from the dead. We believe He has promised heaven and eternal life. But worry reveals that we don't trust Him with what we're going through this week. If you're worried about something, keep things in perspective.

When you're worried, remember how incredibly valuable you are to God. Jesus said, "Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are?" (Matthew 6:26, NLT). Birds don't plant or harvest or store food, and they don't starve, because God feeds them. And Jesus reassures us that if God takes care of birds, then surely He will take care of us.

In Psalm 139, David pondered how much God cared about Him. "How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered! I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand! And when I wake up, you are still with me!" (Psalm 139:17-18, NLT).

When you're worried, remember how incredibly valuable you are to Him. If God takes care of the birds, then surely He will take care of you.

When you're worried, realize that worry is wasted emotion. Jesus asked, "Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?" (Matthew 6:27, NLT). No! Worry is a waste of time. It doesn't change a thing. It's been said that worry is like sitting in a rocking chair, it will give you something to do, but it won't get you anywhere. Worry is wasted emotion. Worry does not do anything to solve the problem.

When you're worried, trust God to take care of you. Again Jesus said, "Why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?" (Matthew 6:28-30, NLT).

All of us have good reasons to worry. I don't want to belittle the problem that worries you, because I don't think Jesus belittled the real-life problems His audience was facing either. But ultimately, according to Jesus, worry is a lack of faith. "Why do you have so little faith?" Worry looks at circumstances and panics. Faith looks at God and rests. Fear and worry reveal that we don't have confidence in God.

Jesus tells us why we should not worry. "(My Father) will certainly care for you" (Matthew 6:30). So, what are you worried about? Bring it to the front of your mind. Do you trust God to take care of that problem? Do you believe God cares enough about you to walk with you, to strengthen you, and to help you with what you're going through? Jesus promised, "He will certainly care for you." Jesus is inviting us to trust His Father with every detail and every problem in our lives.

When you're worried, remember that God already knows what you need. Jesus said, "So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs" (Matthew 6:31-32, NLT).

The "thoughts of unbelievers" are dominated by worry and fear. But not us. We have the presence of God with us. We have the word of God to guide us. We have the Spirit of God to strengthen us. We have the resurrection of Jesus to prove that God is victorious even over death. We have a heavenly Father who "already knows what we need."

What has Jesus said so far? “Your heavenly Father already knows what you need ... He will certainly take care of you ... so don’t worry.”

When you’re worried, seek God above all else. Jesus said, “Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need” (Matthew 6:33, NLT). “Seek first the kingdom of God” (NIV). “Above all else” (NLT). Put God first. Go to God first. Go to Him as the first solution. Set your heart and fix your eyes on Him. Seek, crave, pursue, run to your Creator, your Father, your Savior.

The Apostle Paul wrote many profound things in the New Testament, but perhaps most profound was this statement about his personal commitment to Jesus. “For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). For Paul, life was about faithfully serving Jesus, and death was about finally seeing Jesus. So, whether he lived or died, it was all about Jesus. Set your heart and fix your eyes on Jesus. Follow Him and trust Him “above all else.”

When you’re worried, take one day at a time. Jesus gave such good advice when He said, “Don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today” (Matthew 6:34, NLT). Worry is about “what if.” Worry fears what might happen. Jesus said, “Don’t worry about tomorrow.” Reality is that 90% of what we worry about never happens. On Wednesday, we worry about what might happen on Thursday. But on Thursday, it doesn’t happen. But then on Friday, we worry about what might happen on Saturday. But on Saturday, it doesn’t happen. The reality is that 90% of what we worry about never happens. Again, three times, Jesus said, “Do not worry.” And why? Because “your heavenly Father already knows all your needs ... and He will certainly take care of you.”

PHILIPPIANS 4

Okay, Jesus tells us not to worry, but we do. Life is filled with problems, and as I said earlier, we’ve been living under the cloud of Covid for a year, along with all the other chaos in our country, the uncertainty of life, and the emotions of the heart. So, what can we do right now with our anxiety, our fear, and our worry? Philippians 4 gives us the answer.

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7, NAS). Another translation reads, “Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7, NLT).

“Be anxious for nothing.” But we are anxious. We’re anxious a lot. Saying don’t worry sounds naïve and insensitive. Unless ... unless there really is something powerful about prayer. Philippians 4:6-7 is a huge promise. God promises peace to those who pray.

“Be anxious for nothing ... Don’t worry about anything ... pray about everything.” I understand if that sounds insensitive to you. I know many of you, and I have many friends, whose

prayers have not been answered and whose hearts are broken, who bear heavy burdens and who are struggling to have faith.

I've experienced it too. And when I'm struggling the most, you know what I do? I cry out to God because Psalm 62:8 says I can. "Trust in Him at all times, pour out your heart to Him, for God is our refuge." I cry out to God because there is no one else to cry out to. Because I still believe He loves me and that He cares about me. I still believe, as Psalm 46 declares, "God is my refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble." Whatever you're worried about, whatever you're burdened about, whatever has broken your heart, talk to God about it. Take it to the one who cares.

Prayer is not some psychological exercise where we process our emotions. Prayer is a means of transferring our anxiety to God. First Peter 5:7 says, "Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). To "cast" means to throw. Take the problem off your back and throw it onto His. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear ... (Therefore, I will not worry)" (Psalm 46:1-2).

When we pray, when we cry out to Him for help, Philippians 4 promises, "the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (NAS). He promises peace to our emotions and peace to our thoughts. Peace. Calm. Rest. The Hebrew word for peace is *shalom*. It's a sense of well-being because our lives are in the hands of God. That's why we have faith, that's the reason we experience peace.

CONCLUSION

There's so much to worry about, and we do. But Jesus said, three times, "Do not worry." Why? Because "your heavenly Father already knows all your needs ... and He will certainly take care of you." Whatever you're going through and whenever you cry out to God for help, ***He promises to be there when you need Him most.***

Listen to His promises.

- "The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning. Great is His faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23, NAS).
- "The Lord's unfailing love will surround the one who trusts in Him" (Psalm 32:10).
- "For I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow – not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below – indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God" (Romans 8:38-39, NLT).
- "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble" (Psalm 46:1).

NOTES

¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the The Sermon on the Mount*, The Bible Speaks Today Series (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), page 163.