

Seeking First in the Kingdom

Kingdom Living #11 - Speaker Mike Laramie - June 8, 2025 - Matthew 6:25-34

INTRO: Good morning church! Today is the Day of Pentecost – 50 days after Resurrection Sunday – a date we celebrate the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the first disciples during the Jewish Feast of Weeks (Shavuot) and the founding of the church. While our tradition may not celebrate this day in the same manner as Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox traditions, we do celebrate the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives. With the help of the Spirit, we're continuing our sermon series today entitled, KINGDOM LIVING. It's an expositional study of Christ's Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5-7. Many have described it as the greatest sermon ever preached by the greatest preacher who ever lived.

Need: Anxiety is a topic that dominates the narrative today. According to the National Institute for Mental Health, 19.1% of U.S. adults had an anxiety disorder in the last year. The prevalence is higher among women (23.4%) than men (14.3%), but an estimated 31.1% of U.S. adults will experience an anxiety disorder at some time in their lives. A 2019 study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that 15.8% of adults in the United States had taken prescription medication for mental health conditions in the past year.

You may not be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, but are there stressors in your life that you are anxious about? Have you lost a job or looking for a new one? Are there final exams coming up, college decisions, financial aid or other academic stresses? How about relationship stress that causes anxiety? Marriage issues, dating problems, friendship relationships that are not "two way" can all cause anxiety. Perhaps you are waiting on a doctor's diagnosis, test, or procedure. Surely God does not intend for believers to live in a state of anxiety and worry.

A.J. Cronin, author-physician, analyzed patients' worries this way: Things that never happen (40%), things in the past which can't be changed (30%), health issues (12%), miscellaneous, petty problems (10%), Real, legitimate troubles (8%).

"Worry is a form of idolatry. It's when we love something—like success, health, or relationships—more than God. That's disordered love." — Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*

Trans: Jesus, with the crowds on the mountainside, guides us away from a life of anxiety, stress and worry and guides us towards a life of freedom with their Father.

BODY: In the Sermon on the Mount, after Jesus called His listeners to make God their master, He then challenged them to not be anxious by freeing themselves from the worries of the world. Having made Jesus our Lord, we can free ourselves from the worries of the world. How can we free ourselves from the worries of the world? The text gives three ways to free ourselves from worry when Christ is Lord.

Read text: Matthew 6:25-34 (ESV) ²⁵ "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? 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? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ 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? ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. ³⁴ "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

Having Made Jesus Lord, We Can Free Ourselves from the Worries of the World:

1. Recognize your value.

EXP: (v.25-26)

"Therefore" (25) (τοῦτο, *touto*) - for this reason; points to the previous verses ("no one can serve two masters"). When God is your sole master then the obvious result is a peaceful trust in Him who provides. It is not out of place to now say, "So don't be anxious because your Master has got you." {Preach the Gospel in this therefore.} God must be King before we can trust Him.

Seeking First in the Kingdom

Kingdom Living #11 - Speaker Mike Laramie - June 8, 2025 - Matthew 6:25-34

Matthew 6:24 “No one can serve two masters, for 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 God and money.”

“Anxious” (25) (μεριμνάω, *merimnao*) (PAM: Present Active Imperative) - the KJV says “give no thought”, but that does not mean that we should literally not have any thoughts about our situation. More properly, the word should be translated as “worry” or “troubled with cares”. Christ commands us to not be anxious three times. This must be important. As we delve into this topic, I recognize for many people, merely saying “don’t be anxious” makes you anxious! I also don’t want you to be discouraged as you and I may feel as if there is another area that we are not measuring up to Jesus’ high bar in the Sermon on the Mount. Rather than focusing on not being anxious, let’s look closely at Jesus’ prescription for dealing with worry and anxiety.

First, we need to speak about the difference between worry and anxiety as we define it today. In the Bible, worry is as an uneasy feeling or agonizing about the future, often rooted in a lack of trust in God’s provision and care. Worry is self-talk. Worry is a churning obsession over some future possible happening. Anxiety can be related, but it’s also a natural part of life, helping us prepare for challenges and react to potential threats. According to the National Institute of Health, anxiety is defined as apprehension, tension, or uneasiness that stems from the anticipation of danger, which may be internal or external. For example, feeling anxious before a presentation or a big test is a common experience. Anxiety is more of a physiological response. When I then worry about things I cannot control, I tread into the area of sin. Jesus clearly commands us not to worry.

“Worry comes from disordered love.” - Martyn Lloyd-Jones

“Your life” (25; 2x) (ψυχή, *psychē*) - breath, life, the breath of life, the **soul**, the seat of the feelings, desires, affections, aversions. Not just speaking of physical life, but the entirety of your life.

“Food” (25) (τροφή, *trophē*) - food, nourishment, meat, rations.

“Body” (25) (σῶμα, *sōma*) - the body both of men or animals; the living body; the physical body.

“Clothing” (25) (ἔνδυμα, *enduma*) - garment, raiment, cloak, an outer garment

“Look at the birds” (26) (ἐμβλέπω, *emblepō*) (AAM: Active Aorist Imperative) - another command; to turn one’s eyes on.

“Sow nor reap nor gather into barns” (26) - these words point to so much of the activity of man’s work. We sow, reap, and store up. Jesus has just taught us to store up in heaven and not on earth. So our work here should not be anxious work but Kingdom work, free of worldly anxiety.

“Father feeds them” (26) (τρέφω, *trephō*) - to nourish, support, feed. A bird fits into the created order of God and so they are neatly ordered in His care.

“Are you not of more value” (26) (διαφέρω, *diapherō*) - be better, be of more value, worth, literally - something to bear or carry through any place. So, Jesus’ command to “look at the birds” is for us to assess our value in God’s eyes. Of note: the “you” here in the Greek is singular – meaning you (individually) are of great worth to the Lord. This is critically important – Dr. Curt Thompson, Christian psychologist said that “I become what I pay attention to.” This means that if you and I are to re-wire our neural pathways away from anxiety and worry, we need to realize just how much God values and loves us.

ARG: All of us are created with dignity and tremendous worth:

Genesis 1:27 (ESV) So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

You have been set apart as special:

1 Peter 2:9 (NIV) But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

You are also uniquely loved by God:

Seeking First in the Kingdom

Kingdom Living #11 - Speaker Mike Laramie - June 8, 2025 - Matthew 6:25-34

Romans 5:8 (NIV) But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

ILL: Parable of the 99 sheep in Luke 15:4-7. *Luke 15:7 (ESV) Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.*

APP: Many of you struggle with seeing your own value. Perhaps you have been sinned against; someone has used or abused you and this has led to feelings of inadequacy and shame. There may be some deep psychological trauma wounds from your past, causing habitual anxiety. Your path to healing starts with the Savior – recognize that you are a child of the King! If you know and love Jesus, you have tremendous worth – so much that He died for you and me. If you don't know Him, would you trust Him and He will lift you up.

2. Trust your Father.

EXP: (v.27-32)

“Add a single hour” (27) (πῆχυς pēchys) - a cubit; early Church fathers viewed this as adding a measure to your height, but figuratively, it is about adding to the length of your life.

“Worry never robs tomorrow of its sorrow, it only saps today of its joy.” C.S. Lewis

“Consider the lilies” (28) (καταμανθάνω katamanthanō) (AAM: Active Aorist Imperative) - to learn thoroughly, examine carefully. NASB translates this as “observe”.

“Neither toil nor spin” (28) (κοπιᾶω, kopiaō) - to grow weary, tired, exhausted (with toil or burdens or grief); to labor with wearisome effort, to toil

“Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed” (29) (περιβάλλω, periballō) - array, cast about, clothe, put on.

“O you of little faith” (30) (ὀλιγόπιστος oligopistos) - of little faith, trusting too little, incredulous, i.e. lacking confidence (in Christ). Here is where we get the idea for this second point. Faith as trust.

The great theologian Jonathan Edwards said that it is difficult to give a definition of faith, because there is no single word that adequately expresses the theological fact that in faith the individual Christian is united ‘in the soul or heart’ with Christ. The idea he comes closest to settling on is that faith consists in trusting in Christ. Jesus said that all we needed was faith the size of a mustard seed (Matt 17:20). Faith is nothing else than trust in God’s mercy promised in Christ. This also includes His provision.

“What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” (31) - Much like Jesus’ command to “look at the birds”, his second example is of things that just are – birds and flowers don’t concern themselves with worry over their next meal. But Jesus knew how the world worked. Birds spend a major part of the day gathering food and building nests. They work, but they don’t worry about it. They go about their business.

Consider also how food and clothing may matter more to Jesus’ audience than us. Food insecurity was a major reality for most of the hearers, much like parts of the Third World today. Clothing was not just something to cover the body in the 1st Century, but those people lived much closer to nature than we do. Their tunic and cloak would routinely become a shelter for sleeping outside. We rarely exist outside of heated and cooled, sheltered spaces.

“...the preoccupation he [Jesus] forbids us is food, drink and clothing. Yet, this is precisely ‘the world’s trinity of cares’. We have only to glance at the advertisements in the media to find a vivid modern illustration of what Jesus taught nearly two thousand years ago.” - John Stott Those who do not trust God in the first place spend much energy in pursuing all these worldly things. This is not to say that God is not concerned with them - He knows you need them (v.32). Since Jesus has just minutes ago in His sermon taught us that we cannot be mastered by both God and money, this seems to go beyond mere physical need, but extravagance.

“The Gentiles seek after all these things” (31) - Luke 12:30 “the nations seek after these things”

“Father knows that you need them” (32) (εἶδω, eīdō) - to know, i.e. get knowledge of, understand, perceive. God already knows, we don’t inform Him when we pray for these things.

Seeking First in the Kingdom

Kingdom Living #11 - Speaker Mike Laramie - June 8, 2025 - Matthew 6:25-34

There is another ditch here. We see the warning against worry, but there is a possible overreaction that borders on laziness – “oh God will provide, so I’ll just do nothing”. Be careful. God is not against plans and effort. It is the obsession of worry that He is against. Just as 2 Thessalonians 3:10 says, “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.”

These are all areas where the world spends its energy in worry, but when we understand the value that God gives us, we realize that He already has a plan for those things. There is a tension to be managed here. John Stott writes,

1. Christians are not exempt from earning their own living.
2. Christians are not exempt from being responsible for others.
3. Christians are not exempt from experiencing trouble.

So, while these things are true, we are not to worry about them. Worry is incompatible with Christian faith.

ARG: God’s message throughout Scripture is that He is trustworthy:

Numbers 23:19 (NIV) God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

Isaiah 26:4 (ESV) Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock.

Jesus reminds us that another antidote to anxiety is to trust that God will provide.

Luke 12:32 (ESV) Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

ILL: Example of manna from Exodus 16. Jesus taught us to pray for our daily bread in the Lord’s prayer from last week. We touched on the idea of manna last week as we considered the provision that God sends from heaven. This week, consider this story in a deeper fashion: how much manna were the Israelites to gather? Only enough for the day. What happened if they gathered too much? It would rot. Scripture teaches us that each person had enough, whether little or much. But don’t miss the other part of the story – each person was to go out each day (other than the Sabbath) and gather, or work.

APP: Where is your trust? Are you trusting in your stuff? There were 16 seasons of the TV show “Hoarders”. 16 seasons of people who could not let go of their stuff. How about your financial security? Do you have more trust in your 401K than on the Lord? Live life with an eternal perspective.

3. Seek His Kingdom.

EXP: (v.33-34)

“**Seek first**” (33) (ζητέω zēteō) (PAM: Present Active Imperative) - another command: to seek in order to find, to seek by thinking, meditating, reasoning, to enquire into, aim at, strive after. “First” priority.

“**The kingdom of God**” (33) (βασιλεία basileia) - royal power, kingship, dominion, rule; not to be confused with an actual kingdom but rather the right or authority to rule over a kingdom, used in the N.T. to refer to the reign of the Messiah.

Again, according to John Stott, when Jesus speaks of the Kingdom here, He is not referring to the general sovereignty of God over nature and history, but rather to that specific rule over His people which begins at salvation. God’s Kingdom is Jesus Christ ruling over his people in total blessing and total demand. To *seek first* this kingdom is to desire as of first importance the spread of the reign of Jesus, starting with ourselves, until every part of our life - home, marriage, family, personal morality, professional life, bank balance - is joyfully submitted to Him.

“**His righteousness**” (33) (δικαιοσύνη) - the state of him who is as he ought to be

It’s not clear why Jesus breaks out His Kingdom and His righteousness here, but perhaps we can start by acknowledging that being in His kingdom is the same as salvation. Only those born again have seen and entered the Kingdom. His righteousness is a broader concept. Since God is righteous, He desires righteousness not only within the Christian community, but in every human endeavor. This is why we have an innate need for justice - one of the first protests little children make is “it’s not fair!” We should be so

Seeking First in the Kingdom

Kingdom Living #11 - Speaker Mike Laramée - June 8, 2025 - Matthew 6:25-34

marked by righteousness that it spills over into the non-Christian world, so that those people will see it and desire it. This necessarily implies an evangelistic mindset.

“All these things will be added” (33) (προστίθῃμι, *prostithēmi*) - to add; give more, increase

What things? Well, the things Jesus has been speaking of – food, drink, clothing – the things we need day to day.

Romans 8:31 (ESV) What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

“Unto you” (33) – the “you” here in Greek is plural, meaning a communal “you”. This implies that seeking the Kingdom of God is to be done in community. Part of the cure for anxiety is to live in community; sharing burdens. The early church was an example of this – they held things in common, met needs. You can’t meet other’s needs if you don’t live in community and are willing to be vulnerable.

Christ said ‘Seek first the kingdom, and all these things shall be added unto you.’ Buddha said ‘Seek first the kingdom, and then you will need none of these things.’ - G K Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*

“Trouble” (34) (κακία kakia) - malice, ill-will, desire to injure, wickedness, depravity, evil

Even the life of the faithful disciple can be filled with problems. However, guessing about the nature of those problems that may happen is seldom a helpful exercise - it may actually distract from the task at hand. One needs to get through today to even see tomorrow.

“Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (34) (ἀρκετός, *arketos*) - sufficient, enough, satisfactory. There is enough for us to wrestle today.

ARG: Jesus warns us to seek the Kingdom first, and not the world:

1 John 2:15 (NLT) Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever.

Remember last week:

Matthew 6:20 (NKJV)...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

ILL: Luke 10:38 (ESV) “Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me. But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.” It’s not that what Martha was working on wasn’t important; it just wasn’t of first importance.

APP: How are you doing with the spiritual disciplines (fasting, prayer, meditation, Scripture, serving, evangelism, among others). It’s been my experience that it is difficult to be consumed by anxiety if we are seeking His Kingdom. Pastor Jonathan Minter has been leading people through Practicing the Way’s fasting intensive. Let me repeat a question from 2 weeks ago – how is your prayer life? We have a prayer team that can help.

CONCLUSION: Jesus wants us to live a life free from anxiousness. He has given us guidance as to how to do this by living in close communion with Him and with other believers. Friends, Jesus wants to take our anxiety away when we:

- Recognize our value
- Trust our Father
- Seek His Kingdom.

Let’s pray.