

**Matthew 6:19-34**  
**Trusting God**

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## Intro

“*Do not worry. Do not be anxious.*” Across Canada, and much of the western world in general, we need not look far to notice how anxiety and worry have become one of the debilitating health concerns of our society. Perhaps you have noticed this among colleagues and peers, among family and friends, or perhaps this is also true of you. I remember many occasions growing up where I was quite anxious and I still get anxious today. In Ontario, I attended middle school for grades 7-8 before going to high school in grade 9. When I was in grade 8 I skipped grade 8 math and instead did grade 9 high school math. I was a ball of nerves when it came time to write my first ever high school exam. The evening before the exam I couldn't eat my dinner because I was so anxious and instead went to my room to study. Of course I wasn't able to actually concentrate on my studies because I was anticipating what was to me the enormous and awful implications of actually failing an exam. I didn't fail but maybe it would have been a blessing in disguise to fail and realize that the world wasn't actually over. So the message this morning is one I am also in need of.

## Define anxiety

Jesus' words concerning anxiety and worry are no less relevant in 2018 than when Jesus spoke them or when Matthew recorded them for us. I would like to clarify at the beginning the kind of anxiety or worry Jesus is talking about in this passage in Matthew. The Greek word used is *merimnao* which means needless worry, overly anxious or distracted, to be troubled with cares, to look out for, to seek to promote one's interests. We find the same Greek word used to describe Martha's distracted and worried thought in Luke 10. Paul uses the same word in his letter to the Philippians when he says “*don't be anxious about anything*”. Jesus is not here referring to a clinical disorder, to the kind of debilitating anxiety that may be caused by trauma or other

internal factors. He speaks of our regular, everyday anxiety that we experience. This is the kind of anxiety that takes joy and pleasure out of life.

### “Therefore”

“*Do not be anxious. Do not worry.*” To fully understand and appreciate what Jesus is here saying about anxiety, we must locate it in the context of his sermon on the mount. Jesus begins his discourse on anxiety in verse 25 with a preposition. Our English translations typically translate it as “therefore”. The original Greek word is “*dia*”. In our passage it means “for this cause or for this reason or therefore or on this account or since this is so”. We can see that Jesus is connecting his speech on “do not be anxious” with what he said immediately before. To understand Jesus’ teaching on anxiety, we need to remember his teaching in the preceding passage.

### Generosity

Last week, Pastor Greg spoke about how the passage of treasure, of light and of masters is about generosity; about getting our priorities straight about our possessions; about having a disposition of generosity. Pastor Greg helped us to understand the two different treasuries: heaven and earth; the two different dispositions: stinginess and generosity; and the two different masters: God or mammon. These have to do with what goes on in the depths of our soul. It has to do with what happens in our hearts. In all three, we have a choice and Jesus warns us against choosing unwisely. Jesus calls us to thoughtfulness before action. Jesus calls us to make a choice, and that choice will result in some kind of action.

### Poor decisions vs wise decisions

Then comes the pivotal verse in Matthew 6 verse 25. This is the verse which connects treasure, vision, and master with birds, flowers and kingdom. Verse 25 begins with “*Therefore or for this*

*reason I tell you, do not worry*". In Matthew 6:19-24, Jesus has helped us to understand the causes of our anxiety. Worry and anxious thought happens when we make poor decisions concerning what goes on in the depths of our hearts, what goes on in our soul. If anxiety is experienced by making poor decisions, then the way to freedom from anxiety is to make wise decisions. When we make wise decisions concerning our possessions, concerning our disposition, and about the master we serve then we will experience freedom from anxiety.

### Mammon

Jesus is helping us to see that when we choose earthly treasure, when we choose stinginess, when we choose to serve mammon, then we become anxious. The word mammon here helps us to understand the link Jesus makes between anxiety and choices. The Greek word mammon is related to the Hebrew word aman which means to trust. Mammon refers to the treasure in which we place our trust. Jesus reminds us that all mammon is unstable. If we place our complete and whole trust in objects or possessions, it will fail. If we place our complete and whole trust in money or financial institutions, it will fail. If we place our complete and whole trust in our spouse, our children, our parents, our siblings, that too will fail. If we place our trust in our skill or ability, it will fail. Anxiety is deeply connected to trust. Our anxiety is dependent on where we put our trust.

### Choose to trust God

Jesus is telling us that when we choose to trust God, we therefore don't need to worry. When we choose to trust God, then we will not be anxious. That is far easier to say than to practice. If you're like me, you probably wonder how to not be anxious. How do we learn to trust God? Is the anxiety that I'm feeling because I'm not fully trusting God? How can I not be anxious?

## Paradigm shift

Ultimately, it is the Holy Spirit within us which enables us to trust God more fully and more deeply. In his sermon on the mount, Jesus also shows us that the way of trusting God requires a complete paradigm shift in looking at the world. Greek philosophy presented a world wherein one's destiny was up to fate or fortune. In the first century, Greeks did all sorts of things to supply their needs. It seems that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the perspective is that you create your own destiny. You control your future; do what you want to keep yourself happy. Find within you the strength to overcome hurdles. You contain power within you to choose how your life will turn out. To extend this further, there is the perspective that you – or humanity as a collective – keep the world running and moving. There is the belief that google and facebook and twitter keep the world in motion. Or Parliament Hill or the White House or Wall Street. Or our smartphones and ipads and computers. But people, institutions, technology do not hold the world together. It is God.

## How to see the world

Jesus invites us into a different paradigm, a different world structure, a different way of seeing the world. In fact, this is part of what the sermon on the mount is all about. Pastor Greg and I have been emphasizing that Jesus' words are about character formation; about forming a people of God. To form God's people requires that we develop a particular identity. This identity impacts our understanding of self, our understanding of our relationship with God and others, and also our understanding of the world in which we live. In this passage, Jesus is showing us how to see the world. And in so doing, Jesus is forming our relationship with God the Father by reminding us to trust God our Father.

## Character Formation

Many read this text as moral exhortation, as a command or rule or law to not be anxious. This isn't just a rule or command to stop worrying because it takes far more than a rule or law to deal with the complexities and intricacies of our human anxiety. When I was a teenager, my mother and father told me repeatedly to stop worrying but it ironically only added to my anxiety because then I worried about how to not worry! My focus and my attention were on the fact that I was worrying. Being told to not worry doesn't quite help me to actually stop worrying. I must be given a way forward, practical ways to stop worrying. Jesus does this by offering us a different perspective, a different way to see the world. It demands a complete restructuring of the way we look at things. If our current way of looking at the world, of structuring the world is one in which we carry worry and cares, what is a different way?

## Look at birds and flowers

Jesus offers us a paradigm shift, a different way to see the world. Jesus offers us a different way to stop worrying. It isn't the common practice of yoga, of practicing mindfulness, of deep breathing. Instead, in verse 26 Jesus tells us to go outside and look at the birds and the flowers. According to Jesus, this is how we'll develop a paradigm shift. This is how we will stop worrying. Go outside and look at birds and flowers. This is the cure for our anxiety. The verb choice Jesus uses here implies a concentrated and focused look. To be engaged in, to stare at with a locked-in gaze, to look at in a sustained and concentrated way with a special interest or concern.

### Birds point us to God

I have a few friends who are avid bird watchers and photographers. In fact, whenever I receive a Christmas or birthday card from them, it is always with a photo of a bird or landscape that they took. When we look at the birds, what do we see? We see creatures that do not worry and are not anxious, they are not worried. And when we look more intently, when we look even closer, we will see God the Father. Why is it that these carefree creatures help us to see God? Because birds understand that they are not at the centre of the world. Birds do not cause the sun to go up and the sun to go down. Birds do not make the world go round or keep it going. Jesus invites us to look at the birds and flowers until we see the One who loves us, who made us, who holds us, who sustains us, who keeps everything together. The birds understand what we sometimes forget: that we do not make things, we don't sustain life, we don't hold everything together. It is God our Heavenly Father who does this. The birds and plants point us towards God.

### New Paradigm

The new paradigm which Jesus invites us into is a paradigm that is free of anxiety and care. It is a paradigm that understands and believes that God is at the centre. It is a paradigm which declares that God is the creator and maker and because of that, we trust Him. When we understand what the birds perceive, that God is holding all things together, we live out of a view that is free of unnecessary anxiety and worry.

### Do keep working

In looking at the carefree ways of the birds, there are a few things Jesus does not say about our new paradigm structure. First, Jesus does not tell us we are exempt from working or earning our living. Jesus does not intend that our trust in God means we do not work to provide our needs.

Indeed, when we look at the birds we notice they are very industrious. Birds are constantly working so they are nourished and sheltered. Birds gather and take and find what God has supplied on earth. God provides the means all around us so we must work for it. Hunger is not because God has not provided enough on earth but because humans have not distributed it equitably. God has provided lots of resources on earth, on land and in sea. That being said, I do know that there are some people, like my sister, who are unable to work for various health reasons.

### Idleness

There is a distinct difference between being anxious and being idle. Being anxious is about worrying. Being idle is about not working. To trust God's goodness, to trust God's provision, to trust and believe that God is at the centre does not relieve someone of their responsibility to work, in the ways they are physically and emotionally able.

### Do have responsibility

Secondly, Jesus does not tell us that we are exempt from being responsible for those entrusted to us. Creatures around us help us to see how they take responsibility for one another. God has placed us in families and in communities and it is our responsibility to care for and love one another in the ways that I am able. To trust God's goodness and God's provision doesn't relieve me of responsibility of providing for myself and others.

### Do plan for future

Thirdly, Jesus does not tell us that we are exempt from planning, from making decisions for our future, or from thinking. Jesus speaks against anxious thought instead. Creatures around us show

that planning is important. To trust God's goodness and God's provision doesn't relieve me of planning ahead.

### We will have trouble

Fourthly, Jesus doesn't tell us that trusting God means we are exempt from experiencing trouble. To be free from anxiety and worry, to trust God's goodness and God's provision does not mean we will have a life that is free of trouble and pain and heartache. This is a significant barrier for us all to trust God – knowing that trusting God does not mean our lives will be free of trouble. In fact in verse 34, Jesus acknowledges quite plainly and clearly that there is trouble and we do experience it: *“So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.”* Our freedom from anxiety doesn't happen because we have no trouble or no cause to worry. Freedom from anxiety doesn't happen because our relationships are flourishing or because our bank account is growing or because our cupboards are full. Freedom from anxiety happens because we trust God our Father. Because of the gift of the Holy Spirit, in the midst of our troubles and heartaches, we trust God the Father to hold us, to sustain us, to keep things together.

### Summary

Thus our promise of freedom from anxiety is not a promise of freedom from work or a promise of freedom from responsibility of others or a promise of freedom from planning ahead or even a promise of freedom from trouble. The promise of freedom from anxiety happens because of our trust in God.

## New Paradigm

If the first part of the passage, verses 19-24 is about a paradigm of generosity then the second part of the passage, verses 25-34 is about a paradigm where our good and faithful God is at the centre.

So one structure or one way to view the world is through the lens of anxiety and worry. This is the structure that puts mammon in the centre. This is the structure that trusts mammon – whether that is possession, power, wealth, family, persons – to sustain and to keep things going. The second structure, the one which Jesus invites us into, is a structure that views God at the centre. This structure affirms that God is creator and maker, the One who sustains, who loves, who holds all things together. What Jesus does tell us is to change how we think, to change how we look at and understand the world. Thus change takes place when we experience a paradigm shift and regard the world in a new way.

## Reminder

To remind us of the new structure, Jesus tells us to look at the birds and the flowers. When we study these creatures and plants we see our Heavenly Father.

## Seek Kingdom of God and righteousness

Looking at the birds and flowers is one way we learn to trust God; for it is one way we see God the Father. Jesus also shows us a second way to trust God, a second way to cure our anxiety. In verse 33, Jesus invites us to seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness. Jesus says this because he knows that we all need to strive for something. We all pursue something. We all need to find meaning and purpose in life. We all put our energy towards something. In other words, we all have ambitions. And that ambition is about our goals, our incentive for pursuing our goals. When

we choose to trust God, our first ambition ought to be His kingdom and his righteousness. After all, it is God's Kingdom alone that will last. Jesus tells us that when we seek first God's kingdom and righteousness, we will not experience anxiety.

What does it mean to seek God's Kingdom and righteousness? It means to seek Jesus' reign on earth. It means to seek right relationship with God, with others, and with self.

### Seek first

Note carefully Jesus' word choice in verse 33. Jesus says to seek first God's Kingdom. He doesn't say seek only God's Kingdom. Rather, our first ambition is God's Kingdom. Not seek first affluence or security or influence or power. This will lead to anxiety. Jesus does not say seek first your family or your family's needs. But seek first His Kingdom. There are other good and important ambitions that we must seek. We also seek family, friends, vocation. But when we seek first His Kingdom then everything else will fall into their proper place.

### Trust God

The antidote to anxiety and worry is to trust God. We trust God when we learn to look at the birds and the flowers – when we see God our Father who holds everything together; when we see God our Father who is at the centre. We trust God when we seek first his Kingdom and righteousness – a kingdom that has no end.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.