

The World Upside-Down: How Should the Church Respond to the Coronavirus? (#2)

What should we do when we feel anxious? Psalm 139:17–18; Matthew 6:25–34

Well, our third week of coming together virtually for church. I know for many of you this has been a challenging season, to say the least, adjusting to some of these new realities.

And I know for many of you having your kids at home 24/7 has been a tough transition. The wife of one of our pastors told him, “For years I have been telling you I shouldn’t homeschool. Now you get to see me prove that to you.”

Some of you are finally discovering what it’s like to be a stay at home parent, but nobody told you about these stay at home kids.

I’ve seen a few great memes about this over the last few days. **One was started by someone right here on our staff:, (Jodi Bailey, ServeRDU Team). She** tweeted out: *“For those attempting to work from home with kids: tell us something your kids are doing, but refer to them as your coworkers.”* She got all kinds of responses from people in our church:

- Christine Watkins (Chapel Hill): I told my coworker to take a couple hours off and take a nap. She’s currently kicking her office door and crying hysterically.
- Alicia Clark (North Durham): My coworker kept picking her nose, wiggling around on the couch and sticking her legs in the air as I read something to her.
- Kristen Johnson (Chapel Hill): My coworker just walked out the door and peed off the front porch.
- Tori Lye (Brier Creek): My coworker just pooped in her pullup and lied about it.

The theme of our weeks together is ‘World Upside Down’. Because that’s, of course, what this feels like for a lot of us. Here’s what we are going to think about today: **What should we do when we feel anxious about the future?**

It goes without saying that this whole season has brought on for many of us a whole new set of worries:

- How long is this going to last?
- What’s going to happen if I or someone I know gets sick?
- Will I be one of that subset that develops serious complications? *I had a friend in Missouri who thought he was getting sick (turns out he didn’t have the virus) but he said, “That 1 in 100 doesn’t sound like a lot until you think it’s you or one of your kids and then it sounds really scary!”*
- Or, “Will my parents be ok?”
- Or maybe, “How long am I going to be out of work? What is going to happen to my retirement?”
- How long are my kids going to be in the house?
- And seriously, when is Harris Teeter going to restock the toilet paper?

Prov 12:25 Anxiety in a man's heart **weighs him down**, but a good word makes him glad.

My friend David Platt says this verse depicts worry like extra weight you have to carry around.

- When you are getting ready for college, you wonder: “Am I going to get into the right school?” (BOOKS)

- What kind of job will I get? Will I be able to keep this job? Am I stuck in this job? (HAMMER)
- And, am I going to get married? Am I going to stay married or will I get divorced like my mom or dad? (WEDDING ALBUM)
- As you go through life, you wonder, “Are we going to have enough money to retire?” (PIGGY BANK)
- Will we be able to have kids? And what’s that like? (They are weights: SMALL DB)
- And kids, of course, bring a whole new set of worries:
 - Are they going to do well in school?
 - What if they hang out with the wrong crowd?
 - What if they date the wrong person? (BIGGER DB)
 - What if they need braces? Am I going to have enough money for that? 25LB DB. If not, does that mean they’ll have crooked teeth for the rest of their lives? Maybe my kids will be jobless because of their jacked-up teeth. Then they’ll live with me for the rest of my life. 55 LB DB
- **And then, on top of this already laden-down backpack, comes a pandemic.** This pack was already full with worries about School. Money. Work. Health. Marriage. And now we add concerns about **Toilet paper**.
- Is this how you feel? Just carrying a heavy burden.
- **Prov 12:25 Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad.** Today, *my hope is to give you a good word that makes you glad!. The news doesn't seem to have it. I don't personally. But Jesus does! So I want to encourage you with a good word from him.*

Matthew 11:28, Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” That sounds good, doesn’t it? *Peter*, who knew Jesus well, *tells us*: “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” 1 Peter 5:7 (NIV) You may not be strong enough to carry all these burdens, but he is.

You cast them onto him, in prayer, because he cares for you. Before we do anything else, let’s just spend few minutes thinking about how much Jesus cares for us:

- **Isaiah 49:15** “Can a woman forget her nursing child, or lack compassion for the child of her womb? Even if these forget, yet I will not forget you. 16 Look, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands.” He cares for you and thinks about you more than a new mother thinks about her baby!
- **Psalms 139:17–18**, 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! How much does God think about you? His thoughts about you number more than the sand of the seashore. How many is that?
 - Well, let’s ask this: How many **grains of sand are in this cup?** Guess? 2 million
 - **In this: Sandcastle?** 8 billion (1,000,000 vs. 1,000,000,000): in seconds, 11 days vs. 31 years, 8 months
 - Total number of grains of sand on earth? **7,500,000,000,000,000** (7.5 quintillion)
 - This is the number God chose to communicate how often he thinks about you. *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, what’s more, David said in vs 8, “Even when I made my bed in hell you came after me.” He loved us so much that even when we had wandered from him, rejected him, scorned him, insulted him, made ourselves his enemies, he gave his life for us. **Romans 5:8**: That’s how much he cares!

Let’s just rejoice in that for a few minutes...

Song about God’s faithfulness, casting cares upon him

Now, with that as a backdrop, let me take you to the place where Jesus most clearly instructs us about how to handle worry. (I have taught out of this passage to you before--it’s one of my favorites--but I feel like many of

us may hear it differently today, and when I heard my friend David Platt share some of these things a couple of weeks ago, I knew there was some stuff in it for us, too.)¹

Jesus first spoke it to a lot of people who had worries of their own--joblessness, Roman oppression, disease.

Matthew 6:25 "Therefore I tell you: Don't worry about your life..."

Three times in this passage Jesus will command, "Do not worry; do not be anxious." Hear this as a command from God!

First, what is anxiety? The American Psychological Association defines anxiety as an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes like increased blood pressure. Enough anxiety can produce anxiety disorders characterized by "states of excessive uneasiness and apprehension, oftentimes with compulsive behavior or panic attacks." The kind of thing you feel when I say, "This could last several more weeks."

We're talking about more here than just a concern for the future. A certain level of concern is normal, even healthy: Paul talks at one point in his letters about feeling "anxious" regarding his churches. It's very natural that we be concerned about our kids or our neighbor getting the virus; we should be concerned about what is happening around us. The problem is when that anxiety becomes so weighty that it displaces your trust in God. In fact, maybe that's a great definition:

Sinful anxiety is worry that becomes so weighty that it displaces your peaceful trust in God. *Now, one quick caveat—I know there can be a lot more going on when you experience anxiety besides just concern for the future. For some of us, past traumatic experiences or current physiological challenges contribute to this, and I'm not trying to reduce all anxiety problems as just spiritual issues--physiological problems or past trauma may be at play: If you suspect that might be you, I'd encourage you to check out some of our [resources](#) accessible on our homepage today to get the conversation started.*

Having said that, here are the pegs of Jesus' counsel in Matthew 6

"Don't worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing?" (vs. 25)

1. Your life is about more than anything the world can supply for you (vs. 25)

- "Your life is more than food," "more than clothing." You could add to that list your car, your house, your phone. Don't worry about your health; don't worry about what school you'll get into. Don't worry about who you'll marry. Don't worry about how long you'll live.
- Why? Because your life is about more than these things. Take anything you are worried about and put it in that blank.
- Your life is about more than ____: *What others think of you. What school you get into. Whether you marry or have kids. Whether or not you get a virus. What your bank account will be after this.*
- What IS life about? Life is about pleasing God and knowing him. When you strip everything else away, what matters most in life--all that matters, is knowing him.
- As we often say here, "Only one life to live twill soon be past..."

¹ David Platt, "7 Truths to Believe To Have Peace in a Pandemic: Matthew 6:25–34," given at McLean Bible Church in Washington, DC, March 2020.

- Eternity is going to reveal how the vast majority of things we spent so much time anxious about had no eternal significance
- In fact, for some of us, maybe that's been a big takeaway from this. The shakeup of our foundations shows us that the core of our lives have been built around things that don't last: Food, clothing, March Madness. Maybe it's time to ask whether you are living for the things that really matter! "Only one life to live twill soon be past..."

Your life is about more than anything the world can supply for you; it's about knowing God and doing his will.

2. Jesus says, **You can trust the God who eternally values you (vs. 26–30)**

26 Consider the birds of the sky: (This is odd advice. Go bird watching? **They don't sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them.** His point is that the birds aren't watching CNN or collating FB posts about possible worst case scenarios, and yet they are taken care of). **Aren't you worth more than they?**

28 And why do you worry about clothes? Observe how the wildflowers of the field grow: **They don't labor or spin thread.** 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these. 30 If that's how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, **won't he do much more for you—you of little faith?**

- Here's the logic: The wild grass in a field is super temporary. It is literally here today and gone tomorrow. And yet, God takes care that even grass in the field looks beautiful by putting pretty little flowers into.
- You, by contrast, you aren't temporary. You last forever! So if God takes care of temporary grass like that, won't he take even better care of the eternal you?
- The point is, **God is a God of abundance! Even in a time of scarcity he is a God of abundance.** He's the same gracious, fully attentive Heavenly Father he always was.
- Think about the value your Heavenly Father placed on you: When you and I were rebels--his enemies. In a posture of rejection to him--it was THEN that he died for us. That puts another exclamation point on this point! If he rescued you when you were his enemy, won't he take care of you now that you are his child!

3. Worry is useless anyway (vs. 27)

27 Can any of you add one moment to his life span by worrying?

- **Think about it: Can you change anything by worrying?** No. You're worrying is not going to affect one bit whether or not it happens.
 - Worrying doesn't help you get better prepped for it--it doesn't add anything to your life--in fact, if anything, it takes away from it! A study at the Mayo Clinic noted that 75% of all doctor visits are stress or anxiety related!
 - Furthermore, the vast majority of things we worry about never happen. You're worried about 1000 things, 999 of which are never going to happen, which means you've spent emotional capital on a bunch of things that were never going to happen. I've heard worry described as paying interest on a debt you may not even owe.
- So, instead of living your life in a constant state of worry about "what if's," you should build your life on the promises that whatever happens, "God is."
- One of our staff members, who suffers from chronic anxiety, said that the story of S, M, and A really helped her in this. S, M, A (or Rack, Shaq and Benny) found themselves in a genuinely anxiety-producing situation. Nebuchadnezzar had threatened to throw them into a fiery furnace! That's stressful. And God had not promised him that it wouldn't happen. So, how do they deal with that anxiety? They told King Nebuchadnezzar--our GOD IS able to deliver us--which means there is nothing you can do to us that is outside of his control and everything we go through is under his care, so EVEN IF you throw us into the

fiery furnace, we know we'll be taken care of. They met their worry about "what if" with the promise that God is, and even if the worst happens he'll be with us all the way.

- **Here's my challenge:** Take your WHAT IF'S and replace them EVEN IF'S that are built on the promises that GOD IS.

Which sets us up for #4: **4. Worry is (in fact) only logically consistent for atheists (vs. 31)**

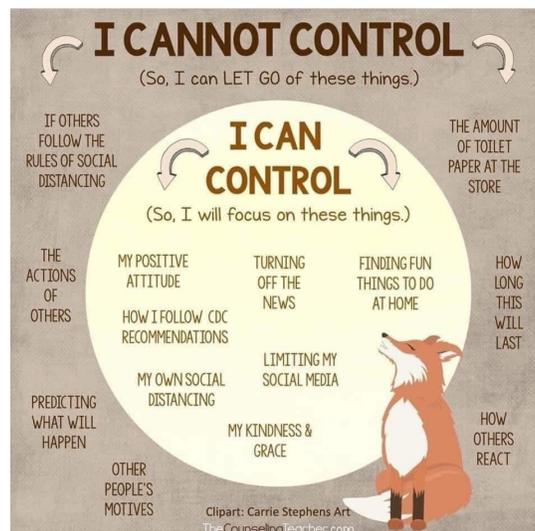
Vs. **31 So don't worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?'** **32 For the Gentiles (those who don't know God) eagerly (anxiously) seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.**

- Anxiety about the future just doesn't befit those who trust in a sovereign, faithful Father.
- Jesus is saying that if you don't know that God that way, it's logical for you to worry. How could you not be?
- But if you have a God who is all-loving, all-powerful, and ever-watchful, who demonstrated his commitment to you when he died on the cross, and revealed his power to save in the resurrection, it is patently *illogical* for you to worry.
- My friend David Platt says it this way: "Anxiety (of this kind) is a sign of unbelief in God." What you really believe about God is shown in a time of anxiety.
- Let me ask: What would change in your heart if Jesus appeared to you this moment and said, I've got this! I love you and I see everything. I could even tell you right now how many hairs are on your head. I've got this and I never stop thinking about you and I'm going to take care of you eternally and even this I'm going to use for good.
- Wouldn't that be a comfort? Because that's what he says to you.

So... **33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you.**

5. If you focus on pleasing God, he'll worry about all the rest (vs. 33)

- You, believer--you focus on doing what God wants. And if you do, he attaches a CRAZY promise to it. I'll take charge of supplying all that you need. And friend, God is not susceptible to the Coronavirus. His stores never close and never run out of stuff. His shelves are always full! He never price gouges and his angels never get sick. He always has enough hope, strength, love, and purpose to spare.
- You focus on what you are supposed to do. I saw this, and thought it was helpful.



- Let me tell you: Some of my greatest moments of personal growth have come in times of uncertainty and anxiety. It was like my foundations being shaken forced me to ask what really mattered. And these times drove me back to “Only one life to live will soon be past, only what’s done for Christ will last.” When it’s all said and done, “all that matters is whether I pleased God and did his will and am going to hear “Well done, good and faithful servant.”
- Is that happening to you right now? Let me ask: If you died today (and I know that’s a morbid thought, but if you did), would you hear from him, “Well done good and faithful servant?” Is that what you would hear if you died today? Only one life to live... What will his verdict on your life be?

Jesus concludes: **34 Therefore don’t worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.**

6. New troubles are met with new mercies (vs. 34)

- I’ve told you before how much I love this verse. I read, “Don’t worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself and I think, “Well, that’s exactly what I was worried about with tomorrow!” But guess what will also be there tomorrow? Or better, “who” will be there tomorrow. God. And the God who gave you strength yesterday will supply you strength for tomorrow.
- God promises to give enough manna for the day. Manna was the daily provision of bread God gave the children of Israel when they were wandering foodless and homeless in the wilderness. He gave them some every day, just enough for the day. The way most of us want to deal with worry is stockpile enough that we feel invulnerable tomorrow. But that’s just not how God works.
- Whatever challenges tomorrow holds, you can be confident that God will give you what you need in that moment. Tomorrow may have plenty of trouble, but a God greater than the trouble will be there, too.

So, for God’s people--you don’t have to feel anxious about this. Trust him, and turn our anxieties into prayer, prayer to Heavenly Father who said he knows what you need before you even ask, always watches you, and is ready to supply for you.

This is the GOOD WORD Proverbs talks about! You can cast your cares upon him. He can sustain this backpack. In fact, my friend DP when he was teaching on this brought a Navy Seal on stage... Don’t just give him the pack, give him you! “Come unto me, all you who labor...” Give him you!

So, let me ask:

- **As these foundations are shaken, are you trusting in Jesus?** Maybe this despair should drive you to Jesus.
- **For the person not yet a Christian, are you ready to see how futile life is without Jesus?** You see, life will demonstrate to you that you have 2 problems: You are incapable of sustaining life for you and those you love; more importantly, 2, you are separated from God by a problem you can’t overcome. Sin. Jesus overcame that for you, but you have to receive him. You can receive that gift of salvation just by accepting that through a simple prayer, “Jesus, I receive your offer to save me,” and by surrendering your life to him as Lord.
- For the one who is a Christian, Do you see how safe you are in the arms of your Heavenly Father? He takes care of the grass, he’ll take care of you. He died for you when you were a rebel, he sought you when you weren’t looking for him, chased you down when you were running from him. Surely you are safe with him now that you are his child.

Worship leader: Isaiah 40:27 Jacob, why do you say, and, Israel, why do you assert: “My way is hidden from the Lord, and my claim is ignored by my God”? **28** Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the whole earth. He never becomes faint or weary... **30** Youths may become

faint and weary, and young men stumble and fall, 31 but those who trust in the Lord will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not become weary, they will walk and not faint.

[Song about God's faithfulness](#)