

Matthew 6:25-34

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Preacher: Reese Winkler

[0:00] My name is Reese Winkler. This is my first time, so prayers are appreciated as we open up the Word of God together this morning. Tiny bit about me, and then a lot about God to follow. So I am a teacher, so I teach Bible class, mostly middle schoolers, so I'm just going to pretend like you're all sixth grade students.

It'll make it a lot easier for me. And my wife, Amy, is a nurse at the hospital over in Gainesville. Okay, so let's read together. We're going to be in Matthew 6, again, 25 through 34. I'm going to go ahead and read from verse 24.

And this is the Word of God. And it says, 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, or mammon. 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 life not more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns. Yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

[1:10] Are you not of more value than they? And which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to a span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow.

They neither toil nor spin. Yet I tell you, even Solomon in all of his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 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?

Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, What shall I eat, or what shall we drink, or what shall we wear? For the Gentiles seek after these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore, do not be anxious for tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself.

Sufficient is the day its own trouble. So, at the surface level in reading this text, I just need to tell you guys, this is a hard text. Not so much to preach, it's pretty straightforward, but it's a hard text to hear, especially in our culture.

[2:18] And so know from the outset, there are going to be things that we talk about today that we'll see in the Scripture that are going to challenge you, they're going to push you. And we have this tendency, I think, a lot of times, when we hear a hard word, to brace ourselves against it, and to harden ourselves against what the Word of God is saying.

And so I would encourage you this morning, soften your heart. Know that this is meant to be helpful to you, that the Word of God is written, as Nathan says all the time, for God's glory and for our good.

Right? This is supposed to hurt a little bit, and if you're not getting hurt ever by the Word of God, then you're either perfect, which is unlikely, or you are not listening to what the Word is actually saying.

So I would challenge you this morning, as I speak, I'm going to try to soften it a little bit, and empathize with you, because I'm walking the same path that you guys are.

I feel anxious. And what a good first text to preach, right? As I'm preparing, right, I have to look at myself formulating an argument against being anxious.

[3:22] And so join me as we look together at what the Word of God has to say about anxiety. Today it may seem overwhelming at times and seem like a message only pointing out a deep flaw in the way that many of us function on a day-to-day basis.

However, I hope that you will see our text as a message of hope as we throw ourselves on to Christ, relying on Him to battle and overcome our anxiety. So society has a lot to say about anxiety. And any time that society has a lot to say about anything, we need to be careful, right? Our world is full of arguments about anxiety. There's so many books, self-help classes, lots of money that has gone into teaching about anxiety.

So we've got to be careful not only about how we think about it, but also how we're affected by worldly influence. This also means that we need to undo some of our assumptions we get from the culture, right?

So before we explore God's Word, we need to undo some of those things, which makes for a long introduction this morning. But be patient, we will get to the text. So according to the National Institute of Mental Health, anxiety disorders affect the largest percentage of Americans of any other type of mental health disorder.

[4 : 39] The numbers are around 19% of Americans fall into this category of disordered anxiety, which means that about one in five people self-report that anxiety affects them so much that it interferes with relationships, jobs, and so forth.

Now, one in five, you may be sitting there thinking, well, I just got to be four out of five, right? But unfortunately, the news is a little bit more bleak than that, right? Our society's baseline of what is normal anxiety is way higher than what Scripture would call us to.

Driven by greed, power, and the desire to be liked, Americans have developed a high tolerance for anxiety, and in large part, the church has been inoculated from the pervasive view of our anxious tendencies.

So as we're thinking about anxiety today, I want us to be thinking about how many of our actions on a day-to-day basis are targeted at alleviating feelings of anxiety.

The way that you dress to please others or to catch attention, doing something so that you can say that you did or post it, looking like you work hard in front of your employer and feeling anxious about that, or distracting yourself from anxiety with music, video games, God forbid, exercise or outdoor activities, even reading the Word of God, praying, reading Christian books, and coming to church so that you don't have to feel guilt later, right?

[6 : 07] The focus of doing even good activities is on taking away anxiety and not on the glory of God, then we're doing it wrong. We have the wrong mindset. For many in society, anxiety has become so normal that we're unable to recognize it and call it out in ourselves and in others.

And we fail to take personal responsibility for our anxiety. So the world seems to recognize several sources of anxiety. Not all of them are invalid. Certainly there's truth to it.

But they normally say some combination of genetics, endless possible life circumstances, and our learned responses to our environment constitute a cause for anxiety. However, the world will never say that anxiety is somehow our fault or that there's some moral weight to being or feeling anxious. Unfortunately, the way that we talk about in the church, think about and respond to our own anxiety would reveal that many of us have bought into this lie, though we may not say it on the surface.

John MacArthur in his commentary on the text writes, Worry is the sin of distrusting the promise and providence of God, yet it is a sin that Christians commit perhaps more frequently than any other.

[7 : 20] So if this is true, if we commit the sin of anxiety as much as we commit any other sin, why are we not talking about it more? Why are we not thinking about it more, encouraging each other more, and so on?

And I think a lot of it has to do with the way that we speak about it. We take our language from the way that the culture talks about it, and then that transfers into the way that we think about it.

So this morning I invite you, as we look at God's Word, to see what the Scripture has to say about it, but then I would encourage you to examine your own anxious tendencies and the root of them.

So our understanding of the cure for anxiety is similarly distorted by society's influence. Their prescription would be some combination of therapy, medication, and self-care.

And even though those results from these activities that culture says work on anxiety are barely better than the combination of placebo effects and the natural cycles of human emotion, which normally cycle in and out of periods of anxiety or depression after six months for most people.

[8 : 25] So in other words, culture's version of the cure or the treatment for anxiety is barely better than doing nothing at all. So we can think about this shallow treatment of anxiety, this symptom-level treatment of anxiety, like treating the common cold.

So we've all had a cold before, and we've probably all used some type of symptom relief to try to get rid of its effects. We've also all probably tried to push through a bad cold or take a pill or two instead of giving our body what it really needs, time to rest and recuperate.

And like anxiety, you might be able to hold the symptoms at bay for a while, but you won't get better until you give the body what it really needs. Like a cold, anxiety will not get better until we give our soul what it really needs, which is a renewed heart before God.

And while we aren't to condemn the use of medication in extreme circumstances, talking it out with someone, or surface-level self-care as a useful symptom management tool, it would be foolish to neglect to examine the spiritual root of anxiety as well.

As scripture would call us to do. It would also be foolish to think that simply because anxiety may have biological roots, that there aren't spiritual roots and consequences as well.

[9 : 40] A tendency towards anger, sexual promiscuity or perversion, and laziness all have biological components, yet we would not excuse a murderer, we wouldn't excuse an adulterer, and we wouldn't excuse slothful behavior.

Right? So we shouldn't also excuse anxiety just because it might have biological roots. And we are in a sinful world because of the fall, which means our bodies are corrupted as well.

The point of Christian living is not to follow the flesh, but to fight against the flesh for what God desires. So our text this morning strongly denounces the idea that anxiety is a product of factors we can't control.

Similarly, we ought not to think that because anxiety is an emotion, that it's totally out of our control. Scripture commands emotions all the time. And if you want a bigger picture of this, there's a great episode of Ask Pastor John, which is John Piper, and it's called The God Who Commands Our Emotions.

So some examples of emotions that are commanded are forbidden in the Bible. Some that are commanded are joy, gratitude, fear of the Lord, delight in the Lord, to love God, to love others, to hope, to be sorrowful, to weep with those who weep, to rejoice with those who rejoice.

[10 : 52] And of course, love is not merely an emotion, and joy is not merely an emotion, but there are certainly feeling aspects to it. The point is that we can't just turn them off and on, but that doesn't mean that they can't be commanded because they are.

And then forbidden, we're forbidden from the fear of man, from fear in general, from the love of the world, from sinful anger, and in our text this morning, forbidden from anxiety.

So just because you don't have total control at all times to flip it on and off doesn't mean that it can't be commanded. So we've got to get that straight in our minds. Anxiety, like all other emotions, is a result or an extension of belief, right?

So an emotion reflects a deeper thing, and that is belief. John Bloom at Desiring God writes in an article on this topic, God designed your emotions to be gauges, not guides.

They're meant to report to you, not to dictate you. The pattern of your emotions gives you a reading on where your hope is because they are wired into what you believe and what you value and how much.

[11 : 56] That's why emotions like delight, affection, fear, anger, joy, etc. are so important in the Bible. They reveal what your heart loves, trusts, and fears. Pleasure is the measure of your treasure.

Isn't that nice? Because the emotion of pleasure is a gauge that tells you what you love. Another commentator in our text describes it as Jesus' treasure test in reference to what the preceding passage that Clay preached on last week refers to.

So in other words, you can know what you're treasuring by examining your emotional attachment to those things. Christ here in our text specifically ties anxiety to treasure or to worship.

So we've got to ask ourselves the question, what does your anxiety, what does our anxiety, tell us about what we worship? Is it our family, money, appearance, providence, or your sense of self-worth before others and before God or a job performance?

So a quick word of encouragement before we dive into our text. Maybe you're feeling overwhelmed at the thought of that, wow, my anxiety that I feel all the time is sinful?

[13 : 02] What? Maybe this is bad news for you. However, our text provides a cure along with it. But we have to be willing to go deep enough in digging out the root of sin. So I want to revisit really quickly our cold analogy.

And I know that no analogy is perfect, but with your permission, I'd like to beef mine up a little bit to be a more accurate description of our dealings with anxiety. So I'll invite you into a different dimension for a second as we change some basic assumptions about colds, medicine, science, and the way that the world works in general.

So some of you will find this helpful if you can track with me. So I have bad news and I have good news. So the bad news is that you're going to catch the cold every day, or sorry, every week this year.

So no matter what you do, you're going to catch the cold every week this year. But there's good news along with it, right? There's a vaccination for the cold. Hip, hip, hooray, right? So you can prevent the cold or you can take this vaccination before you get sick or you can take this vaccination after you get sick.

Okay, it's your choice. And in this fanciful world, cold medicine is also an option. So you could just kind of knock out the symptoms that are there as well. So this leaves us with a few options.

[14:18] Some are better than others. So the first option, this is the best option, is to take the vaccination before you get sick, right? You know it's going to happen, so you take the prescription for it before it happens.

Number two is an okay option. Probably not your best one, but you could wait until the symptoms start coming up and then choose to take the vaccination or take the medicine, right? That's an okay option.

And then option number three, take the cold medicine that will alleviate some of your symptoms. So you get sick, then you pop a Benadryl and hope for the best, right? Not a great option.

And then our worst option, we can get the cold every week and accept our new normal. So this should frame the way that we think about the text this morning, how we think about anxiety.

And even though there's some bad news, right, that anxiety is sinful, there's good news, right?

There's a cure along with it. So we can either seek to prevent anxiety with prayer, meditation on the Word, and renewed daily belief.

[15:20] We can treat anxiety once we're already flustered with prayer, meditation on the Word, and renewed daily belief. Or we can keep using shallow methods to make the symptoms of feeling anxious temporarily subside.

Or we can just settle for anxious lives and try to get by. So it's bad news that our anxiety is sinful unbelief, which we'll see. But it's probably worse, and it's probably worse than we originally thought. But we can prevent it, and we can deal with it. And when it does come, we can repent before a God who has offered us grace upon grace to sojourn through this life. God knows our frame.

He knows His children that are living in a sinful world will be tempted by only looking at what's around them in the world and becoming anxious. So let's call anxiety what it is together, do our best to examine ourselves, and lay our sinful anxiety at the foot of the cross as we take up biblical prescription for dealing with worry.

So anxiety, again, is a symptom of a deeper problem. It's not a cause, or it's not the issue in and of itself, but it's a symptom of something deeper.

[16:27] Today, we're going to be looking at anxiety as a symptom or as a result of a few common areas of sinful unbelief, how to prevent those things, and see how our Lord would have us respond when we recognize feelings of anxiety.

So in our text this morning, and from surrounding texts from the Sermon on the Mount, we'll see anxiety as a symptom of unbelief, specifically a symptom of a worldly focus, a symptom of unbelief in God's provision, a symptom of unbelief in God's wisdom, a symptom of the fear of man, a symptom of prayerlessness or wrongful prayer, and then we'll look together at some points of application.

I'll repeat those headings as we go. So first heading, anxiety as a symptom of unbelief. So like other sins, anxiety is rooted in the unbelief of specific characteristics and promises of God.

So any sin, no matter how big or how small, is a statement to God saying our way is better. And we don't always do this consciously, and in fact, most of the time we don't do this consciously, but the action that we take is saying to God, what I wanted to do in this moment is better than what you've said is the right thing to do.

Anxiety and belief are clearly tied together in our passage this morning. If you look back over it, you have this continued echoing of do not be anxious, but believe that God will provide.

[17 : 53] The command to not be anxious is specifically mentioned three times. In verse 30, our Lord connects anxiety with belief. He says, 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?

Right? So you have those two things specifically tied together. The belief that God will provide or the unbelief that God won't provide is a symptom of belief or not having faith.

John MacArthur in his commentary on this text writes, Worry is not a trivial sin because it strikes a blow both at God's love and God's integrity. Worry declares our Heavenly Father to be untrustworthy in His Word and His promises.

To avow belief in the inerrancy of Scripture and in the next moment to express worry is to speak out of both sides of our mouth. Worry shows that we are mastered by our circumstances and by our own finite perspectives and understanding rather than mastered by God's Word.

Worry is therefore not only debilitating and destructive but maligns and impugns God. God has made abundant promises to us throughout the Scriptures. The question is whether or not we will believe them and hold fast to them in times of trouble or will we live a life of anxiety and worldly comfort.

[19 : 16] So first question for us, do we know the promises of God? Do we have specific things that we can take up in God's Word to fight anxiety with? Do we know the characteristics of God as they're expressed in Scripture or is it kind of this like general, well yeah, God's loving and He's kind and He's powerful and He's sovereign.

We know these words but we need to know things in His Word that we can run to in times of anxiety and comfort. In our chapter, in our text this morning, verse 33, the promise, seek first God's kingdom and all of these things, daily provision, will be added to you.

Great promise right there. And then in Isaiah 41, verses 8 through 10, it says, You whom I took from the ends of the earth and called from its farthest corner saying to you, You are my servant.

I have chosen you and not cast you off. Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, and I will uphold you in my righteous right hand.

So together, let's look at our next heading as we see specific areas of unbelief that anxiety indicates in our hearts. So point number two, anxiety is a symptom of a worldly focus or worldly treasure.

[20 : 33] So worldly focus versus Godward focus has been a major, if not the major theme of the Lord's teaching here in the Sermon on the Mount since at least the beginning of chapter 6. So Nathan taught, and if you didn't hear the series, we'll call it a series, on the Lord's Prayer.

I would encourage you to go back and listen to those. But we see God's glory, not our glory, being the focus of prayer in chapter 6, verses 9 through 13. And then throughout, we have God's reward in prayer and giving and in fasting instead of the temporary reward of appearing spiritual before others.

So again, we get to choose, am I going to choose God's reward or worldly reward? And then seeking heavenly treasure over worldly treasure in verses 19 through 24. And then in our passage, seeking God's kingdom and His righteousness instead of our little kingdoms.

We can only choose one of these two, as Clay put it well last week, right? We only get one choice, and our call throughout is to be singularly focused on God's kingdom.

Anxiety, therefore, is a result of treasuring or overvaluing the things of this world. But we are called to have minds that are set on heavenly things, right? Colossians 3, 1 through 4 says, If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

[21 : 55] Set your minds on things of above, not on the things of this earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ and God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will also appear with Him in glory.

So if we can treat this world as passing, treat our life as a vapor, our death as imminent, your primary citizenship being found in heaven, in your life, as a tool in the hand of God, then you won't be anxious.

One of the primary ways that we tend to fall into this worldly mindset is in our facade of self-sufficiency. So this brings us to our next point. Anxiety as a symptom of unbelief in God's provision.

And this is point number three. The primary thrust of our text is what we're looking at here, right? The symptom of unbelief in God's provision. So if you look with me at our text, you'll see the pattern or the way that it's structured.

We have the overall heading, then we have this repeated pattern that he uses. So the repeated pattern is a topic, a supporting example, an argument of lesser to greater, and then we have this little argument in between of unproductivity in verse 27, and then concluding with an exhortation and closing rationale.

[23 : 09] So we have these two topics of food and clothing, and then supporting examples of God's provision for birds and for flowers, and then we have this argument of lesser to greater.

If he so feeds and clothes them, will he not also feed and clothe you? So the overall heading, verse 25, do not be anxious about what you will eat, drink, or wear.

And then we have several reasons given not to be anxious about food or clothing. First reason, you are more valuable than birds and flowers. Yet God feeds and clothes them.

How much more will he then feed and clothe you? In verse 27, we learn that anxiety about our lives is totally unproductive. And if you think about your own anxiety, think about what you have produced by working yourself up.

Nothing, right? We don't accomplish anything with our anxiety, and that's clearly our origin scripture. Unbelievers worry about these things. Our next reason, our next argument is that the Gentiles think in this way.

[24 : 12] They worry about food and clothing because they don't believe that God will provide for them, and it would be foolish for us to think like unbelievers in reference to God. Our next reason, God provides what we need daily, and each day has enough things to worry about, so don't worry about tomorrow.

And again, in line with our experience and implication from verse 34, or worrying about tomorrow makes you unable to accomplish what you're meant to do today. And all of us have found this to be true, right?

If we spend all day worrying about what we're supposed to do tomorrow, we don't get anything done today, right? We know that's true, and yet we don't have the tools or seem to have the tools in our arsenal to battle anxiety.

When we believe or when we begin to believe that we are providing for ourselves, we become anxious then when our provision is jeopardized. our anxiety about money, food, and clothing is an indication of unbelief that God will provide and is declaring to God that you have provided for yourself in the past, right?

I hope you're tracking with me there. There's no reason to be anxious unless you believe that you're the one who has been providing up into this point so far. So it's actually a statement of pride to God to feel anxious because we're saying in the past I've provided and now I'm going to be anxious about how I'm going to provide in the future, but when we have faith in God, ask Him to provide, then He gets the glory.

[25 : 37] So God has sustained us and clothed us and our family every day since we've been alive and He will continue to do so. The question is will you trust Him? A fabulous example in church history of this type of reliance on the Lord for life and ministry can be found in the 19th century missionary and pastor George Mueller.

Moving to Bristol in 1832, he pastored a church named Bethesda Chapel from then 1832 until his death in 1898. In 1835, after seeing hundreds of orphans in the surrounding community with their basic needs unattended to, he opened four houses able to take in 130 children.

In 1846, he bought more land to begin building even more orphan houses and then from 1849 1849 to 1875, more houses were opened that could house 2,050 orphans at one time, all of which are still standing today.

Mueller, throughout his life, would care for 10,000 orphans. His ministry brought in the equivalent of over 112 million dollars of today's money and yet, he never asked for any of it.

He never solicited money, he never said, we're in need, we need this, he just prayed and allowed God to provide. He didn't start with any significant amount of money or fortune and he never took a salary.

[27 : 02] Mueller was a man of faithful prayer and trust and God to meet the needs of his nuclear family and his extended family of over 10,000 people. In A.T. Pearson's biography of Mueller, he writes of one of these times when he was looking at purchasing new lands of pressing faith in God

to accomplish the building of those new orphan houses and he writes, should God provide large amounts of money for this purpose, it would still further illustrate the power of prayer offered in faith to command help from on high.

A lot of ground spacious enough would at the outset cost thousands of pounds but why should this daunt a true child of God whose father was infinitely rich? Mr. Mueller and his helper sought day by day to be guided of God and as faith fed on this daily bread of contact with him, the assurance grew strong that help would come and so it did.

When we ask and rely on God for provision and then he provides, he gets the glory for that provision. But when we fail to see him as the provider, we begin to believe that we're the ones providing for the needs and then we get the glory and success or feel anxious about the threat of failure, right?

And so by asking God beforehand to provide, seeing him as the giver of our jobs and of our provision, he then gets the glory on the back end. Right?

So faith in God's character and promise cannot coexist with worry. Mueller once said, and this quote is on the front of your bulletin, he says, the beginning of anxiety is the end of faith and the beginning of true faith is the end of anxiety.

[28 : 43] So if we trust God for salvation to perfect us eternally, to cleanse our sin from us, why can't we trust him to meet our daily needs?

Yet isn't it so easy to fall into this trap? It really feels like we're providing. Just as God provides work for the birds to do so that they can eat, he gives us opportunity to work and to provide for our own. So let's pray often to this end, asking God to help us recognize our dependence on him for our daily need, asking him to provide so then we can thank him and praise him when he does.

So we've looked at several lesser to greater arguments. This argument that if he does this little thing, if he cares for these little birds and these lilies will he not also care for you because you're more valuable.

So I'd like to make my own lesser to greater argument. And technically, I think it's a less to lesser argument. If God desires for us not even to worry about the basic life needs, how much less should we worry about the trivial things that we spend most of our time anxious about, right?

[29 : 48] We're all here this morning. Most of us are dressed at least pretty nice. All of us, I would assume, don't have to worry too much about where our next meal is going to come from. We can get it one way or another.

Yet we find ourselves worrying about more than just our basic needs being met. Often we find ourselves not content with what God has deemed appropriate for our lives, which brings us to our next point of unbelieving anxiety.

Point number four, anxiety as a symptom of unbelief in God's wisdom. And this is where I think most of us, if and when we struggle with anxiety, this in a lot of ways is kind of what comes to mind in my heart.

And I think for a lot of us at CFC, this is really where it hits home because God has promised to provide for us and sustain us, but often we're not content with the basics.

We want more than the basics. We desire more than what God has planned for our lives. This shows itself in several areas and some common ones as believers are in materialism, the wanting of new things, more money, nice things, which ultimately only serve for our enjoyment rather than the furthering of the kingdom.

[31 : 01] We're also not content often with our situation or our environment. We want our family situation to be easier or better. We don't want to be single anymore. We want life to be easier.

We want a better job. We want better grades and fill in the blank. When we worry about these things, we say to God that what He has given isn't enough and Christ isn't enough to satisfy.

I know that may sound harsh again this morning, but let's look at what the Scripture has to say about the way that God provides in His wisdom. So a really common verse, but I don't know how often it's necessarily applied to anxiety.

Excuse me. Romans 8, 28 through 30, a common verse again. And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good. For those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. Right? So we have this massive statement at the outset that God works all things, that He's in control of all things and they're

working together for a purpose.

[32 : 09] So I don't want to skip over that because it's important to know that God's in control. He's working out everything that happens in the universe around us, but also in our individual lives to an end.

And that end is found at the end of verse 29, to be conformed into the image of His Son. That's God's definition of good that He's just said He promised to do.

So again, everything in our life is working towards making us more like Christ in the way that God has designed it to be. Another common verse that we know, Ephesians 1, 11 through 14.

I would encourage you to go ahead and turn there with me for this one. Maybe not as common as the last. So go ahead and turn to Ephesians 1. We'll be reading verses 11 through 14. And it says, In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him, who works all things according to the counsel of His will, so that we who are the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory.

In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, we're sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance, until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory.

[33 : 37] So again, we have this huge statement. Again, God also works all things so that we might be to the praise of His glory. So when you put those two things together, we have a statement.

God works all things together for good to be made more like Christ, that we might be, we might exist for the praise of His glory. So whatever happens, again, in our lives serves this purpose.

Therefore, our lack of contentment with what God has placed in our lives, often revealing itself through anxiety about our situation, says that we would rather get what we want than to be made more like Christ in the way that He has decided to do so.

So again, let that sink in. A lack of contentment with what God has placed in our lives, says that we would rather get what we want than to be made more like Christ. This includes the process of our sanctification.

This is kind of a challenging argument to make, and I want to be clear. When I was talking to Nathan yesterday about it, I just asked him, like, does that make sense? Like, should I include this? And I feel like it's a really relevant part of the Christian life, this frustration with the process of our sanctification.

[34 : 49] We often get frustrated to the point of anxiety with the pace at which we're growing. We get frustrated with the fact that we're still battling the same things over and over.

So have you ever asked yourself this question, why doesn't God take away my temptation? Or why am I still struggling with the same sin I was five years ago? This is a very common frustration that we have as believers.

So in one sense, we should never be content with our relationship with God, right? We want to be zealous. We want to be striving after a deeper relationship with Him and knowing Him to a greater extent. Is that not the purpose of the Christian life?

But when this desire turns into guilt as we beat ourselves up for our performance over the last week, the last month, or the last year, it gets in the way of accepting the grace that God has provided as a covering for our sin.

We're effectively saying to God, thank you for my salvation, but now it's my turn to make myself worthy to be your child. We often find ourselves guilty or ashamed before God because we feel like we aren't good enough.

[35 : 54] And we've got to remember that's the whole point of the gospel. That is the message of the gospel, that we're not adequate before a holy God to be a good enough brother or sister or son or daughter or husband or good enough at our job.

But in Christ, we have sufficiency. In Christ, we are, in fact, worthy before a holy God. Not because of our works, but because of what He's done in us.

We have to understand our dependence and the synergism, us and God working together on our sanctification according to His will. Paul, writing to the church in Galatia about salvation through faith alone, by grace alone, says in chapter 3, verses 2-3, let me ask you only this.

Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish, having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Of course, the answer to that question is no.

Just as the birds gather what the Lord has provided for them without worry, we must learn to do the same in our own sanctification, not full of anxiety, but simply taking up what He has provided for us daily in His Word and the church as we seek to walk with Him in obedience.

[37 : 08] When we try to repay God back for our salvation and we begin to feel anxiety because we've placed the pressure on ourselves to earn back our salvation, which has been freely given to us by God and we effectively say that the cross of Christ is not enough.

Strive for godliness by all means, but don't worry about where God has you in your faith and in your walk. He has promised to sustain us to the end and to make us more like Christ in the process.

So, along with the promise that we already have in Romans 8-30, Philippians 1-6 says, and I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ.

Oftentimes, we're anxious about the way that we appear before God, but sometimes this anxiety that we feel about our own holiness is a result of not looking good in front of other people.

And so, this brings us to our fifth point. Anxiety is a symptom of the fear of man or the desire to please man more than we desire to please God. So, again, the symptom of the fear of man.

[38 : 12] This is a huge source of anxiety for many in the church and we clearly see this taught already in the Sermon on the Mount. Chapter 6, verses 1-8, we see righteousness either to be seen by others through generosity, prayer, or fasting instead of seeking after the heavenly reward that God gives us for those actions.

Anxiety about what others think of us is the fear of man spending significant time worrying, thinking, getting worked up about what others will think is the fear of man. And many believers are raised and function as people pleasers primarily and not as God pleasers and end up living a crippling life, enslaved life to the opinions of others.

And this has many consequences, one of which is that it stifles our ability to share our faith. Right? If we're so concerned, more concerned with what people think than what God thinks, then it cripples our ability to share our faith.

John Bloom, again, he says, we will obey the one whom we fear. So, whichever one we fear the most, that's where our actions and our obedience will then follow.

Again, we can only choose one, the fear of man or the fear of God. Deuteronomy 10-12 says, Now Israel, what does your Lord require of you but that you fear the Lord your God, walk in His ways to love Him and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

[39 : 40] If you'll turn with me to Matthew 10-26 and following. Again, Matthew 10-26 says, this is Christ's teaching, so have no fear of them for nothing is covered that will not be revealed or hidden that will not be known.

What I tell you in the dark say in the light and what you hear whispered proclaim on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.

Rather, fear Him who can destroy both the soul and the body in hell. Again, Jesus talking about birds. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny and yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.

But even the hairs on your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows. We must trust that pleasing God in all circumstances at whatever cost will offend and displease others ever more so in our age.

But when we back down in our beliefs, fail to share our faith when we know we ought to or simply live as we ought to for fear of social consequence, losing a job, etc. We say to God that we are making our kingdom the priority instead of His.

[41 : 10] Okay, last point. Point number six. Anxiety as a symptom of prayerlessness or wrongful prayer. And to see this, we do need to go outside of our text again, but we'll see it in the surrounding teaching on the Sermon on the Mount.

So, look back with me, turn back to Matthew 6 if you're not there already, and we'll reflect on verses 9-13, the Lord's Prayer. So, as we read it, we'll find that if we have Christ's attitude in prayer as He models, we'll alleviate many of the sources of anxiety we feel today.

So, our Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your name. If we trust in the declaration of God as our Holy Father, because of the redemptive work of Christ, our focus will be heavenward for His glory and not for our own.

So, the fear of God will far outweigh the fear of man. Next, your kingdom come, your will be done. If we focus on God's will being done and His kingdom coming as our focus instead of our own will and

our own authority, we'll be content with whatever He brings into our lives to accomplish His purposes.

Give us this day our daily bread. If we trust Him to be our provider for daily provision and forsake the sin of pride, believing we are self-sufficient, we will not be anxious about where money will come from to provide for our families.

[42 : 28] And we will be content with the grace He gives us daily to sustain us. And then lastly, forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

If we trust Him to forgive our sin as He works forgiveness into us and to keep us from temptation, we will not worry about the progress of our sanctification or try to earn back our salvation.

And maybe we pray and maybe you feel like, well, I spend enough time in prayer, yet I still struggle a lot with anxiety. Oftentimes, we're not focusing on God taking away, sorry, we are focusing on God taking away painful circumstances which aren't to be the chief aim of our prayer.

So maybe our focus is off, maybe we're not doing it often enough, or maybe we're not equipped to specifically pray to the end God would have us do. And we'll take a look at that in just a minute.

Okay, and then Philippians 4 is another great example of prayer as a prevention tool for anxiety.

This is a very common verse. So let's read it together.

[43 : 35] It says, Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone for the Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything 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 understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. So, many read this passage as only being a treatment or a prescription once we feel anxious.

But in fact, a more straightforward reading of the text simply shows the command not to be anxious and then the means to prevent anxiety through prayer. So, look or listen.

Again, it says, do not be anxious about anything but in prayer by supplication let your requests be made known to God. So, it can be done beforehand. In fact, it's not just a tool to respond to anxiety with prayer.

And then we have the promise that God's peace will guard us. From what, we may ask. Not the circumstance we prayed for necessarily but from the original anxiety we fight.

[44 : 40] From the attitude that God isn't in control or doesn't know what's best. So, as we thank God for all he has given, turn our requests over to him, relinquish our perceived control, he guards our minds from anxiety with his peace.

So, I want to look together at some more specific application. I hope some things have been coming into your minds as we've been talking but let's think about some specific application. How do we replace our worldly focus with a Godward focus?

How do we seek God's kingdom and his righteousness trusting God to provide the rest? The change to a worldly focus can be subtle but it happens quickly to us all, right?

We can start like we feel or maybe we go home from church, we're just done with our quiet time and then slowly throughout the day it seems like, man, I've become so focused on what other people think. I've become so focused on my job performance, right?

So, how do we get ourselves to a point where we can renew our minds and make it stick, right? It's a hard thing. So, first, we need to take a preventative approach to battling anxiety using regular habits of grace.

[45 : 45] So, target those daily habits of grace towards your anxiety. Daily orient your mind and your life on God's kingdom. So, when you pray, pray like Jesus prayed.

Focus as you're doing it. And, I don't know about you, but when I pray, I tend to become distracted really quickly. So, sometimes it takes a minute to warm up or to settle down or whatever word you want to use to talk about prayer, right?

It takes time. So, set apart time so you can be focused on what God would have you focus on which is His glory, right? So, pray like Jesus prayed. Focus on God's glory, His plan, and His purpose for your life as a child.

Next, meditate on specific promises of God which reinforce belief, right? There's so many rich texts, right? We looked at a couple today, but there are, I mean, hundreds of texts that you can rely on, memorize those things, know where to turn so you can meditate on those things, right?

He is in control, He provides, He knows what's best, His commands are good for us, but it's not quite enough just to like know that knowledge intellectually, but we have to let it sit in ourselves, we have to marinate in the truth of God's Word and let it sink in, right?

[47 : 01] So, if you struggle with anxiety, then find these promises and don't only know them and memorize them, but sit down with them, take the time to think about them and thank God for those attributes. Secondly, change the way you speak and therefore think about anxiety.

If anxiety is sinful, which we've established today, repentance is the appropriate response, right? And so, oftentimes when we talk about anxiety, we're talking to someone else, we say, we're really stressed, we have a lot on our plate, I find myself worrying a lot, but we never go beyond that, we never call sin what it is in our own hearts and we find it uncomfortable to call someone else out on their sinful anxiety, and I'm not advocating when someone says they're stressed in community group to say, you better stop it, you sinner, right?

But maybe in smaller conversations where it comes out, like gently remind them, this is a problem of the heart, it's not just a symptom, it's something that goes much deeper, right?

So we need to address it with repentance. And then lastly, rehabilitate, it's a big word, I know, rehabilitate worldly responses to anxiety. Habits can be a powerful thing, right?

And so, in the brain, going psychology on you, but in the brain, when you do two things together, there's literally a physical connection that happens to, inside of your brain, there's a physical connection between an action happening and then your response to it.

[48 : 34] So the more often that you put two things together, like anxiety and then just treating a symptom, there actually is a physical connection that becomes stronger and stronger as your habits are formed, right?

So if we're going to create godly habits, we have to undo what's already there. So when we're anxious, instead of turning to mere surface level solutions, turn to what the scripture tells us to do. So if our cure for anxiety is only exercise, sleeping, eating, whatever, then you're training yourself to believe that anxiety is merely emotional and not spiritual.

So this doesn't mean that doing those things to de-stress or unwind or whatever word you want to use is wrong, but it can't stop there. It's not deep enough. It doesn't address the problem underneath.

So thirdly, address the unbelief in your heart. When you feel or when you find yourself anxious, try to identify specific areas of unbelief and then ask God to help to look at specific promises to believe in, right?

[49 : 40] God is not standing over us in judgment on our anxiety. He knows what we experience and believe it or not, Christ actually had to battle sin of anxiety.

He was tempted as we were, right? And yet, He was without sin. So we have this advocate. We have this helper. He's there with open arms. The price has been paid for our redemption so we can go to God.

We can ask Him to help us in this unbelief. So let's go to the Lord. Let's take refuge in Him from the things of this world and He can renew your mind. He can change your perspective and He can ease your anxiety as He brings our focus off of us and onto Him.

Y'all join me as we pray.