

Matthew 6:25-33 - (NRSV)

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink,^[a] or about your body, what you will wear. 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 can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?^[b] ²⁸ And why do you worry 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 clothed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³² For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But strive first for the kingdom of God^[c] and his^[d] righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.



A Thankful Life

A country preacher decided to skip services one Sunday to spend the day hiking in the wilderness. Rounding a sharp bend in the trail, he collided with a bear and was sent tumbling down a steep grade. He landed on a rock and broke both legs.

With the angry bear charging at him from a distance, the preacher prayed, “O Lord, I’m so sorry for skipping services today. Please forgive me and grant me just one prayer---make a Christian out of that bear that’s coming at me!”

At that very instant, the bear skidded to a halt, fell to his knees, clasped his paws together, and began to pray out loud at the preacher’s feet, “Dear God, please bless this food I am about to receive.”

It is certainly a silly tale, but doesn’t it feel good to laugh?!? That is just one of the benefits of living a thankful life, rather than one that becomes increasingly paralyzed by worry and fear. With a thankful life, we can laugh and smile and embrace, allowing worry and fear to melt away.

In our scripture text for today, we meet up with Jesus in the midst of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus must have been teaching the crowd for hours. For this “Sermon,” or collection of teachings, begins with the beatitudes, and goes on to cover subjects like salt and light, laws and prophets, anger, adultery, divorce, oaths, retaliation, loving your enemies, almsgiving, fasting, treasures, and the like. Jesus even teaches the disciples how to pray, giving a model for prayer that has been handed down to us as “The Lord’s Prayer.” Then, in the very middle of these teachings, Jesus reminds those listening that as people of faith in an almighty creator God, they should not worry. That is the topic of today’s text. Jesus concludes this teaching stating, “*But strive first for the kingdom of God^[c] and his^[d] righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well*” and adds, ³⁴ “*So do not worry about tomorrow,* “

Now, in this day and age (not unlike Jesus' day), when we experience debilitating distrust, those in power instilling fear in the masses, and uncertainty concerning future security, the realists among us might be asking, "Is this guy Jesus in his right mind? How can he expect us to take on such a positive attitude? Sure, he promises that God will take care of us. But it is so hard to trust!"

Friends, worry steals our peace and joy and affects every area of our lives. For example, many health problems are caused in part, or exacerbated by, worry and stress. When we trust God, worry will be replaced by faith and the knowledge that God will provide for us. When we walk with God, our faith will consume our fears.

What does it look like? Well, let me share with you, there are those who make it work! Listen to a story my friend tells:

John is the kind of guy you love to hate. He is always in a good mood and always has something positive to say. When someone would ask him how he was doing, he would reply, "If I were any better, I would be twins!" He was a natural motivator. If an employee was having a bad day, John was there telling the employee how to look on the positive side of the situation.

Seeing this style really made me curious, so one day I went up and said to him, "I don't get it! You can't be a positive person all of the time. How do you do it?" John replied, "Each morning I wake up and say to myself, you have two choices today. You can choose to be in a good mood, or . . . you can choose to be in a bad mood. I choose to be in a good mood. Each time something bad happens, I can choose to be a victim, or . . . I can choose to learn from it. I choose to learn from it.

Every time someone comes to me complaining, I can choose to accept their complaining, or . . . I can point out the positive side of life. I choose the positive side of life."

"Yeah, right, it's not that easy," I protested.

*"Yes, it is," John said. "Life is all about choices. When you cut away all the junk, every situation is a choice. You choose how you react to situations. You choose how people affect your mood. You choose to be in a good mood or bad mood. The bottom line: It's your choice **how** you live your life."*

I reflected on what John said. Soon thereafter, I left the Tower Industry to start my own business. We lost touch, but I often thought about John when I made a choice about life instead of reacting to it.

Several years later, I heard that John was involved in a serious accident, falling some 60 feet from a communications tower. After 18 hours of surgery and weeks of intensive care, he was released from the hospital with rods placed in his back.

I saw John about six months after the accident. When I asked him how he was, he replied, "If I were any better, I'd be twins . . . Wanna see my scars?"

I declined to see his wounds, but I did ask him what had gone through his mind as the accident took place. "The first thing that went through my mind was the well-being of my soon-to-be-born daughter," he replied. "Then, as I lay on the ground, I remembered that I had two choices: I could choose to live, or . . . I could choose to die. I chose to live."

"Weren't you scared? Did you lose consciousness?" I asked.

John continued, "The paramedics were great. They kept telling me I was going to be fine. But when they wheeled me into the ER and I saw the expressions on the faces of the doctors and

nurses, I got really scared. In their eyes, I read, ‘he’s a dead man.’ I knew I needed to take action.”

“What did you do?” I asked.

“Well, there was a big burly nurse shouting questions at me,” said John. “She asked if I was allergic to anything. ‘Yes,’ I replied. The doctors and nurses stopped working as they waited for my reply. I took a deep breath and yelled, ‘Gravity!’ Over their laughter, I told them, ‘I am choosing to live. Operate on me as if I am alive, not dead.’”

He lived, thanks to the skill of his doctors, but also because of his amazing attitude . . . I learned from him that every day we have the choice to live fully. . . . Attitude, after all, is everything.

So, we have a choice, too. We can allow worry to consume us, and rob us of our peace and joy. Or, we can live thankful lives, trusting that God will provide for us in each situation of life. Finding a reason for thanksgiving during any challenging situation will be a blessing for our souls, and for the souls of those we encounter.

Eugene Peterson paraphrases a verse of our scripture stating, *“If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers – most of which are never even seen – don’t you think God will attend to you, take pride in you, do the best for you? What I’m trying to do here is to get you to relax, to **not** be so preoccupied with GETTING, so you can respond to God’s GIVING.”*

That is a thankful life! Thanks be to God!