

Prayer

Open our hearts Lord God, to the people we meet and with whom we work. Give us graciousness in our speech, love in our hearts, generosity in our praise, compassion in our attitudes and honesty in our dealings with all who we meet. In this Gospel way, may we make a difference to our world. Thank You Lord God. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: World Politics

Pray for Australia and New Zealand and their distinct heritage which is highly independent, yet sensitive to its role in that part of the world. Pray for its political and cultural leaders.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for journalists working in dangerous places of the world*
- *Pray for those who are disadvantaged because of sickness*
- *Pray for solutions in Zimbabwe*

Meditation

Lord Jesus, You are God,
and all things are made according to Your great plan.

You have authority over us;
yet You choose to allow us to live however we please.

You know our past;
yet You allow us to make mistakes and learn from them.

You know our present;
Yet You treat us with love and compassion, whatever happens.

You know the future;
yet You do not prevent us from exploring what lies ahead.

Lord Jesus, You are God;
and Your love never ends. May we have the courage to love You.

Bible Study - Matthew 6:25-34

²⁵ 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or (or drink) or about your body, what you will wear. Surely life is more than food, and the body more than clothing?' ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any of you add a single hour to your life by worrying?

²⁸ And why are you anxious about your clothes? Learn from the wild flowers, and watch them growing; they do not work or make clothes, ²⁹ yet I tell you that even Solomon in all his magnificence was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God adorns the grass in a meadow, which is alive one day and the next is incinerated, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith?

³¹ Therefore do be anxious, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" ³² These things are concerns of those who do not know God. Your heavenly Father knows all that you need. ³³ Therefore, search firstly for the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and everything else will be yours as well. ³⁴ And don't let yourself be worried about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today has enough trouble of its own.'

Review

If you read back over the 'Sermon on the Mount' from the beginning of chapter 5, you will find that on the one hand, it tells us of God's liberating blessing on those who are 'poor in spirit' (the Beatitudes) but informs us that those who follow the way of Jesus will be liable to suffer 'on His account' (5:11). Jesus goes on to speak forthrightly about the Kingdom of God which requires a higher 'righteousness' than that of the Pharisees (5:20)! Moreover, He began to speak to about ways of practicing faith in God which were radically different from what people knew (in prayer and fasting for example – 6:1-6). Perhaps Jesus noticed the sense of disbelief and concern in his hearers and felt it necessary to speak directly to their concerns, but for whatever reason, Jesus now spoke to those gathered around Him about being worried and anxious. This is therefore a significant piece of teaching, for even now, people are worried as soon as they hear the radical nature of God's call on their lives. This is Jesus' answer.

The beginning of our passage today may raise people's concerns rather than assuage them, because traditional Bible translations say 'take no thought for what you should eat or drink ...' which sounds as if Jesus was telling His disciple not only that they should not worry, but more scarily, that they should do nothing but await the Lord's provision! Modern translations generally stress the real meaning of the text here, which is this; Jesus nowhere forbids the proper human activities of providing for daily life with food, lodging and clothes, either for oneself or for family. He does, however, command His followers not to live in a state of worry about such things. The reason for this is because God knows the needs of those He loves (6:32) and has his hand on all these things.

Most of us know well what it means to worry about life (6:25), work (6:26), health and longevity (6:27), and how we look (6:28-30). Jesus does not forbid us to live our lives properly or work or deal with health issues. What he does say is that we do not need to be consumed by these things. The word 'worry' has the sense in Greek of being overcome and dominated by something. That is the problem, for if we are dominated by worry, then we will not make the radical choices Jesus asks us to make in order to follow him, and change our way of life. If we are dominated by food and clothes, then we are serving 'Mammon' or 'wealth' (see yesterday - 6:24) and we cannot serve two masters (6:24). If we are poor, then to be consumed by worry can prevent our reliance upon the Lord who can help us through our problems, if we allow Him to do so.

The middle section of the passage, verses 28 to 30 are subtly different, however. They are not just about the basic necessities of life, but about 'adornment'. The illustration Jesus draws on is the fading natural beauty of a flower and the magnificence of Solomon as the great King of Israel who built the Temple. It was a powerful illustration because as anyone would agree, the simple beauty of a flower can outshine the finest earthly 'glory' imaginable! Jesus wanted us to know that God has provided so much beauty within His natural world that we should not be worried about how God provides for us and how we look to others. He has more ways to help us in our fears and concerns than we can imagine, but in order to access this, we will have to trust Him.

God's care and provision, as we shall increasingly come to know in Matthew's Gospel is a matter of faith and trust, and in the following verses Jesus provides us with a clue about

how to walk that path, and find the Kingdom. He said; 'search firstly for the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and everything else will be yours as well'. Basically, this is a call for us to place our trust in God completely, so that He can help us become balanced and effective as His people. However, it is easy to read this famous text without thinking through what this 'Kingdom' is and what 'righteousness' is. It is, of course, everything Jesus has taught so far in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus tells us that although what He has said sounds difficult and sometimes impossible, if we trust Him for it, then we will find that everything makes sense. Then, and then only will we be able to say that we are not worried about tomorrow; 'for tomorrow will bring its own worries, and today has enough troubles of its own!'

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Is it possible to perform one's duties of care towards other family members without worrying? How can we be free to care without being bound by worry?
2. Discuss whether the world has entrapped Christians through the forces of conformity to fashion. Are men and women obliged to present themselves in certain ways, and do we worry about it?
3. What else will be ours if we search for the Kingdom?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

'Do not worry' may seem like a counsel of perfection when it comes to dealing with family issues! Yet it is a great gift to have peace at home as well as at work, and this is as much a challenge to discipleship as anything. I have to ask myself whether I am as peaceful as the Lord would have me be at home and at work; it is a pertinent question which has a direct bearing on my faith.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *In what ways do you worry about things; about the present, the future, or even the past? If you are aware of issues which dominate your thoughts and feelings, it would be better to deal with them by talking them through with a friend at church and submitting them to God in prayer.*
- *In what ways can you 'search for the Kingdom ...' in such a way that everything else in your life will make sense? Take the opportunity to pray about this and share the issues with your husband or wife or close friend.*

Final Prayer

Drive away the demons of doubt that wander near my soul from time to time, Lord Jesus. Break the power of sin to bind me into worry about this and that, I pray. And when I rest with You, my Lord, restore my faith and make it strong enough to face the world again. I pray this in Your Name, Lord Jesus, AMEN