

Prayers

To God

Pray out loud, speaking out the names of God you know. This is a 'technique' used in some churches for prayers of praise, but there is no reason why we cannot do this by ourselves.

For myself

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for the inspiration and help You give me day by day. I long for Your healing touch, I am excited by Your enthusiasm and zeal, I treasure the touch of Your hand on my life, and I revel in the breath of Your Holy Spirit blowing through my world. Come to me afresh this day I pray, **AMEN**

For others

Pray for those who are troubled in their minds

It may not be something you have prayed about a great deal before. However, many people have what may loosely be called mental problems, whether in the form of a breakdown of mental health or a specific condition of the brain. Pray for any you know who have such problems, and if you know no one, then pray for them in general.

Meditation

Lord, I learn about You by opening up my heart
To appreciate all that is happening all around me.

Through smiling, and seeing others smile too,
and by sharing the pain of those who suffer.

Through watching a child learn to walk;
and by steadying the hand of an elderly person.

Through eating a meal with friends and family
and by giving what I have to people in need.

Through listening to beautiful music and song;
and by enjoying the design of magnificent buildings.

Through the finding of faith and hope and love;
and by resting in peace through the blessing of my Lord.

Bible Passage

Luke 12:22-31

²² He said to his disciples,

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life and what you will eat, or about your body and what you will wear. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.

²⁴ Have a look at the ravens: they neither sow nor reap and they have no storeroom or barn, yet God feeds them. You are worth so much more than birds! ²⁵ Can any of you add a single hour to your lifespan by worrying? ²⁶ If you cannot do a small thing like this, why worry about anything else?

²⁷ Have a look at the lilies and how they grow: they do not toil or spin, but I tell you even Solomon in all His glory was not adorned like one of these. ²⁸ Such common plants are alive one day and thrown into the fire the next, so if God clothes them like this, how much more will He provide your clothing, you of little faith!

²⁹ Do not set your heart on what you eat and what you drink, or worry about it, ³⁰ for everyone needs these things and your Father knows you must have them. ³¹ Instead, strive for His kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.”

Review

This is a well known passage from the heart of Jesus’ teaching, and at first glance it looks like a series of five sayings around the common theme of worry. As we look at it closely, however, we will find that it is more focussed than this. The main theme is Jesus call to trust God and stop worrying, and this is a rare passage from Luke that is virtually identical to the equivalent teaching in Matthew’s Gospel (Matthew 6:25-33). Luke and Matthew must either have copied this one from the other, or they found it in another ancient record of Jesus’ teaching we know nothing of today. Whichever it was, the closeness of the Gospel records here indicates that this was an important and memorable teaching of Jesus. It certainly goes to the heart of the human condition and our need of Christ’s redemption.

We should bear this in mind or we will merely read the passage and implore each other to stop worrying because Jesus commands it. But as we all know, it is almost impossible to stop worrying, especially if ‘worry’ is part of our basic character, or the circumstances of life mean we face constant pressures. So, does this teaching lie beyond our reach? Is it something to which we may aspire but never fully experience? Is this teaching an ideal, set before us to remind us to confess our worry every day, if not for one thing, then another?

The answer, of course, comes at the very end of this teaching where Jesus calls on His disciples to, ‘*Seek first the Kingdom of God*’ (12:31). Moreover, this is not just a command to do something, as if people can attain God’s Kingdom by their own effort. If this was true, then God would not have had to send Jesus to die for our sins! So to place this passage in its proper context, we must read it as advice for those who have responded to Jesus by faith and are ready to receive His salvation. So this passage describes the blessings of life redeemed and lived with Christ, which is ‘*more than food*’ (12:23). It is life for all who will

respond to God's love, who He values as '*worth so much more*' (12:24), who are clothed by Him (12:28) and can place their trust in Him (12:30).

The very first verse sets out the teaching. It is not just a call to stop worrying followed by some examples of worries, that is, about '*what you should eat*', about bodies, and about '*what you should wear*'. The teaching is far more focussed than this, Jesus warns His disciples firstly not to worry '*about life and what you should eat*' (12:22), and this suggests we should not worry about the food we need to keep ourselves alive. But there is more; Jesus could also be a warning His disciples against having unnecessary attitudes towards food, such as having too many likes and dislikes, or warning against eating disorders that come from worrying about food and body image, it is all important. Secondly, Jesus warns His disciples not to worry '*about your body and what you will wear*' (12:22), which calls for trust in God when it comes to keeping warm and being presentable. But this could also be an attack on the very concept of fashion and a warning not to be preoccupied with our own looks. There is plenty here for us to reflect on.

Nevertheless, worry about food and clothing are indeed the focus of the passage, and this is confirmed by what Jesus says next; '*for life is more than food and the body more than clothing*' (12:23). In other words, we should not worry because in God's Kingdom, life means more than keeping fed, and being comfortable and presentable. These things may dominate life for the unsaved on earth, but they should inspire us now because they are not the priorities for heaven!

The next two paragraphs highlight the themes of food and clothing. Verses 24 to 26 expand on Jesus' call not to worry about food. He offers the example of a raven, which eats without growing or preparing food (12:24), and then encourages His disciples to accept that worrying achieves nothing (12:25,26). Remember, this is a heavenly perspective on earthly things, and Jesus' intention is to help His followers cast aside their dependency on earthly things, and believe that God will guide them throughout life, including getting sufficient food.

Verses 27 to 28 say something similar about clothing. Jesus gives the powerful example of the extravagant beauty of a lily, '*adorned*' by God. Again, Jesus is not asking people to ignore what it means to wear clothes and present themselves well. He is appealing to them to accept that God sees all people as beautiful because they are His creation, and He has both already provided their outward beauty and will '*provide*' their clothing (12:28). But more than this, God longs to clothe us with the more precious garment of salvation in Christ. The apostle Paul refers to this when he writes, '*as many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ ...*' (Galatians 3:27), and '*you have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its maker!*' (Colossians 3:10).

In the last paragraph of our reading, Jesus concludes this message. We are not to be bound by earthly worries; He understands that His followers need '*these things*', and must do whatever people of any time or place do to make sure they are fed and clothed, the two basic provisions of humanity. But by telling us not to worry, I do not believe God's people must sit back and think God will provide everything automatically. Jesus' message is to stop worrying, it is not an instruction to do nothing! So when He says '*strive for His kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.*' (12:31), Jesus is asking us to expect God's provision without worrying about it, but not without work. Such an approach to life will enable us to do what God requires of us without it being coloured by our wants and needs. We are to tell other people of the love of God, we are not to let anything get in the way of our message.

Worry and lack of trust in God is one of the chief things holding the church back from doing its intended work. Because of this, our passage today must be remembered as important teaching; it should not be forgotten.

Going Deeper

Notes on the text and translation

V22 *'do not worry about your body and what you will eat ...'*

Other translations:

'do not worry your about your life, and what you are to eat ...' (NIV)

'do not worry about your life, what you will eat ...' (NRSV)

The subtle point to notice here is this. The text does not say two things in this sentence, firstly not to worry about life, and secondly not to worry about what to eat. The sentence says one thing; do not be concerned for your body, that is, in terms of what you eat. Verse 23 confirms this as the right interpretation when it adds, *'life is more than the food ...'*

V24 *'storeroom'*

Other translations:

'storehouse' (NRSV)

All translations use either 'storehouse' or 'storeroom' here in this verse because no English word conveys the full meaning of the Greek here. A simple Galilean house of the first century was built around a central 'inner' room used as a store for food and other supplies, which is what is referred to here. The word 'storehouse' might imply a separate building, so I have preferred 'storeroom'.

V26 *'why worry about anything else?'*

Other translations:

'why do you worry about the rest?' (NIV)

'why are you anxious about other things?' (NRSV)

In the Greek, the last word of this sentence means 'what is left'. While other Bible versions mostly translate this as 'the rest', I think that in this instance, the logic of the sentence means it refers to everything else people worry about apart from how long they live (12:25). The phrase *'anything else'* seems to me to be best.

V28 *'common plants'*

Other translations:

'grass of the field' (NIV, NRSV)

Most Bible versions translate this 'grass of the field' because it is a straight translation of the Greek words. However, in the context of the paragraph, this term, must be a general (or colloquial) expression for plants found in the wild. By translating 'common plants', the whole paragraph makes better sense.

V30 *'everyone'*

Other translations:

'all nations' (NIV, NRSV)

Most Bible versions have '*all nations*' here, but in the first century, this was simply a way of speaking about 'everyone else'. I have therefore used this phrase, and it opens up the way for a verse translation that is much easier to understand.

Further Comments

Adding a span to our lives by worrying

In times past, Jesus' saying about not adding a day to our lives by worrying was entirely understandable. Most people would be happy to believe that the hour of death was something controlled by God and God alone, but this is perhaps only partly true today. For all sorts of reason, the lives of individuals today can be prolonged, and the worrier can take action to try to prolong life, for example by buying the right treatments, or by going to live in countries where care of the elderly is enhanced. I would still argue that the time of death is a mystery in the hands of God, but there is scope for someone who worries and also has financial means, to do something about how long they live.

In this way, material presumptions may dull some people's appreciation of what Jesus says here, even if His point is still relatively clear. Worry is by nature a consuming fear, and will therefore dominate feelings; someone who is worried about something will often feel that the one thing worried about will affect the whole of life. Worry is a form of delusion that stands against the work of God in an individual, and Jesus exposes it in order warn to the disciples of its power. If a follower of Jesus begins to worry about something then the most important way to deal with it according to this Scripture is to refocus on the Kingdom of God and its benefits.

Discipleship

Application

Worries about things ...

We need to be so careful when it comes to reading passages of Scripture like this. It would be very easy to miss Jesus' point and suggest we should not worry about food and clothing just as birds and flowers do not worry. So we must read the passage carefully until we appreciate that He is challenging us not to avoid the problems of life but to trust God within them. Jesus was never an escapist, He was a realist who saw in His Father the solution to human problems. This is why He called on His disciples to '*strive for His Kingdom ...*' (12:31).

Of course, worrying is like fear, it can be unpleasant but necessary to enable us to react properly to what happens around us, and what people worry about changes from age to age and from country to country. For example, today, many Christian people do not feel they need to worry about food, not because they have decided to trust God but because they have sufficient resources to go and buy what they need in the supermarket. This hardly seems like a test of faith. For this reason, I suggest that when trying to get to the heart of what this passage means, we replace the idea of 'food' with that of 'money', because without money we would be as compromised as people without food in Jesus' day.

Worries about self and fashion

There is no doubt about one main theme of this passage, and this is Jesus' call for us not be consumed by concern about our bodies and clothes. Again, Jesus is not asking people to reject wearing makeup or suggesting that clothes and presentation do not matter. He is however indicating that if we give such things priority over God's Kingdom by worrying about them, then our lives are out of step with His will for us. Fashion may be an important aspect of this life, but although we can surely look forward to beauty in the next, I doubt that we will be competing for beauty and elegance!

The trouble with worry is that it tends to be all consuming, and at least dominating. In addition, the trouble with worry about self image, or what we look like, is that it can also be all consuming. Many people struggle with their bodies, and this can dominate their lives, especially if society makes people think that unless they conform to certain shapes and sizes, they are not beautiful. One of the important messages of the Gospel is that God, the Creator, has made each one acceptable before Himself, and each one is loved. The duty of God's people is to demonstrate this acceptance on earth, and provide a place where people can feel loved, even if society is a difficult place because they feel rejected by others.

What people strive for

Striving for the Kingdom of God places all things in their proper perspective, especially if we remember that in Christ, the Kingdom has come in our midst. The priorities for God's Kingdom are love and compassion, and a readiness to do His will. These things should surely mark out God's people, whether or not people generally find this attractive.

Ideas for what to do

- The only think you can do after reading a passage such as this is ask yourself whether worry has a significant place within your life. It may be rather daunting to do this, but have a go, because through self analysis, the Holy Spirit can help us to understand more of what God has for us as individuals.
- Keep your eyes open today to see if God will teach you something about Himself and His character through what you see around you in His world.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What does this passage say to you about God's Kingdom?
2. Discuss what it means to 'seek first' the Kingdom of God. What does God 'add' to us today when we seek His Kingdom?
3. Is it possible to be someone who worries a great deal and still be called a Christian? In discussing this, be careful not to dismiss the just concerns of others.

Final Prayer

Almighty Lord and God, give me a heart to trust You in all circumstances. I confess that I do not always find it easy to exercise such trust, but I know that with Your help, I can come closer to this noble aim. Bless me I pray as I seek to be obedient to Your call. AMEN
