

# LUKE

## Part 49: "The Truth About Worry"

Luke 12:13-34

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Sunday, February 3, 2019 (Epiphany Season)

### Scripture Reading

<sup>13</sup> Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." <sup>14</sup> But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" <sup>15</sup> And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." <sup>16</sup> And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, <sup>17</sup> and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' <sup>18</sup> And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. <sup>19</sup> And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." ' <sup>20</sup> But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' <sup>21</sup> So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

<sup>22</sup> And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. <sup>23</sup> For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. <sup>24</sup> Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! <sup>25</sup> And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? <sup>26</sup> If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? <sup>27</sup> Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. <sup>28</sup> But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! <sup>29</sup> And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. <sup>30</sup> For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. <sup>31</sup> Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

<sup>32</sup> "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. <sup>33</sup> Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. <sup>34</sup> For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. <sup>1</sup>

*Almighty and Everlasting God, you are our everlasting rock. Your word says, "You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you" (Isaiah 26:3, ESV). So I pray today that you would grant us the grace to fix our minds upon you, to trust in you, and to seek first your kingdom. We pray this in Jesus's mighty name, AMEN.*

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Lk 12:13–34.

## **Introduction**

One evening this week, our youngest son Simon Peter was crying as I put him to bed. I asked him why he was crying. He said, “Samuel took my Spider-man costume.” The problem with this statement was that this particular Spider-man costume (we have several) was Samuel’s birthday present. I told him, “Simon, that costume belongs to your brother, but maybe we can work out a deal where you do some chores, and we can save up to by you a new Spider-man costume just like Samuel.” He said, “I don’t want a new Spider-man costume. I want *Samuel’s* Spider-man costume.” This led us to a conversation about sin and about what is really going in my son’s heart. The issue that needs to be addressed is not the costume, but rather the issue beneath the issue.

In our text today, Jesus is traveling toward Jerusalem. As he is doing so, he is teaching and preaching the word of God. And in the middle of one of his teachings, a man interrupts Jesus and asks that he would intervene within his family dispute.

It appears that this man has recently lost his father, and on top of whatever grief there is for this loss, now the family is arguing over how to settle the estate of the now deceased father. The man tells Jesus that he feels that his older brother is not giving him his fair share of the inheritance, and he wants Jesus to intervene and help.

However, there is reason to believe that this man’s motives are not entirely pure. Notice what he does not say. He does not say, “Look Jesus, my brother and I are not seeing eye to eye when it comes to our inheritance. Maybe he’s wrong. Maybe I’m wrong. Maybe we are both a little bit wrong. Whatever the case we need your wisdom and guidance, and no matter what you decide I will submit to your judgment.” No. Instead, this man says, “...*Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me*” (Luke 12:13, ESV). In other words, Jesus I need you to take my side – no questions asked – and tell my brother to give me what I want.

Another clue that would alert us that this man is not in the right is how Jesus responds. Jesus does not respond to the issue at hand. Instead, he responds to the issue beneath the issue. Instead of addressing the particulars of the situation, Jesus addresses the motive of the heart, which in this case is “covetousness” or (in some translations) “greed” (πλεονεξία)<sup>2</sup>: “*Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions*” (Luke 12:15, ESV).

But then Jesus does something fascinating. He speaks to the issue beneath the issue beneath the issue. Underneath the man’s family drama was the issue of covetousness or greed. But underneath the greed was an issue that I believe is a temptation for every person in this room – the issue of *worry*.

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<sup>2</sup> πλεονεξία, ας, □ (πλεονέκτης) **the state of desiring to have more than one’s due, *greediness, insatiableness, avarice, covetousness***. William Arndt et al., [\*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature\*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 824.

Worry is often a state of mind that underlies a lot of sinful behavior. Worry is a potential root of *greed*. We think, “I am insecure and uncomfortable, and I need money to make me feel safe and comfortable.” But there is never enough money that gives us the security that we are so worried about.

Worry is a potential root of *anger*. We think to ourselves, “I am afraid, and I’m mad at and blame the things people that make me feel threatened or exposed in any way.”

Worry is a root of *lust and addiction*. We think, “I am scared, so I will run to something or someone that will give me a quick hit of comfort.”

Worry has the unique capacity to cause us to spend a phenomenal amount of mental energy and time on non-realities. Worry has a negative physiological effect on our bodies. It can contribute and even cause disease. Most of us hate worry, but we are addicted to it. And we know this is a problem, so then we worry about worrying!

This is why Jesus’s in this passage words are so profound for us today. Jesus is going to show us that there is a better way. He is going to teach us **“The Truth About Worry.”**

In particular, he is going to show us: **1.) What causes worry, 2.) What we should consider when we worry, and 3.) What cures worry.**

## **Exposition**

### **1.) What causes worry.**

*The first cause of worry: worry arises when we convince ourselves that we can control the uncontrollable.*

- Take a look at our text, beginning in verse 16: **“And he told them a parable, saying, ‘The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’”’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’”** (Luke 12:16–20, ESV).
- Notice, “The man already [is] rich at the beginning of the story.”<sup>3</sup>
- He could have used his bountiful harvest to throw a feast that would bless his family. He could have generously given some of his harvest to feed the poor. But he isn’t satisfied with the wealth he has.
- This is not a man who would ever be okay with dependently trusting God for his “daily bread” (cf. Lk:11:3). He is convinced he can work himself self into a position that he needs nothing and no one. And because he believes the future

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<sup>3</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 352.

and his health is something he controls, he is willing to sacrifice a lot to make sure he can secure the comfort he desires.

- He works frantically and painstakingly to achieve a comfortable, early retirement by tearing down his barns and building bigger ones.
- But once he finishes his building campaign, he promptly dies.
- The implication may be that he worked himself to death.
  
- While there is wisdom in the principle of delayed gratification, wherein we put aside pleasure of the present for a greater joy of the future, there are times when we sacrifice the daily mercies that God gives to us for an idealistic and unrealistic vision of the future that could never come.
- As a young parent, I know there is a real temptation to work and work and work so that I could get to a place where I could spend more time with my family. But that future time never comes, and if I'm not careful, it would be easy to let the season of my kids being small children slip through my hands.
- Why do we do this?
- We mistakenly attribute to ourselves power that only God has.
- We think (and America teaches us to think) we can achieve heaven on earth through hard work, after which we can sit back, relax, and put our responsibilities on cruise control.
- This is a false carrot that we will never achieve, and often what it does is require us to worry over a future that never comes.
- This way of thinking doesn't account for the brokenness of this world that only God can restore. It doesn't account for how much is based on the mercy of God and how much is genuinely out of our control. It doesn't account for our true rest comes from God.
- And instead of giving us rest, worry causes us to vigilantly consider all the hypothetical futures that we might need to come up with a plan for.
- *The Screwtape Letters* is a book of letters written by a fictional demon named Screwtape to a novice demon, who is just getting started in the temptation business. In one of his letters, Screwtape tells his underling to constantly tempt humanity toward anxiety as a way of distracting them from true and, more importantly, distracting them from any real opportunity to engage God: **"We [demons] want a whole race perpetually in pursuit of the rainbow's end, never honest, never kind, nor happy now, but always using as a mere fuel wherewith to heap the altar of the future every real gift which is offered them in the Present."**<sup>4</sup>

*The second cause of worry: worry arises when we have set the treasure of our heart in temporary things.*

- **Look at verse 22: "So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will**

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<sup>4</sup> Lewis, C.S. *The Screwtape Letters*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 77-78.

***put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing” (Luke 12:21–23, ESV).***

- Jesus will even circle back to this theme at the end of this passage: ***“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Luke 12:34, ESV).***
- Food and clothing: good things, necessary things; things that should not be central to your life. Your life is more than these things. Thus, these things can be your truest treasure.
- Where our truest treasure is, there will our heart be.
- By the way, the Sunday school answer for what the treasure of your heart should be and what the treasure of your heart actually is are two different things.
- There is a real difference between our stated treasure and our functional treasure.
- Where are you spending your time, money, and thought life? What do your daily habits reveal about what you value most?
  
- Habits both reveal and aim the desires of the heart.
- Some habits that foster a false sense of control.
- In my house, we are not allowed to go on *WebMD*, or as I like to call it, anxiety porn.
- What are your habits and your thought life training your heart to treasure?
- Is your heart being trained to value stuff, material possessions, approval, body image, health, or comfort the most?
- If your heart is set on things that are temporary and fleeting, the natural posture of your heart will be worry.

## **2.) What we should consider when we worry.**

*We should remember God’s care for creation.*

- ***“Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!” (Luke 12:24, ESV).***
- ***“Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried.” (Luke 12:27–29, ESV).***
- Ravens and the lilies are representations of God’s creation that we often consider insignificant, but nevertheless, God cares and provides for.
- Ravens don’t farm for food or worry over whether or not their food is organic, farm fresh – but they are eating just fine.
- The most intentionally curated clothing fashion cannot compare to the natural splendor of the lilies. Even the greatest king’s wealth does not compare with them.
- When you are beset with worry, reflect upon the intricacies of the most magnificent galaxies and the smallest molecules.
- Reflect upon the careful craftsmanship of ecosystems and all living things.

- God is a powerful provider. He has it covered.
- We are to contrast this idea with a second consideration.

*Remember the utter futility of worry.*

- **“And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?” (Luke 12:25–26, ESV).**
- There are plenty of things you can do to shorten your life.
- But there is virtually nothing you can do that guarantees you a longer life.
- If you are worried about something you can’t control, you are wasting your time, your energy, and you probably neglecting a real responsibility you have been given to steward.
- Worry is so often a futile exercise. I have heard it said that worry is praying to yourself because you think you are in control.
- You are presenting your self with your problem.
- This is why one theologian said, “[constant] worry is practical atheism”; it is an essentially pagan spiritual discipline.”<sup>5</sup>
- Conversely, the disciplines of reading God’s word and prayer set us free of the delusion of our control and futility of our worry.
- The reading of God’s word reminds us of the fact that when we are not in control, God is.
- Prayer is itself an act of relinquishing the myth of our control and attuning our heart to the worth of God
- Pray your fears; cast your cares upon the one who cares for you: **“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:6–7, ESV).**

*Remember your identity as God’s people.*

- **“For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them” (Luke 12:30, ESV).**
- The “nations of the world” (τὰ ἔθνη τοῦ κόσμου) is a reference to the rest of the world, those who do not know God.
- The outside world is centered on anxiety.
- But we are God’s people. The infinite God of the universe is our Father – we should have peace that reflects that reality.
- How? Be and peace and be generous, as if you are the child of royalty:
- **“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys” (Luke 12:32–33, ESV).**

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<sup>5</sup> Blomberg, Craig L. *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture. Volume 22: Matthew.* (Nashville: B&H, 1992), 126.

- Peace and joyous generosity are to be distinctive attributes of God’s people. God is not glorified by anxious Christians. But when the watching world sees peace that passes understanding and joyful generosity without bounds, it will want in.

### 3.) What cures worry.

- The command “don’t be anxious” is a frustrating command by itself.
- We can’t just not be anxious. We have to do something else. What is that something else?
- The answer is found in verse 31: *“Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you”* (Luke 12:31, ESV).
- What is God’s kingdom? *The kingdom is the reality of God’s rule and reign.*
- We are to remind ourselves of the truth of a God who is infinitely powerful and infinitely good.
- Worry is believing in a future without a good God.
- More than ignoring our fears, we are to remind ourselves whatever our future holds, in that future, there is a good God who will make all things new (Rev. 21).
- Sinclair Ferguson: *“Jesus’ teaching is not...a form of ‘the power of positive thinking.’ The problem with anxious people is not merely that they think negatively about life. It is much more radical than that. Anxious people think untheologically about life! Their mistake is not that they have low self-images; it is that ‘in all their thoughts there is no room for God’ (Ps. 10:4). It is only when their focus upon the Lord is restored that they can finally experience the conquest of anxiety.”*<sup>6</sup>
- And how are we to look to the Lord? How are we to remind ourselves that God is both powerful and good?
- We remember where Jesus is going. He is headed to Jerusalem. He has not come to handle estate matters. He has come to meet the greatest need we have. He has come to die for our salvation.
- We look to the cross.
- We look to the ultimate proof of the goodness our God.
- We look to the sign and seal of the extent to which he loves you.
- We look to the eternal reminder that the infinite power of divine sovereignty flows through nail-pierced hands.
- We look to the promise that the one who has bled and died will one day return and make all things new.
- Jesus – the very God who spoke the universe into being and commanded the winds and waves on earth – gave up his sense of control go to the cross so that we might find peace.

May he be our greatest desire, may we rest in his provision, may we find peace in his power, his goodness, and his presence! AMEN.

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<sup>6</sup> Ferguson, Sinclair B. *The Sermon on the Mount: Kingdom Life in a Fallen World*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1987.

## Community Group Discussion Starters

1.) *Read Luke 12:13-34 and briefly summarize in your own words the themes of what Jesus is teaching in this passage.*

2.) *What are the ways you are tempted toward worry, and how has worry negatively affected you?*

3.) *How might this passage encourage us to handle worry differently?*

4.) *Sinclair Ferguson writes: "Jesus' teaching is not...a form of 'the power of positive thinking.' The problem with anxious people is not merely that they think negatively about life. It is much more radical than that. Anxious people think untheologically about life! Their mistake is not that they have low self-images; it is that 'in all their thoughts there is no room for God' (Ps. 10:4). It is only when their focus upon the Lord is restored that they can finally experience the conquest of anxiety." How do these words challenge you to think and live?*

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