



Live Q&A on Anxiety

GraceLife: September 23, 2007

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The following questions and answers occurred before a live audience.

Before we get into the questions, I just want to read the passage we've been studying, beginning in Matthew 6:25. Jesus says:

For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worked can add a single hour to his life?

And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!

Do not worry then, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear for clothing?" For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Now before we get into the questions, I just want to very quickly summarize a couple of the main points that we made as we were going through this teaching.

The first one was to recognize that Jesus' teaching here in this passage is connected to His teaching on life priorities in verses 19-24. That's not by accident. Our anxieties flow out of that which we consider important. We are not anxious about stuff that we don't care about. So when we find ourselves being anxious, we should step back and say, "What is it that I'm concerned about here? Is this something that involves earthly matters or is this something that involves kingdom matters?"

When you see that your anxieties are almost always tied to temporal things, that takes you back into the teaching in verse 19, where Jesus said: “Don’t store up for yourselves treasures on earth, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” Your anxieties immediately expose your priorities and what you love. That immediately is very searching and humbling when you see the things that we get all uptight about.

Second thing that I want to emphasize here is to realize that when Jesus says, “Don’t be worried, don’t be worried, don’t be worried” – at least three times in that passage – He is giving you a command. Jesus is giving you a moral imperative. This isn’t a thought for the day. This is to govern all of life. It’s the idea of “Stop worrying, and don’t start again.”

The funny thing is that Jesus doesn’t tell you to feel differently; He tells you to think. He tells you to look at the birds of the air in verse 26, and observe the grass of the field in verse 28. He goes on and tells you to think about what the Gentiles do in verse 32. The cure for anxiety starts with you *thinking*, not you trying to feel differently. Your anxiety flows from the fact that you are not thinking rightly about God. You are not rightly thinking about His character and His certain care for His children.

So, that’s kind of a real quick overview of what we have been talking about. I know there are questions. I’ve gotten a lot of good questions from e-mail and in private conversations and all of that. So I’m looking forward to whatever is on your heart today. I like doing Q&A’s because I’m as interested to hear what happens here as you are.

Q: Christians in other parts of the world who really are seeking first the kingdom of God don’t find sometimes all these things added to them. They find themselves persecuted, without food, put in labor camps, and those kinds of things. How do we understand that in light of what Jesus said?

The question seems to me is this: How do we vindicate God’s righteousness in light of this promise when human suffering seems to contradict it? When Jesus says, “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you,” how do we reconcile that with the reality of suffering and poverty in the world?

There are several things I want to say about this. First of all, recognize that Jesus’ is making a promise to the true children of God, not to all men indiscriminately. He is speaking to His disciples. And so general hunger in the world does not disprove this promise at all – it has nothing to do with this promise. Jesus is talking to His disciples about how God cares for His own. When most of the world does not love the true God, and is actually antagonistic toward the true God, they have no claim on what He says here. There is that aspect of it.

Secondly, I would want to distinguish between those people who call themselves Christians and true Christians. True Christians are the recipients of this promise, not everyone who applies the name to themselves. So for example, those people who suffer lack and poverty in countries that are dominated by the Catholic Church do not disprove

Jesus' promise here. Those poor people have been plundered by a system that takes advantage of the poor and ignorant to the enrichment of its leadership.

The Catholic Church is probably the wealthiest institution in all the world. So the fact that they don't care for their people has nothing to do with what Jesus says about God caring for His own children. That doesn't violate the promise because you are not dealing with true Christianity. We just have to be very clear and specific about what Jesus is addressing here.

But going beyond that, for those true Christians that are living in what we in the West would consider poverty, let me say a few additional things.

First of all, Jesus promises that necessities will be provided – food and clothing, not luxuries. For all of us that are within the walls of this room, we should not impose our standard of living which we enjoy here in the West upon the promise that Jesus makes here. The fact that some people live at levels that we think would be hard to live by, at a subsistence level, doesn't negate this promise. Our luxuries are not their necessities.

Almost every one of us lives at a higher standard of living than probably 98-99% of the world population. And so the fact that they don't live at our level is not a statement about God's promise here at all. In 1 Timothy 6:8, Paul says: "If we have food and covering, with these we will be content." The standard that we apply to that promise needs to be considered.

But getting into the spiritual nature of Jesus' teaching here, I would rather think that if you actually went to those places and found true Christians living in those difficult situations, I think you would not find them complaining that God wasn't meeting His promise. You would find them in the midst of inexplicable joy because of the hope of heaven that is theirs and the love of Christ that is within them. The fact that we would complain under their circumstances doesn't mean that they would raise accusation against God that He was not meeting their needs.

In 2 Corinthians 8:1, Paul says, "Now brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction, their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality."

In deep poverty, they were the most generous people that you could ask to meet. Paul says in verse 3: "I testify that according to their ability and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints. In this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God."

And so the fact that we might grumble doesn't mean that our brothers and sisters in Christ in those difficult circumstances are responding in a carnal way. So what I would

say is, let that Christian in that circumstance tell you that God has been unfaithful to him rather than making that conclusion for them. I think you will get a different answer.

I remember being down in Mexico several years ago, visiting an orphanage. I was speaking to the director of this orphanage. We were out in the middle of nowhere. The place was clean but it was very sparse by our standards. No one that is in my circle of friends comes anywhere close to living that way.

And yet, they were trying to take care of these children. I spoke to the director, trying to get through my broken Spanish and his broken English. I said, "What do you think, living here?" There was very little that he had in the material sense, not only for himself, but for these children around. I'll never forget his answer. It still affects me when I think about it today.

He looked at me and with total sincerity of heart and said, "Glory to God." He was just giving glory to God that he was saved, that he had this opportunity of ministry, and these children had a place to stay instead of being on the streets of Mexico.

I think if Christians in live in foreign lands came and lived amongst us for a while, they would have a certain sense of pity on us and they would say, "You know, you guys miss so much because you are so materialistic. You think you need so much in an earthly way, but you really don't. You guys are more like Martha. You are busy and distracted with so many things, yet just a few things are necessary – Jesus said, really only one."

Even if after all of that, you still find the Christians suffering, I think in terms of Matthew 5:10. Let's say they are being persecuted because the government is trying to drive out the Christian church and silence the testimony of the true God through His chosen servants in their area. I would go to Matthew 5:10, where Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

The apostle Paul suffered hunger and thirst in the midst of his ministry, but he didn't complain that God was being untrue to His promises. What did he say in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10? In the midst of all of his suffering, he says, "The Lord has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you; for power is perfected in weakness."

He looked beyond the immediate suffering to see the blessing that awaits us when we are with Christ in His kingdom. In an ultimate sense, Jesus is going to fulfill His promise to every one of His disciples. There may be ups and downs during earthly life, but when His kingdom is consummated and we gather around His table, the fullness of what Jesus has promised – "All these things will be added to you" – is going to be manifest to us. There won't be a single dot of God's promise that goes unfulfilled.

In the meantime, speaking of bringing it back to you in this kind of environment, if we become aware of that kind of suffering, then we have the responsibility to use our means

to alleviate the needs of our brothers and sisters. God gives us abundant means so that we might be able to share it with others.

So there is a whole lot that goes into answering that question. Hopefully that's helpful. All right, next question.

Q: How do you know what is the Lord's will when you pray for something you want so much and you find a lot of obstacles along the way? You keep praying for that and then all of a sudden, God gives it to you. Is it possible that God is telling you, "Okay, I know it is not good for you, but you want it so much, I am giving it to you." How do you know it is His will?

I would say a couple of things in response to that. The question, as I understand it, is: When you are earnestly seeking God over an issue or some need in your life, and you are praying about it and it seems to be withheld and you still want it, how long do you pursue it? How do you know what God's will is in your life?

Keeping it in the context of Matthew 6, I think there are a couple of things that I would say about it. We'll see if I am able to articulate it with any degree of coherence. First of all, the most important thing that we can pray as we are considering the things that we want is to remember Jesus taught us to pray: "Your will be done" – Matthew 6:10.

The place that we have to go to is this. We so trust in our heavenly Father – our good heavenly Father who knows all of our needs, our gracious heavenly Father who sent the Lord Jesus Christ to die for our sins, our powerful heavenly Father who rules over all – we so trust Him to know what is good for us, that we say that ultimately we end our prayers with the spirit of "God, here is my heart desire, but as my Lord Jesus prayed, 'Nevertheless, not as I will, but Thy will be done.' God, I want what You want for me." That is the heart of true Christian praying.

Secondly, I would say that we have to remember that God is the author of our circumstances. God is the one who has ordained the circumstances of our life. He is so omnipotent, He is so powerful, He so rules and governs over His creation, that there is nothing in our life that has not, in either a direct or intermediate sense, come from His hand.

When you understand that God is your heavenly Father and that He is in control of your circumstances, then that gives you a whole different perspective on things that have been withheld from you. You say, "Perhaps what I want isn't the best thing, and God, I will defer to that."

When you really play this out, this affects the way you approach all of life. You have your desires and your dreams for what you wanted your life to be, and yet you see God steering your life in a different direction. In those circumstances – and we can only superficially deal with this – you need to remember the teaching of Proverbs 16:9: "The

mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.” We plan out what we want and we have our desires.

But as we continue in life, we have to be willing to see God direct our lives in a different direction providentially and rejoice in His different direction just as much as if He had given us the desire of our heart.

God is worthy of our full contentment, our full worship, and our unconditional love and obedience, whether we get what we want in prayer or not. Right? This is independent of our circumstances. I think this is a big part of what Jesus means when He says: “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness.” Seek first as your supreme, unchallenged, unparalleled heart priority to know God and to live out the righteousness that Jesus describes in the Sermon on the Mount in daily life. Everything else is secondary.

If that marks your life, then God is going to providentially guide you to the fulfillment of what He wants. You can rest in the joy that a good God is doing what not only is good for you but that which will use your life to bring glory to His name. Okay? Thanks for that question.

Q: I am looking to understand the biblical distinction between fear and anxiety. Fear obviously is one of the areas that has this distinction, between commanded to fear God and not to fear man. Can you help us with the relationship so we can be helped with the temptations from all these?

I want to see if I understand your question. There is a proper fear when the the Bible says, “Fear God.” In fact, the Bible says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” I would say you cross the line into the forbidden territory into anxiety when you start to wonder whether it is going to work out for you in the end.

You start to say, “You know what? Bad things may happen to me,” and that starts to consume your thinking and distract you from a true trust in the Lord: “I may lose my job here, and if I lose my job, then what’s going to happen? How am I going to provide for my family and these things that I have responsibility for? What if I can’t get my job back? What if I can’t ever find anything? What if they turn me down for food stamps?”

The anxiety starts to tumble over you so that you have completely lost sight of the certain, loving, providential care of your heavenly Father in the midst of it. It is where your anxieties are viewed apart from the certain care of your Father and you don’t bring the loving care of your Father to bear on your circumstances.

Stated differently, it is when you start your thinking with your problem rather than starting your thinking with God. You could say, when you start your thinking, “How is this problem that I have going to work out?” That’s the wrong approach; that’s absolutely the wrong approach, because when you say, “How is this going to work out?”, you are looking into the future that you don’t know, that’s filled with uncertainty, and you start calculating what the different options are to make your problem work out.

That's entirely the wrong approach, although it's what most of us do when we are not conscious of what we are thinking.

The way you should start it out is, "*Who* is going to work this problem out?" Not how, but who. Because when you ask the "who" question, then you are driving your mind back to your heavenly Father, especially if you have been listening to the teaching on anxiety and what Jesus has said about this.

The "who" question makes you stop and say, "Ah, there is a person involved in this: it is my heavenly Father. It is my omnipotent Father who loves me, who cares for the birds, who causes the flowers to grow and clothes them with great beauty. He is the one who is over my circumstances. He has promised to care for me, and therefore, my anxieties can be put to rest." That's the way you deal with your heart on these things.

(Continuation of the above question): Would you say that the terms fear and anxiety are synonymous?

For purposes of our discussion, I would treat them the same. Whether it is a sudden fear – you are on a plane that looks like is going to go down – or just the ongoing nagging anxiety as you are trying to make ends meet in an expensive place to live, the Bible says do not fear.

Your mind and heart should be so trained in the goodness and sovereignty of God that you say, "This circumstance cannot be the end of me. And even if this plane goes down – I'm flying to London today, so I'd better watch what I say here – even if this plane goes down, this ends with me being in heaven and being face-to-face with my Savior. I win either way."

So I would treat the terms as synonymous and not try to press the difference too much.

Q: I have two questions, one for myself and one for my friend. I'm going to give you my friend's question first. At what point do thinking or planning for the future to be anxiety?

That's an absolutely great question and I am so glad that it came up. One of the things that you have to understand about the nature of God's providence and the nature of God's sovereignty is that His primary way of working is that He uses means to accomplish His ends.

When He saves souls, for example from Romans 10, he uses the means of preaching to convert the soul. And that's why Paul says, "How will they believe unless they have a preacher? How can they believe if they don't hear? How will they hear if they don't have a preacher?" God uses means to accomplish His purposes. He can work directly or He can work indirectly.

Let me give you an illustration – God's direct work would be, if I held my hand out and a \$100 bill just miraculously appeared. If I had just said, "Man, you know, things are

really tight” – pfff! But you stick your hand out and it comes back and it is still empty. That’s one way God could do it. But in the world that He has ordained, He uses means; He uses our planning; He uses our work and He’s ordained work, even before the Fall, for man to sustain himself, for example – I’m just using an illustration here.

And so, we have to understand that our planning, our good and righteous planning, is part of the means that God uses to add all things to us. Get this – I don’t know if you have ever thought about it this way, but it is much an act of God – because He is providential and working in all things and blessing the fruit of your labor – it is much an act of God when your boss hands you your paycheck as it would be if you held out your hand and a \$100 bill automatically appeared. That is as much is an act of God because He is working in all things to accomplish His purposes in your life.

And I think a lot of people go wrong just on this very point, that God uses means to accomplish His ends – a lot of people go wrong on this. They think that somehow if you are involved in the process at all, then God is not involved in it. So for example, in some places they would look down on preachers who study, because they say, “You need to just let God speak to you. Just get up and say whatever comes out of your mind when you stand up.” That’s ridiculous. God uses the means of a preacher’s study in order to communicate His truth.

Similarly, there are people who think that to use doctors at all is contrary to faith – I don’t agree with that. To use doctors is simply to avail yourselves of one of the means that God has put at our disposal in order to effectuate healing. The fact that I use a doctor doesn’t mean that I have any less faith than someone who just wants to try to get it done by prayer – God uses means.

And so, with those examples, I think it is just very important for us to understand that God works out His providence through the willing actions of rational creatures, and somehow He works through all of that to accomplish His ends. And so the fact that it is not some big spectacular miracle, like a \$100 bill appearing in your hand, doesn’t mean that it is any less God’s provision when you do your work faithfully and get paid for doing it. God is still to be given thanks either way.

Q: Now I ask my question. How does Don Green seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness in the manner that you live your life?

A: Well, that’s a good question and it’s no different for me than it is for anyone else – for other Christians. I think it’s important to understand that when Jesus talks about seeking first His kingdom, that He is talking about a lifestyle; He is talking about a pattern. This is an entire approach to life; this isn’t about what time you wake up to do your devotions, or how long, how much time, you spend in prayer.

It is about a comprehensive approach that in every circumstance that you find yourself in, you are seeking to advance the kingdom of God, either through evangelism, or through Christian service, or whatever. And you are seeking His righteousness and the totality –

just in the context of the Sermon on the Mount – the totality of Christian character in verses 3-12, the purification of your inner heart in verses 21-48 of chapter 5, and practicing righteousness in a way that you are not calling attention to yourself in chapter 6, verses 1-18.

And so in every circumstance that we find ourselves in, whether in our work or whether in our service, or church or whatever, you are saying that “I am here by God’s design; I am saved by God’s mercy in Christ; and therefore, as a response to that grace that He has shown me, I want to live out everything that I do in obedience to what He says.” And so it involves thinking biblically and it involves knowing the scriptures, seeing what the scriptures say about every manner of life and applying it and obeying it in all of those circumstances. And so there is no magic to it; there is no trick to it.

You know, some people leave what they are doing and go to the seminary – that’s great, but that doesn’t mean that someone who works in secular work is any less seeking the kingdom of God. I could stand up on the pulpit and jump up and down to emphasize that point. We just live out the circumstances that God has placed us in with an eye toward His kingdom, and we trust Him to accomplish His will through us as we are seeking to be righteous in our daily actions and our daily attitudes.

So, I don’t know if I would add too much to it. I don’t want to make it sound like it’s something big and esoteric and difficult to find – this is available to every one of you, to live in a way that would honor what Jesus says here: “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness.” I think you look at your circumstances, you say, “How can I advance God’s interest with what I have here?”, and then you go do it.

Q: How can we be anxious for nothing if we have not taken care of the daily things in life that need to be addressed?

A: That also is a very good question and is kind of tied to what I was saying earlier. Look at chapter 6, verse 33, with me again, where – in the midst of Jesus’ teaching that says, “Don’t be worried, don’t be worried, don’t be worried” – Jesus says: “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

Now – I try to think about how I want to approach this – once again we go back to the means of God’s providence. If we are not fulfilling our initial responsibilities, if we are not being faithful in our family relationships, if somebody is lazy and doesn’t work – an able-bodied man that doesn’t work or tries to get somebody else to do things for him and all of that – then that verse here, this promise of verse 33 does not apply.

That person has every reason to be anxious because he is in the midst of living in sin – you are setting yourself up for divine discipline if you are a true Christian. God fulfills this promise in part through the responsible actions of the Christian, living out his life.

So for example in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, the apostle Paul said: “If anyone is not willing to work, neither is he to eat.” A person who is not being responsible in his daily life does

not have a claim on this promise. And if God allows him to suffer hunger, it is not because He is violating His promise in chapter 6:33 – it is because that person is not seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness. It is not righteous to be lazy and irresponsible. And so if that’s the situation that somebody finds himself in, then he is outside the protection of this divine promise.

Along a similar line, 1 Timothy 5:8 says: “If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

Jesus here in Matthew 6 is not giving promises to cover for our irresponsibility. What He is doing He is promising that for those that are faithful and are seeking God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness in their life, God will provide for them.

Now, if you find yourself suffering lack, then I would start by coming back. For some of you, I would venture to say – this room is large enough that you would know I don’t have any of you in particular in mind – for example, if you are having trouble meeting your obligations because you are in debt, for example, let’s say you’ve got a lot of credit card debt that comes from a lot of consumer goods that you’ve purchased over the years, and now you’ve got 20, 30, 50 thousand dollars in debt and you can’t meet the monthly payments.

If that’s the case, your starting point is not to lay hold of Matthew 6:33 and say, “God is going to provide for me to get out of this no matter what.” That’s not your starting point because there is a spiritual issue that you need to address first. What you have to do if you are in that circumstance is step back, look at your life, and look at all the stuff that you have around you – pull out the credit card bills statements and look at the things that you bought, plasma TV and all that junk.

And your financial difficulties – listen to me; this is really important – your financial difficulties become a symptom to show you an inescapable testimony to your conscience that you have not been seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness because you have not been content with what God has given to you. You have not been content with food and covering; you have gone beyond the means that God had provided so that you could have more because you were dissatisfied with your earthly life. You are building up earthly treasures.

I’m saying this, I’m being pretty direct here, but it is all for the sake of helping you understand the spiritual reality of your life – not to criticize you or condemn you, but to help you see that, if you are in that position and you are struggling day to day, you need to ask yourself, “Why is that? How did I get here?” And for a lot of you, if you are in that position, you are going to find that it is simply because you weren’t willing to live within your means.

And if you haven’t been willing to live within your means, it is because you valued earthly treasures over heavenly treasures, and therefore, there are fundamental heart

priorities that Jesus is exposing through this teaching. You can't blame God if you can't meet the monthly bill on your credit card – come on!

So you say, “Where do I go from here?” Let me say this as a means of encouragement if you feel convicted over that: How you finish is more important than how you begin. If you have begun spiritual life badly, or you are 30, 40, 50 years into this and have no idea how you are going to get out of it, start with that fundamental assessment, that fundamental repentance of being so earthly-minded, and say, “Lord, whatever consequences are of this, today, from now on, I truly want to seek first Your kingdom. And if I have to sell off a bunch of stuff, I'm going to do it – simply, Lord, to live out the reality of seeking first Your kingdom and Your righteousness. And I'll trust You as I pursue my faithfulness in that process. I trust You, Lord, that You will supply my need.”

But a question came up – just an outstanding question – a couple of weeks ago: “What if you are being anxious over the consequences of your sin? Is it okay to be anxious over that?”

No, you are not anxious over these things, but you come to a place where you take full responsibility for your actions that led you into the circumstances that you find yourself in, and you start from that point and you say, “Lord, I don't know how You are going to sort this out, but I see that as a matter of my earthly thinking, I want to go a different direction. And by Your grace, so help me God, I am going to pursue a different direction in life and whatever You give to me out of that, I am going to trust You for.”

And so you trust yourself again to God's grace, but in the process, you are taking responsibility for what got you into the mess in the first place. Okay? That sucked the oxygen out of the room.

Q: I would like to ask a question about – looking in the context of chapter 6, we see Christ teaching in different areas with fasting and money and anxiety and then we come – which I don't think is by chance – but right in the middle of all this, is the Lord's Prayer. So my question to you is: what relationship is there between our anxiety and prayer?

A: You won't find too many people that have a healthy, vibrant prayer life suffering from anxiety – there is another symptom for you to evaluate yourself by, I suppose. I see the connection being, in verses 1-18, God has said to live unto His glory, not for the praise of man. And flowing out of that in verse 19, there is talk about your priorities. And the only way that you can live with the single eye toward the glory of God without being anxious is if you understand that God is going to meet your needs as you do that.

We do have to live in this earthly life – we do have to pay our bills and meet needs and all of that. And so Jesus is driving us again and again back to the throne of grace, back to the God who is gracious, and an inherent, intrinsic part of that walking with God is this manner of prayer that we spent several weeks teaching on a few months ago.

And so, prayer is one aspect of that fundamental walk with God, that fundamental seeking first of His kingdom and His righteousness that will lead to the anxiety-free life that Jesus lays out before us.

One other little thing here, just to tie something in – Look at verse 33 with me: “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness...” Okay, that’s what we have been talking about. When you look at the model of the Lord’s Prayer in verses 9 through 13, 14, or 15 – wherever you want to cut it off at – notice that even in the sequence of topics that Jesus lays out for prayer, the priority of God the Father and His kingdom is put first ahead of your earthly needs.

So in verse 9 it says: “Pray then in this way: our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come; Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” The priority, even in prayer, is seeking first the kingdom of God – seeking God’s will in your life.

And then as an add-on, as a second kind of thing, Jesus says: “Give us this day our daily bread... Forgive us our debts... Don’t lead us into temptation.” But always the pattern of prayer sets up and reinforces what Jesus said in verse 33 – it is always about seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness as the first matter of prayer.

And so again, if you listen to yourself pray – however it is, you are bowing at the table or getting on your knees or whatever – what is the first thing that comes out of your mouth? What is the first five minutes of that plight? Is it about rehearsing the needs and problems that you have, or is it about praising God and honoring Him and seeking His will in your issues? Because that is the connection – we have to train our hearts again and again and again to do this.

One last thing that I want to say about this is that when we are talking about dealing with anxiety – and hopefully this will help you – I think by the nature of the command that Jesus gives in 6:33, “*Continually* seek His kingdom first,” I think we should understand and expect that this is a battle. This is an issue that we are going to deal with again and again and again.

It is not like you say, “Okay, I’ve got this straight,” and it is just easy until you go to heaven and you are never anxious again. No, as new issues come up, you have to apply this teaching fresh again and again. And so you apply the same principles to new situations, always fighting the battle with the same weapons: “The character and goodness of God guarantees that He will provide for me in the end.”

Q: When we teach on anxiety, it is very convicting to all of us because we all deal with anxiety at one level or another. And so the question is along the lines of, is this just utterly condemning us when an anxious thought comes to our mind?

I would answer this on a couple of different levels. Really the question of Jesus’ teaching at one level on anxiety is laying forth to us how we respond to anxiety. When anxiety

comes to us, how do we respond to it? How do we overcome it? And in that sense, it is no different than trying to overcome hateful feelings or lustful thoughts or any of the inner temptations that present themselves to our soul. We are buffeted by temptation and buffeted by the world, aren't we? We are in the midst of the battle and what Jesus is doing here in Matthew chapter 6 is He is giving us the tools to win the battle against anxiety.

One example that is not original to me – maybe you have heard it – you know, a thought comes to your mind – awful, blasphemous, wicked thoughts come to your mind seemingly out of nowhere. Or anxious thoughts come to your mind seemingly out of nowhere. What about that? Is that sinful? Here is how I would encourage you to think about it. And this is the example that is not original to me: Someone said, “You can't keep a bird from flying over your head, but you can keep him from building a nest in your hair.” So the bird might fly over, but it is when he lands on you that you start swatting him away and doing all of that.

And so, the where-the-rubber-meets-the-road type of issue is that when temptation of any kind – in our context particularly, temptation and anxiety – comes to you, you respond to it by applying the principles that we have been talking about today and you bring your mind back, and those become an opportunity for you to draw closer to Christ as you rehearse in your mind again and again, “No, there is no reason for me to be anxious, even if it is my son going to Afghanistan.” You know I say that in absolute love – right? “Even in the most serious, severe circumstances, those drive me all the more to the spiritual reality that the God of the universe is my heavenly Father and I trust Him for absolutely everything, and I trust Him for that.”

It is not like you hear this sermon once and then you win the battle and that's all over, and it is a once-for-all kind of victory over it. These are principles that God gives to us so that we would apply them again and again and again. Every time we are tempted to anxiety, we come back and fight with the exact same weapons. The devil is relentless; he is a relentless adversary of our soul and there are multitudes of things to distract us, and so we resist him. That's what I would say to that.

Secondly, I want to say just a little bit more about it. In addition to that, we come back and recognize that as we say that, and the reason that we fight this battle, is because it is a command from Jesus: “Don't be anxious.” We are commanded to fight this spiritual battle and not to let those anxieties take root in our heart.

And so we have to engage that battle, and you say, “I can't be perfect in this, what does that say about my Christianity?” Here is what I would say to that. When you understand the battle with anxiety at that level and you say, “What does that say about my Christianity? I can't be perfect in this; I still fight this battle.” When you understand the battle at that level, you are getting very, very close to what the whole impact of the Sermon on the Mount should be on your heart.

Because when you come to the point when you say, “This is just beyond me; I don’t have the power to live this way and can never be impacted by anxiety again, that’s just too much for me” – when you get to that point, you are getting to exactly where Jesus is trying to bring you into the Sermon on the Mount.

Because when you go through the Sermon on the Mount – and I know some of you have listened to my tapes on the beatitudes; you will hear me say this over and over again – when the Sermon on the Mount convicts you so deeply, and you see how high the standard is that Jesus calls you to in your spiritual life, and you see that you don’t meet that standard, it just shows you over and over again how much you need a Savior.

It shows you how much you need someone else to be your righteousness before God. It reminds us that Christ died to forgive us of our sins, that He lived a perfect life to be our perfect representative in heaven, and it takes us outside of ourselves and leaves us, not trusting in ourselves, but trusting in Christ in order to have a right standing before God. And so it just reminds us that we need the righteousness of Christ credited to our account, because we cannot meet the standard that He calls us to with perfection every single day of our lives.

Even if we could somehow meet that standard going from this point forward in our lives, we still have all of the sin that is behind us in our lives that have to be dealt with. And so when you get convicted by this teaching on anxiety, even as it has convicted me over the past several weeks in my own heart, in that particular matter of anxiety, let that simply be another indication to you that you need to go back every day to the throne of grace and say, “Lord Jesus, I see again all over how much I need You.”

And let that point of conviction be that which draws you to a deeper love and a deeper appreciation for Christ because you realize that He has paid it all – everything that is necessary for you to be rightly related to God. And as you entrust your days to Him, and you entrust your standing before God to Him, and you come to the point where you just realize and fully admit in an increasingly deep and profound way, “I have no righteousness of my own to command myself to God; I can only be right before God based solely on the righteousness of Christ” – that is where this teaching on anxiety should lead you.

You understand that your righteousness has absolutely nothing to do with what is inside you. You need an external righteousness that is not of your own. The apostle Paul said in Philippians 3:9, “I want to be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own which is through the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.”

See, it is Christ who is our righteousness. And when you realize that you fall short of what Jesus calls you to in the Sermon on the Mount, that should just drive you to Him all the more, and you cling to Him all the more and you thank Him again and again and again for being your Savior and being your advocate before God in His throne of grace.

Q: The question is whether dealing with past anxieties prepares us for dealing with future anxieties in our lives?

I would say, yes, I think that's absolutely true. I think when we are buffeted by different anxieties as we go through life, and we respond in the way that Christ calls us to in the Sermon on the Mount, and as we see Him demonstrate His faithfulness to us, it builds up our spiritual muscles, just like lifting weights, to face more anxieties in the future.

What I really want to say to you as a word of encouragement, when a significant trial comes and you find yourself broken by it, or you find yourself getting worked up by the difficulties that you are facing in a particular time in your life, don't let that throw you into utter despair, beloved. Don't be discouraged and say something like, "Well, nothing that has ever happened in my spiritual life before now must have even mattered, because if it was real, I wouldn't be like that today." And you say, "Well, may be it wasn't real all along." I would encourage you not to view it that way.

Simply take this opportunity where you find yourself falling short, and you find yourself discouraged with anxiety – if you find yourself like that today, simply take this opportunity to manifest your trust again. And God is graciously showing you, and you have to remember, God is your heavenly Father if you are a Christian; He is being gracious to you even in this latest trial and His designs for you are always good.

Remember, beloved, that He deals with you – if you are a Christian – He deals with you from a position of love and grace because Christ Himself has opened the doors of grace to you and God deals with you as a child. Sometimes He disciplines His children; He helps them see that their faith isn't as great or as deep as they thought it was before the latest trial hit.

And if you find yourself in that position, and you say, "I'm not meeting the standard that Jesus calls me to" – when you find yourself in that position, beloved, simply humble yourself once again and go to the Lord and say to Him with this heart attitude, "Lord, I see that I am not as far along as I thought I was, but I want to respond to this rightly now as this comes to my mind, as I see that I need to trust You once again."

So, take the opportunity to respond to what is in front of you now, rather than question whether anything that ever happened in your prior spiritual life was real. And understand that the same principles apply regardless of the kind of trial that you are facing – Jesus didn't give us one set of principles if we have concern over our children and a different set of principles for trusting God in our finances. It all comes back to the fact that you believe and you trust the character of God as He has revealed it in the scriptures – that is your center of gravity in the Christian life.

And every different manifestation of trial and anxiety all comes back to that central point, the central point that God to the Christian is a heavenly Father who loves them, who knows their needs before they ask, and He will be faithful to you through it all. And so it is not that complicated. And that's why it is easy for me to say this is available to every

true Christian. This kind of trust in Christ is not the exclusive domain of pastors; it doesn't belong to the guys who are up front or anything like that, as though it were reserved for an exclusive spiritual elite. No, this is what God has made available to every believer in Christ. This is where we can live as Christians; this is where we must live – bless His name.

Q: The question is: how do I deal with the concerns I have over my unsaved children?

A: I would say this, that in some ways, you are addressing one of the most difficult, practical questions in the Christian life when you ask that question, because you are talking about your own flesh and blood. You are talking about the children who have come from the fruit of your own body. And I understand that you love those boys; when they were babies, you helped them and fed them and you cared for them all the way up to now, and you are looking at their adult years.

And you know, I wouldn't ask for show of hands from the people in this room because everyone would raise their hands, but at one level or another, everyone in this room is dealing with that question: "How do I trust God for the fact that I see my adult children and I see even younger children – that you may have – not trusting Christ, not concerned about their eternal destiny?" That is a great and important question, and the truth of the matter is that it just shows us once more how completely dependent on God we are to work in the lives of the people that we love.

You know, Jesus said in John 6:44: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day." No one can come to Christ unless the Father draws him – Jesus said that, not John Calvin; that is what the Lord Jesus Christ said. And that verse in this whole situation that you see on a practical level in your own life brings us face to face with the fact that we are completely dependent on God and completely helpless before Him to accomplish the things that are most important to us – and that's a good thing, beloved.

For all of us who have loved ones that are not in Christ yet, I would emphasize: don't give up praying. But we have to realize how utterly helpless we are to make the things that are most important to our heart happen. We have to realize, as Jonah said in Jonah 2:9, "Salvation belongs to the Lord." Salvation is His gift to bestow as He wants. And that means that we have to trust God for salvation – not only for our own salvation, but for the salvation of the people that we love.

And how do we respond to that? What do we do with that? When you have the opportunity with these loved ones, you share the gospel with them; you preach the gospel to them. You implore them to repent; you implore them to believe on Christ. But at the end of the day, where you are left, beloved, is you are left being on your knees before you crawl into bed, and you go on your knees before God and you say, "God, their salvation has to come from You or it is not going to happen at all."

Now beloved, if the truth be told, if you are thinking rightly, that's exactly the way you want it. I am glad that someone else's salvation doesn't depend on what I do, because I could not begin to carry that weight on my shoulders and on my conscience. I have enough trouble dealing with my own sins, let alone trying to persuade someone who is not a Christian – someone who is dead in their sins, someone who is not seeking for God – I can't possibly get inside their heart and try to turn them around so that they would seek God as He has revealed Himself in the Lord Jesus Christ – you might as well try to change the spots on a leper.

No, we are not lord of the human heart; we can't make that happen. And when you realize that, where you go with your concern over those unsaved loved ones is this: It drives you all the more to depend on God and to pray to Christ for the salvation of those souls, realizing that God uses the means of the preaching of the scriptures and He uses the prayers of believers – those are the means that He uses to accomplish salvation in the lives of anyone who ever comes to Christ.

And so the fact that your loved ones are not coming to Christ is not a reflection necessarily of any failure on your part. Ultimately, we are just shut up to the mercy of God and we plead to Him to be merciful and to do that which we cannot do on our own and that which He said is a providence that He has reserved exclusively to Himself.

And so as I have said before, I will say one more time. If I am going to entrust my own soul to Christ, then what that means is, you trust Him enough for the souls of those that you love as well. And you do that not from a position of desperation, a position of anxiety; you do it from a place of perfect trust and repose, just as you have reposed your entire soul to Christ, and you are confident that you are going to go to heaven because you trust Him to complete that which He has started in your heart and He has already giving you a perfect righteous standing in Christ anyway.

When you think about your loved ones, you say, “Lord, You have been so good to me, and You have proven Yourself so perfectly in Your word, and You have purchased my soul on the cross of Christ, I am going to trust You no matter what. Even if that means my loved ones die without Christ, I am going to trust You even then.”

And as I have said to you before, beloved, God had to use a plane crash to teach me that lesson. Man, that hurt to see my brother and my father go down in a plane without Christ – I say, to see them go down; I obviously did not witness the crash, but you know what I mean. The fact that it happened in our lives and I have to deal with the reality that my father and brother are probably not with Christ – it's okay; ultimately, it's okay because if my dad and brother died without Christ, I can live with that because God reigns.

My heavenly Father is in charge of the universe and He never makes a mistake and He has certainly dealt well with me. So I am going to trust Him for the most important things that I can't do anything about. You know what? One day, whether my dad and brother repented five seconds before that plane hit the tree or not, here is where it ultimately comes out: When I get to heaven, my faith is not going to be disappointed.

If Dad and Roger are not there, I'm not going to look around and say, "Man, God let me down here," – perish the thought! I am going to be in heaven and the only thing that is going to be overwhelming in my mind is this: I am going to be overwhelmed with the thought that God has been far exceedingly, abundantly gracious to me than I could have ever imagined. I can imagine quite a bit from reading His word, and it is going to be so much better than I ever dreamed.

And so, my joy in heaven is not going to be diminished if some of my loved ones are not there. And I am trusting God to bring to fulfillment everything that He has said and that He will be exceedingly, abundantly gracious to me in ways that I can never imagine.

So where does that lead you, beloved? You have the same promise of joy and hope that I do – this is the same hope that is available to all Christians. And understand that the Bible says that whoever believes in Christ is not going to be disappointed. And so we plead with our loved ones to repent; we pray to God for Him to work in their lives to bring them to salvation. But at the end of the day, our heart is settled in the hope that God will be good and gracious to us, and our love for Him is the predominant affection of our heart. And we realize that we love Christ more than mother or father or brother or sister or anyone else, and that supreme affection is reserved for Christ alone.

So how could I wrap it up in light of all of that? You love those boys and you pray for them with all of your heart, but at the end of the day, you say, "I'm going to trust God for their souls just like I have trusted Him for mine." And you bank all of your hope and all of your aspirations solely in the goodness and greatness of God and know that He will be righteous and do what is right in the end.

I hope that's helpful. The providence of God, the sovereignty of God over your life, is the anchor for all of life – the fact that God is involved not only in good things that happen to you, but He is involved when sinful things happen to you. Joseph said to his brothers: "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good."

And in Acts 2:23 – let me read this last verse as we close, because the depth of the security for our souls and the anchor for our thinking here is just so profound. When Peter was preaching about the crucifixion of Christ, preaching to those men of Israel in chapter 2:22 – listen to what he says here:

Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know – look at verse 23 – this man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

God planned the crucifixion of Christ before the foundation of the world. And so, when sinful men were carrying out their wicked deeds, God was not an author or a party to their sinfulness, but He was directing their sinfulness to accomplish His purposes. When people sin against you – and some of you have been sinned against significantly –

understand, you can trust God even in that because God uses even the wicked actions of sinners and Christians against you, and He uses that to accomplish His purposes in your life.

Everything that has ever happened to you, everything that you have done – all of it falls under the promise that “God works all things together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.” There is nothing that you need to fear if you are a true Christian, seeking the kingdom and righteousness of God. He will work it all out and add all these things to you in the end. Let’s pray:

Father, we marvel at the supremacy of Your person. You reign over little things like birds and flowers and how they eat and how they grow. You reign over nations and direct the hearts of kings to accomplish Your purposes. And in between all of that, Father, somewhere our life falls in. We see that You are in sovereign control of our lives as Christians, that You love us and that You will accomplish Your purpose in the end, Father, and we trust You for that.

Your character is the anchor for the fact that we need not be anxious. You are our heavenly Father who knows everything before we ask and who knows our every need, who is wise beyond all measure, too good to be unkind, too wise to be mistaken.

And so Father, in the holiness of Your presence, we bow before You. We seek Your kingdom and Your righteousness and pray for grace. So accomplish Your purposes and let us love You with all of our hearts, souls, strength and mind, and in that security find the peace that passes all understanding. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

This transcript was prepared by Shari Main.