

# “Don’t Worry”



BY DAVID POWLISON

Jesus said to His disciples,

“For this reason I say to you, do not worry about your life, as to what you will eat; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.

Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; they have no storeroom or barn, and yet God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds!

And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life’s span? If then you cannot do even a very little thing, why do you worry about other matters?

Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more will He clothe you?, you men of little faith!

And do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not keep worrying. For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things. But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.

Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

- Luke 12:22-34

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Let’s set the scene. Jesus is talking to a huge crowd of people—so many, they were even stepping on each other. They’re out in the open air, up on a hillside overlooking the lake, the Sea of Galilee. It’s a lovely scene, the lake spreading out below, sparkling, tucked between the dry hills, fishermen out fishing in their small boats. Around them, wheat is growing in small plots of land, in between patches of rough or fallow ground. The crowd is mostly simple people: dirt farmers, fishermen, peasant women. Here’s how the conversation gets going. Jesus has been talking to them about two things: who they’re most afraid of—God or other people; and what their attitude is towards Him.

Some guy had just interrupted Him: “Jesus, Master, tell my brother to give me half of the inheritance! I want my share. I want what’s fair” (Luke 12:13). Jesus cuts the man off at the knees—this is not “gentle Jesus, meek and mild.” He basically says, “Look, man, I’m not going there. I’m not going to divide

inheritances for you. I've got a different game plan. There's something else I'm about." But the man's interruption has turned the topic of conversation to money and possessions: "I want mine! I want my share of what's fair." So Jesus turns to the whole crowd and says, "Look out for every form of greed. What you are is not what you own." Money is as good an issue as any to get at what people most fear and at how they view Jesus.

Then Jesus tells a story about a man who had lots of money (12:16-21). He lived a comfortable life. He could sit back and relax. No worries, he thinks. But God will say to that man, "You fool! You're going to die tonight. Who's going to have what you worked for your whole life? You have nothing. Your life is an utter waste."

Jesus weaves a warning through the whole story, "Keep your life from every form of greed." That theme runs through this earlier section (verses 13-21) right to where we come in at verse 22: "Keep your life free from every form of greed, from every form of 'I want mine,' and even from 'Because I have mine I can sit back and coast.'"

Then Jesus pushes the topic forward another step. He has been talking to the crowd, and now He starts talking directly to the people in the front row seats. That's where our passage begins. He talks straight to the disciples—His friends, the people who love and know Him.

"For this reason I say to you, don't worry about your life, what you are going to eat." He refers back to something He just said, but changes the application. In other words, he had said that if you *don't have* something, then don't get greedy. And even if you *do have* a lot, it's not your life, so don't rely on it. Now, Jesus applies the same principle to a different problem. Even if you *don't have* a lot of money, or as much as you think you need, money is still not your life. So don't get anxious. Money can't make or break you. "Don't worry about what you'll eat or your body, what you're going to put on. Your life is more than food and the body more than clothing."

We have to remember that Jesus is talking in a subsistence culture: scratch-plow farmers, poor fishermen, people selling a few items in the marketplace. Think third-world village.

Most of us here pretty much take food and clothing for granted—but we worry about money, too. Jesus goes right to the basics: food, clothing, shelter. Are you going to live or starve tomorrow? Although our situations are different, the same issues, attitudes, and temptations play out. "Your life is more than food. Your life is more than money." That's how Jesus starts.

Then He lists reason after reason after reason why you should not be in the grip of fear and worry. He first says, "Consider the ravens." Remember, Jesus is talking outside. He's not utilizing a literary device or a sermon illustration He thought up in his study! He's out in the open in Palestine. They have crows there, just like here in Glenside, Pennsylvania. Their kind of crow happens to be the gray-hooded crow. Those crows are flying around overhead cawing, or hopping around on the ground squabbling. "Take a look at those crows! Think about them. They neither sow nor reap. They don't have storerooms or barns. They make no preparations and have no storage. Yet God feeds them. How much more valuable are you than birds?"

He adds a second reason: "Which of you by worrying can add a single hour to his lifespan? If you can't do the littlest thing like this, why do you worry about the rest?"

Jesus gives you another reason. He keeps piling it on. "Consider the lilies." He's not talking here about fancy flowers. He's talking about the kind of tough wildflower that grows in a vacant lot or on roadsides, among the weeds. Remember, these are poor people. They don't have flower gardens. Jesus is pointing out the kind of flower that grows in a weed patch, a bright splash of color. "Look at those flowers over there, how they're growing. They neither toil nor spin"—they make no effort to look pretty. "But I tell you even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. If God so clothes the grass of the field" (here today, gone tomorrow), "which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace" (gathered on the brush pile to be burned), "how much more will He clothe you, you of little faith?"

Then Jesus gives a fourth reason. His next comment deals not so much with *feelings* of anxiety as with what you are *living for*. Jesus

describes that driven, obsessed state of mind, the preoccupation with money and possessions. “Don’t seek what you are going to eat and drink, and don’t keep worrying.” He doesn’t mean not to have a job to make money. He means, don’t make it your life objective. Don’t keep fretting and obsessing. Don’t be driven. “All these things the nations of the world eagerly seek.” In other words, that’s their business. That’s what everyone in the world is into. “Your Father knows that you need these things. But seek His kingdom. These things will be added to you.” God says, don’t live for the one thing everybody lives for. Don’t worry about it, because “I’m going to give you something better—and along the way I’ll take care of you financially.”

Lest we should doubt (“Is He *really* going to give something better?”), Jesus piles it on in His next reason. He says, “Don’t be afraid, little flock.” That’s a vivid picture: “little flock.” It’s the only place in the Bible where that phrase is used. It gives the sense of a flock of sheep small enough that the shepherd knows all their names; He knows what each one faces. He knows their personalities. He knows what they

wear out, that unfailing treasure in heaven where no thief comes and no moth destroys. Where your treasure is your heart will be also.”

So far, the Word of God, with a little amplification!

### 1. **You’ve got plenty of good reasons to worry!**

Let me jump in this way. Point number one. When you think about it, you have good reasons to worry. I’m not going to say there is no reason to worry. For example, the people Jesus is talking to are *poor* people. They have primitive sanitation, no health care, and their lives immediately depend on whether it rains or not. When drought comes here in Glenside, it’s just an inconvenience. Your lawn gets brown. But when drought comes there, they die.

There are things to worry about. In fact, here’s one of the things that makes talking about a passage like this a pleasure. This is one of those topics where I *know* the shoe fits you! I know something about you: You worry. You happen to know something about me—the exact same thing. We all put our own spin on the temptation to worry. This is one of those universals.

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## Jesus has piled up reasons not to get hung up on money, even when survival is at stake. This leads to radical implications for your lifestyle.

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are like. And Jesus makes sure we know that nobody twists God’s arm. He’s not reluctant to love you. “Your Father has gladly chosen to give you the kingdom.”

Jesus has piled up reasons not to get hung up on money, even when survival is at stake. This leads to radical implications for your lifestyle. “Sell your possessions, give to charity.” Instead of every form of greed—What’s in it for me? I want my share! I’ve got a lot, so I can sit comfortably! What if I don’t have enough? Maybe I won’t get something I need!—instead of get, got, get more, hold on to what you got, want to get, worry you won’t get—instead of all that, *you can give because you have been given to*. Here’s the logic. Your Father who loves you gives you a life that you can give away and not lose. “Make yourselves money belts that don’t

We all get obsessed about the wrong things. If you are six years old, perhaps here’s the level at which this comes in: “My older brother makes three bucks more on his allowance. If only I had that extra three bucks. Why, if I only had a little bit more...” Then if you’re the ten-year-old brother, “My sister is sixteen. She’s so lucky, because she has a job. If only I had a job, wouldn’t that be great!” Then you get a job—and you get bills to pay. You think having a job is going to solve all your worries, but now you’ve got bills to worry about, and everything you want or need costs more.

So now you’ve got an after-school job and can put some spending money in your pocket. You still worry, “Am I going to get into college? How will we pay for college? What kind of a part-time job or student loan will I need?” If

you're in college or just graduating, "Am I going to get a job? What if there's no work? My parents have jobs, so they're set. But there's not much out there for me." You worry about getting a job. Then when you get that real job, "Will I ever have enough money for a house? How are we going to afford kids? Will they be able to go to school?" Even with a job, you find lots more good reasons to worry. I don't know about you, but I've had this experience too often: Even when we have enough money to pay all the bills, I leave that bill-paying session with a vague, underground anxiety. A half hour ago I had a comfortable amount of money, but, now, after I've paid everything, there's not much left, and low-grade worry sneaks in. Perhaps you can identify with this one. In our budget it's always the dentist or the auto mechanic. Somehow I just never figure in that \$300 brake job or \$900 for a major reconstructive root canal on the right lower molar. It never gets into the budget, but it easily gets onto the worry list.

Then you get old like me and start doing financial planning for retirement—which you should have been thinking about twenty years before (another worry). The planners show you diagrams of your projected assets. The amount goes up for a little while, and then takes a nosedive at about age seventy-five. You better die before you're eighty-two—or you'll be in the poorhouse or dependent on your kids to take care of you. Then there's your 401K: the stock market crashes....

There's *always* something to worry about.

One of the things that makes money such a neat worry to think about is that it has an obsessive component. It's always there. It says "Goodnight" to you. It wakes you up in the middle of the night to say "Hello." It greets you in the morning with, "Hi, here I am. Think about me." It butts in on your drive home: "Just reminding you I'm here." Financial worries play with your mind. It provides a good example for all the other worries that operate in exactly the same way. What you see in common with all the things we worry about—every single thing—is that they are *uncertain*. They're all iffy. Am I going to get that? Maybe, maybe not. If I have it, could I lose it? Maybe, maybe not. We worry about stuff that is inherently uncertain. You've

got good reasons to worry, because you can never be sure. Money is a great starting point—but maybe there are other things that plague you.

What hijackers seize the controls of *your* mind? I'd like you to personalize this. What are the one, two, six, dozen things that tend to snag you? What do *you* tend to worry about?

Maybe it's not financial, or in addition to financial, there are other worries.

- "Do I have any real friends?"
- "What if I don't make the team? What if I forget my lines in the play? What if someone else gets picked for that committee? What if...?"
- "Will I ever find a husband or wife?"
- "If I do find one, will he or she be faithful to me?"
- "Am I worth marrying?"
- "Will I be able to have kids?"
- "If I have kids, how will they turn out?"
- "What about my health? Some of my friends are dying of cancer. It's painful. Is that going to be for me? Will I be able to have the strength to go through that? What if I get Alzheimer's? The thought of ending my life not even able to recognize the people I love: what about that?"

On and on and on, your health, your money, your relationships, your achievements. Any of those things can hijack the controls. You worry, fret, and stew. The fact is, these are all iffy. You have good reasons to worry about those things. None of them are sure. Your health could go to the dogs. The stock market could crash. There could be no jobs. The kids could turn out rotten. You could end up lonely. You could fail at something or get excluded. These are all unsure by nature. There is every reason in the world to worry about them. Let me ask you to personalize: *What* do you worry about?

But there's a second personalizing question to ask yourself. When all is said and done, *why* do you worry? Why do you fret about these things in the first place? Why do you obsess? Why do you get your nose to the grindstone? Why do you get preoccupied and driven, or throw panic attacks or brood, or whatever form your anxiety takes?

The easy answer is to point your finger back towards *what* you are worrying about, and to think that explains it. “I’m worried because I don’t know if I’m going to get a job. I’m worried because I don’t have enough saved for retirement. I’m worried because I have a family history of cancer.” But Jesus doesn’t do that. He explains our worries not by pointing to how uncertain life is, but by pointing to something in us. Throughout this whole passage He says, “You worry because of something about *you*, not because of the things you worry about.” That’s what He threw on the table in the interchange just before the passage we’re focusing on: “Guard yourself from *every* form of greed.”

“I want my share of what’s fair” was one form of greed. *Covetous* greed will make you angry and manipulative. You’ll even break in to interrupt Jesus when He’s talking!

“I am set. I can kick back. I’ve got plenty!” That was a different form of greed. *Satisfied* greed throws you off when it comes to money or any other aspect of life. You could care less about what really matters because ease lulls you to sleep.

In the passage right in front of us, where Jesus is talking to His disciples, His friends, about not being anxious, He goes after a third form of greed. “What if I don’t have enough? What if what I need isn’t there?” That’s *anxious* greed. I want something I might not get, so I worry.

A little later on in the passage Jesus captures the same thing from a different angle: “Oh you of little faith!” What He means by that is not that you have *no* faith. Remember, He’s talking to His disciples. Think of this metaphor for what happens to us. It’s like a flashlight with drained batteries. It still makes light, but the light is yellowed and flickering and uncertain. The faith is dying out. There’s not much battery juice left. We lose sight of God because what we want (and worry about) is the only thing we see. One of the things Jesus does here is to help us spot things. “Where do I go off? Why do I worry? What makes me forget? Why do I fret? Why do I lose it?” When faith is dying out, greed and worry come to life. When anxious greed comes to life, it kills off faith.

The middle of the passage gives another take on why you worry. “Which of you by

worrying can add a single cubit to his lifespan, a single hour? If you can’t even do a small thing, why are you worrying about the rest?” Worriers act as if they might be able to control the uncontrollable. That’s something central to the problem of worry. It’s the illusion that we can *control* things. “If only I could get my retirement right, I could control the future.” “If only my parents would give me three dollars more allowance, I wouldn’t get caught short on Saturday when my friends want to catch a movie, but I spent my money on candy bars earlier in the week.” “If only I could get my diet and medicine right, I wouldn’t get cancer.” “If only I could figure out the right childrearing technique, I could guarantee how my kids turn out.” Control. Worry assumes the possibility of control—over the uncontrollable. The illusion of control lurks inside your anxiety. You’ll see it in yourself, and in the people God gives you to help. Anxiety and control are two sides of one coin. We want to control something. Since we can’t control it, we worry about it.

Jesus’ final comment gives you one more handle on *why* you worry. A worrier is storing “treasure” in the wrong place. If what you *most value* can be taken away or destroyed, then you set yourself up for anxiety. Money? health? a particular friendship? the dream of marriage? success in sports or business? how your children turn out? Even when you feel good, when everything’s going your way, you’re building your house on sand. Your treasure is vulnerable. And whenever what is “precious” to you is threatened, you’ll be gripped with fear. Guaranteed. Where do you store your treasure? In iffy things or certainties?

Jesus takes apart why we worry. So why do *you* worry? What desires are you greedy for? What life objectives snuff out your awareness of God? What wants make you want to control your world? Grasp those things, and Jesus’ alternative will become very, very precious to you.

## **2. You’ve got plenty of better reasons *not* to worry!**

Jesus has no interest in simply talking about what’s wrong with us. He’s always going somewhere good. He does make reference to the temptations you face during anxiety, and to

some of the ways you go off the rails, and to how your faith dims when you fall into greed. But the passage is largely about giving you lots of solid reasons not to worry. Sure, you have good reasons to worry, because lots of things are uncertain. But you have many, much better reasons *not* to worry!

Some things are *certain*!

That's where Jesus is going and where He aims to take you. It's a terrific, encouraging story that He tells. Jesus lays it on thick and fast to His disciples. He piles up reason after reason, wooing, winning, informing, and encouraging them. I want you to be persuaded and heartened. "Don't worry" doesn't hang in space as a moral platitude! Jesus gives you solid reason after solid reason to live without fretting—even when you're facing the very things that are inherently uncertain and uncontrollable. I've teased out seven promises from what Jesus says, seven reasons for you not to worry. Let's look at these together.

Again, I want you to make it personal. Which one of these do *you* find most inviting? Which one is most necessary and helpful, where you can say, "If I remember \_\_\_\_\_, I'll be a different person this week"? Which one would make the most difference? "If I could just remember \_\_\_\_\_, I would not worry

are tight." What you have or don't have is not what's playing in the theatre of the universe. Your life is more than food and clothes. For starters, what matters a lot more is "Who *do* you fear?" and "What *do* you do with Jesus?" Those are life and death.

You've probably known people, as I have, where it's obvious that they are living for very empty, foolish things. Have you ever seen a twenty-three-year-old woman who was living to be beautiful? She's living for her face. You say, "That is the stupidest thing in the world! If you live for your face, the best that can happen is you grow old and wrinkly. Come on! That's a losing bet right from the start!"

What if you live for your health or for your athleticism or for adventures? Inevitably, you start to get knee injuries after age thirty-five. Your reflexes slow down. You get old. Systems start to break down. And, sooner or later, you surely die. "You fool! Isn't there more to life than health and sports and vacations?"

It's like that with everything we live for—and worry about. If you live for money, you are banking on a clunker. The car is a lemon, but you spent everything you have on it. It will *always* break down and give you reason to have worries on top of your worries. Your life is so much more. There are better things to give your

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about money, health, friends,...whatever." Which of these *better* reasons do you most need?

Jesus starts out by saying, *Your life is so much more than food or clothing*. There's so much more to who you are than what you have or don't have. Jesus refers back to the story of the rich man who was a fool: "for this reason" points back to what He'd just said. That rich man's life was not *made* by the fact that he had lots of money. Money couldn't give him identity or meaning or security or life. Therefore, Jesus adds, "If that's so, then your life can't be *unmade* by the fact that your finances

energies to. I promise you this. I promise you that there is something much more important going on in your life than the stuff you worry about. Go through your worry list one by one. Jesus promises, "Your life is more than \_\_\_\_\_." Something much bigger is playing in town. That's promise Number 1. Jesus doesn't give us much detail about what is more important (He'll unpack it a little later), but He promises that life is more than your worries.

Here's the second reason. Jesus tells people to look around. Open your eyes. Look at the world. In this case, *look at crows*. Notice

these birds flying overhead. It's like saying, Notice rabbits, Notice pigeons, Notice feral cats. Notice some common, not very appealing animal you take for granted. Jesus says, "Consider the ravens. See, God feeds them. He takes care of them even though they don't put a single seed in the ground. They don't ever water their crops. They don't store a thing for next year—not even for tomorrow. They live in the moment, day to day, but God provides for them."

How does God feed them? Think about it for a minute with me. It's not romantic in the least. A crow is a scavenger. Jesus isn't painting a sweet little picture of God feeding the poor helpless birdies. These aren't cute little babies looking up to momma bird to give them a worm. Crows are tough. They are dirty birds. They are aggressive. They are smart. They are savvy. They are noisy. They are obnoxious. They are pests. They are scavengers. How does God feed crows? Road kill. Trash picking. Raiding your crops. That's why you have to have scarecrows. God feeds the crows by the fact that they steal your food and pick over your garbage!

I have to tell a story about how this came home vividly to me this past July. A treasured plum tree grows in our yard. This year it was the only one of our five fruit trees to bear fruit, because of the odd weather last spring. As summer unfolded, no less than forty, beautiful, sweet plums (I counted them!) were coming to ripeness. I couldn't wait!

One day when I came home, there were only twenty plums left on the tree. A gang of crows was having a pig feast on my precious plums! Earlier in the year a gang of crows moved into our neighborhood. Six crows. I called them The Crow Boys. They were noisy, obnoxious, and aggressive. They made all kinds of racket early in the morning. They did what crows do. They were always scavenging. The Crow Boys had found my plum tree. You can imagine, I was not happy. That was my beloved tree! We planted this tree as a family. I prune it regularly and spray it faithfully. I had been eagerly looking forward to those forty juicy plums. And now there were only twenty left. I mobilized our defenses. I threw ice cubes at the crows, banded trash cans, and quickly ran down

to Primex Garden Shop to get netting to put over the tree. By the time I got back, there were only twelve plums left on the tree. I draped the netting. When any crow tried to land, he would get a big unpleasant surprise. I felt a little safer. Sure enough, a few minutes later, as I watched from the window, the first crow swooped in for a landing. He hit the netting, got tangled and flustered, and flapped off irritably, "Caw! Caw! Caw! Caw!" So I thought, maybe I've won!

But by the end of that day, there were *zero* plums left on my tree! Those crows were so smart. They figured out how to come up from the bottom of the tree. They'd land on the ground, and hop up through the branches close to the trunk where the netting didn't reach. They cleaned me out. Oh, for a .22 rifle and a clip of ammo and legalized hunting in the suburbs!

God's sense of timing and sense of humor are very interesting: quite a coincidence that I had to preach on this passage a month later. Jesus says to me, "Oh, David, by the way, look how God provides for the crows." Yes, just look. He provides by using my fruit trees!!! But here's the promise: *You are much more important than crows*. Yes, the scavengers get fed. But how much more does He care about you? See what Jesus is saying here? God feeds a bird, even a trash bird, one of the Old Testament's unclean animals, a carrion bird that lives on road kill and theft. People matter a *lot* more to God. That's a promise you can take home.

Jesus keeps going. He adds a third reason, a different kind of reason, a simple logical reason. *Which of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?* It's a difficult phrase to translate. Literally, Jesus says, "Which of you by worrying can add a cubit to his span?" What does that mean? A cubit is a distance measure: eighteen inches, your elbow to your fingers. I think He's saying this. The Bible envisions life as a "walk." You walk through your life, step by step by step. Jesus is saying, "You won't get even eighteen inches further by worrying. You can't even get half a step further by worrying." Think about that. Worrying does...nothing. It accomplishes...zero. I promise you, worry won't get you eighteen inches further down the path of your life.

Our first promise: There is something

bigger going on in your life than the things you worry about. Second promise: You matter more than crows. God feeds them, and He will surely feed you. Third promise: It's pointless to worry. Don't fool yourself by thinking that worry can accomplish something.

Here's Jesus' fourth promise, a fourth better reason not to worry. "Keep looking around. This time, *consider the lilies of the field*, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin, yet I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory is not clothed like one of these." Again, as I said earlier, He's not talking about orchids or hybrid roses. He's not even talking about those tiger lilies that bloom in banks of color in summer. Jesus is pointing to weed flowers growing in vacant lots, splashes of color in the midst of rocks and brambles and tough grasses. God makes beautiful the flowers that grow on their own beside the road, that don't get any tending, flowers nobody planted and nobody takes care of—except God. Think of those little bright-blue flowers that grow out of the gravel beside the road. Imagine wild Morning Glories: tough, hardy, and beautiful.

Jesus starts with the same logic as with the crows. He says, "Look around. Look at that." But Jesus ups the ante this time. If God makes mere wildflowers so glorious that their beauty outdazzles Solomon, the richest man of the Old Testament, how much more will *you* outdazzle the lilies, O you of little faith! Do you see? Do you get that? This promise is *far* more than "God will take care of you." This is "God will clothe you in nothing less than His radiant glory!" I promise you. "So why do you worry about the clothes you wear? I'll dress you in My own glory! Why do you worry about your health? I'll raise you from the dead to eternal life. Why do you worry about a few dollars? I'll give you the whole earth as your inheritance. Why do you worry when someone doesn't like you? I'll make you live in the kingdom of My love!"

That's the fourth promise. When you get it, it's a spectacular reason not to worry. This is far more than giving you nice clothes. God is giving you a life that is radiant and indestructible and full of glory. You will *dazzle*. If God so adorns mere wildflowers with glory, how much more will He make you as radiant

as Himself!

Here's Jesus' fifth reason. "Don't seek what you are going to eat and drink. Don't keep worrying about these things"—the word here for worry doesn't mean feeling anxious; it means to obsess and be driven, to be preoccupied—"All these things the nations of the world eagerly seek." We could put the reasoning this way: *Look at what everybody everywhere is after*. Are you going to be a lemming? Are you going along with the crowd? Are you going to march in step just because everybody else does it?

Look at this example: the Sunday paper, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. A big fat paper. What percentage of this paper is about money? Ninety percent? Probably. It's not just the business and financial section, is it? Look at the automobile section, the housing section, the want ads, the jobs, all the other advertising. Even the Sports pages: the baseball strike, salaries. And most of the front page and news articles—wars, crime, budgets, taxes—are also about money. The newspaper is about what everybody is into. It's ninety percent about money.

So the whole world is after money. That's what *life* is about, according to the *Inquirer*. That's what counts as news. That's what people are interested in. But what about this book, the Bible? It talks a lot about money—maybe five percent is directly about money and property. But the Bible is one hundred percent about what really matters, like "What is your attitude towards money? Since people live for *either* God or money, what will it be?" This book is about what really lasts. What's not iffy. What's certain. It's one hundred percent about the living God, the One who made us in His image, who made us to live our lives for something bigger and better than the stuff we tend to worry about and define our lives by.

Sure, you have economic needs. We're not living airy-fairy in space. Jesus says, "I promise you, your Father knows you need these things." You do need a job. It's not wrong to provide for retirement, to pay your mortgage and bills, to own a car. Your Father knows you need these. But what are you going to be *about*? Is your life *about* money? Everybody else's life is: "The nations of the world, people everywhere,

eagerly seek these things.” Jesus says, “Your Father will give what you need.” If you just get the BIG things straightened out, you’ll have what you need in the little things that everybody else blows all out of proportion. I promise you, what everybody in the world is obsessed with, God puts a distant second. He’ll give you what you need to live on if you NEED Him in order to live.

Jesus is on a roll. He gives better reason after better reason. Here’s His sixth promise. This is the most significant reason of all. Some of what Jesus has been saying you might half get by reading the paper, looking at crows, looking at flowers, or thinking a minute about how useless it is to worry. Common sense, open-your-eyes: it is God’s world, so life works the way He says it does. But you’d never see how *God* connects to the crows or the flowers unless He tells you. And this sixth reason is the capstone, and it’s all about God. This is the climax of Jesus’ argument. This is the best of all these “better reasons not to worry.” *God promises you...Himself.* In essence what Jesus says is, *your Father* knows you need these things. If you are preoccupied with *His kingdom*, then the other things you need will be added on. Get your life to be about what *your Father* is about.

This promise is sensitive to our tendency towards anxiety. We’ve seen what happens if we live for money, health, being pretty, having a boyfriend or girlfriend, or job success. But what guarantee do you have that Jesus’ kingdom won’t turn out to be one more iffy bet, one more disappointment? So Jesus really camps here. He gets very tender: “*Your Father knows what you need...Don’t be afraid, little flock, because your Father has chosen gladly to give...*” You can throw your weight on this. Jesus makes it as personal, intimate, and generous as possible. He wants you to really get this. Here you can stake your life and never be disappointed. He’ll give you something you never have to worry about. As we said earlier, the shepherd of a “little flock” knows every single sheep by name. He knows your concerns. He knows your situation. He knows your personality. And it is His *pleasure* to give you the kingdom. He invites you, “Leave your anxious fretting about whatever, and seek something else instead.” He is more than willing to give you the something else. We

could say a hundred things about what that kingdom means. I’ll mention a few.

I was talking recently with a close friend. Some very difficult things have happened to her. She was describing a series of painful experiences, and how she had become very discouraged, doing a lot of worrying, brooding, floundering. She couldn’t get traction in life. Life wasn’t working. She felt swept away with the tension and confusion. She was seeking God, but couldn’t seem to find Him. Then, like a bolt of lightning, the thought came into her mind, “Your father...is *God*. Your father is God.” She described how her worries changed. They didn’t go away: the child with a disability, the husband with financial problems, uncertainties about her health, uncertainties and conflicts in other parts of her extended family life, miserable things from her past. But the promise weighed more: “Your father...is God.” That supreme and simple promise came in and rearranged the furniture of her mind, of how she saw life and what she lived for. It drained the life out of worrying. Think about that. You can say, “My father is God. He is more than willing to give me His kingdom. It is His pleasure. He chooses gladly to love me.” One element of what the kingdom means is for you to know, “My father is God.”

I was at the Glenside pool last summer. While waiting for my wife Nan, I watched a toddler, a little girl, maybe two years old. She waded into the shallow end of the toddler pool, and was heading boldly towards the deep end. No fear, full of determination. She started out—ankle deep, up to her knees, then to her waist. Pretty soon the water was up to shoulder level! She was bold and kept heading into the deep end. What if she stumbled? She wasn’t all that stable on her feet yet. But right behind her every step walked her mom, with hands outstretched, two alert hands poised eight inches from the little girl’s shoulders. At one point the girl slipped slightly. I don’t think she even realized it, but her mother reached out and steadied her. “Your father is God.” Someone is right there, like that mom with her toddler.

What else does it look like to be given the kingdom? It’s being able to say Psalm 121: “My helper is the LORD who made heaven and

earth.” Try wrapping your mind around that sentence! Or, think about this, “My rescuer is the Messiah of the world, Jesus.” Or, “My savior, who bears wrath, the substitutionary sacrifice, is the Lamb of God, the One good man, the only Savior of the world.”

Or, “My shepherd is the LORD.” Like that mom walking behind the toddler, “My shepherd is the LORD. I shall not want. Why would I be afraid? What am I so uptight about?” If life is like the entire electromagnetic spectrum, from infrared to ultraviolet with every wavelength in between, why do we obsess and fret, as if all of life were simply the green band, the money band, of the entire spectrum?

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## It's His pleasure to give to you, so you can give, too.

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Money is part of life, sure, but wake up! The sun is shining across the whole spectrum. There are much more important things, much better gifts than money. Your father is God. It's His pleasure to give you the kingdom, little flock, beloved children.

Finally, after saying all this, Jesus gives a seventh reason not to live a fretful life. It's both a reason and an alternative. Having *given* you so much, your Father calls you to the radical freedom of *giving* your life away. Everything before was *get*. We become anxious because we want to *get*. We don't want to lose what we *got*. We covet the inheritance because we want to *get*. We become presumptuous, and kick back into a life of leisure, and think we are fat cats because we have *gotten*. Everything is *get*, *got*, *gotten*, want to *get*, maybe I won't *get*. But here, when you come to the end of Jesus' message to you, it's all *give*. Because you have been given, because you are being given, because you will be given a sure thing, a certain and wonderful thing, no *iffy*, no *maybe/maybe not*, because there's nothing to really worry about, then *give*. It's His pleasure to give to you, so you can give, too. Focus there.

What happens as that sinks in, O you of simple faith, is a marvelous transformation of your life. You have good reasons to let worries go. We—who tend to be just like all the people in the newspaper, so absorbed with what's in it

for me, I'm so anxious about this, I have to jockey for my little piece of the pie, what if...? —become able to open our hands.

Jesus says, “Sell your possessions, give alms.” He doesn't mean you have to live exactly like Francis of Assisi did—but you get Francis of Assisi's attitude. That's to die for and to live for. It's the only true freedom and the only real happiness. It's an attitude of trusting your Father and being able to live a life that's worth something. “I can give myself away, and I can use my gifts. My life can be about give.” There's a world to reach out to, and people to love, and jobs to be done. We have a purpose, and we can give ourselves to that

purpose. Your Father knows what you need. He'll add that in, as needed. You, get first things first. Live for the kingdom. What Jesus says here is terrific: it works directly against the *iffyness* and uncertainty of the things we worry about.

Notice how Jesus describes it: “money belts that do not wear out.” You can own something that will never get old. It will never wear out. It will never get tattered. It will never get holes in it. It will never run out. An unfailing treasure. You can live for and give away something that is inexhaustible. Yes, that crash in the retirement income curve means your assets might get exhausted. But here's a treasure that's inexhaustible. The spring is always flowing. There's always more. No thief can ever take it away from you. No moth can ever destroy it. This “purse” can never get stolen or moth-eaten or flimsy or useless or lost.

Jesus says, “I promise you, the best thing you could ever want you will never lose.” That is amazing! All the stuff we worry about is what we want, but could lose. That's why we worry. The best thing you could ever want you will never lose, and you can always give it away. “If you die for me, you will live”—that's a promise. It's the fundamental way that redemption works. If you die for Christ, you'll live. Your Father will provide, so you can give generously.

### 3. How do you get a grip when the barbarians are rioting in the streets of your mind?

I want you to personalize this. Do you want to hear a good description of what happens with anxiety? “A man who has no control over his spirit is like a city broken into and without walls.” That’s Proverbs 25:28. How do you get a grip when barbarians are rioting in the streets of your mind? Terrorist attackers, a gang of criminals, suicide bombers, cities invaded, fires everywhere, a lion in the street, chaos. Your mind loses its grip. Fear and anxiety have taken over. Nothing’s safe or certain.

Anxiety is a universal human experience, and you need to approach it with a plan. Notice this is not a formula. When Andy Reid coaches the Philadelphia Eagles, he doesn’t know a single thing that’s going to happen after the opening whistle. He doesn’t even know who’s going to kick off until they flip a coin. But he’s not unprepared. He goes in with a *game plan*, a basic orientation to the game ahead. I want to give you six things as a game plan for when you start to worry and obsess.

First, name the pressures. You always worry about *something*. What things tend to hook you? What do *you* tend to worry about? What “good reasons” do you have for anxiety? The very act of naming it is often very helpful. In the experience of anxiety, it seems like a million things. You’re juggling plates, round and round and round and round. But really, you’re juggling only six plates—or maybe obsessing on just one. It helps you to name the one thing or the six that keep recycling. Anxieties feel endless and infinite—but they’re finite and specific.

Second, identify how *you* express anxiety. Spot the signs. How does anxiety show up in your life? For some people it’s feelings of panic clutching their throat, or just a vague unease. What a huge step forward when you stand back and say, “Aha, a red light on the dashboard!” Rather than just indulging your worries, you can name them. For some people it’s repetitive, obsessive thoughts: “Oh, now that’s the fourth time I’ve repeated that scenario in my mind.” For some people the sign is anger. They get irritated, but when they work back, they realize, “I was fearful and worried about something.” For other people, worry shows up in their bodies

(e.g., a tension headache) or in the cheap remedies that sin manufactures to make us feel better (e.g., gobbling ice cream, or an overpowering desire for a stiff drink). Spot the signs. How can those things become cues to you? “I’m losing it, I’m forgetting God, my flashlight is going dim.”

Third, ask yourself, *Why* am I anxious? Worry always has its inner logic. Anxious people are “you of little faith.” If I’ve forgotten God, who or what has edged Him out of my mind and started to rule in His place? Identify the hijacker. Anxious people have fallen into one of the subsets of “every form of greed.” What do I want, need, crave, expect, demand, lust after? Or, since we fear losing the things we crave getting, what do I fear either losing or never getting? Identify the specific lust of the flesh. Anxious people “eagerly seek” the gifts more than the Giver. They bank treasure in the wrong place. What is preoccupying me, so that I pursue it with all my heart? Identify the object of your affections.

Fourth, what better reason does Jesus give you not to worry? What were those promises we just talked about? Go back and pick one to take to heart. I listed seven promises for you, seven things Jesus guarantees about how God runs His universe. We highlighted the sixth, “Your father is God,” because it was the best of those better reasons. But they’re all good reasons. That’s why Jesus mentions every one. We’re pretty uncomplicated people. It’s tough to remember seven things at once, so pick one. For me, over the last month, the most helpful one has been, “If God feeds the crows, won’t He provide for you?” It makes me laugh even to think about it, and anxiety can’t coexist with hearty laughter! Those Crow Boys intercepted a lot of temptations to anxiety; they did me good. Grab one promise and work with it.

Fifth, go to your Father. Talk to Him. It’s not as though your Father doesn’t care about the things you worry about: your friends, your health, your money, your children, and so forth. *Your Father* knows what you need. You can go to Him with the things that concern you. Cast your cares on Him, because He cares for you. You’ll have to leave your worries with Him. They are *always* outside of your control! How will your kids turn out? Will you get

Alzheimer's? What will happen with the economy? Will you ever get married? Will there be an anthrax attack? Will your dad come to know the Lord? Will you have money for next month's bills? You have good reasons to be concerned about such things, but you have better reasons to take them to Someone who loves you. Like that toddler whose mom trailed her, even the deep end of life is safe.

Finally, give. Do and say something constructive. Care for someone else. Give to meet human need. In the darkest hole, when the world is most confused, when there are barbarians in the streets, when life's the toughest, there's always the right thing to do. There's always some way to give yourself away. The problem might seem overwhelming. You could worry, worry, worry, worry. But what you're called to do is small, just a little itty-bitty thing. There's always something to give yourself to, and some way to give. Jesus said more about this in Matthew 6, the parallel passage to ours:

"Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day thereof." Give yourself to today's trouble. Be about the business of today. Leave tomorrow's uncertainties to your Father.

My brothers and sisters, it is *your Father's pleasure* to give you the kingdom. Your father is God. Don't worry.

Pray with me. Our Father, we stand before You because of mercy. You are full of mercy. We are the recipients of a most spectacular mercy. We thank You that You forgive us, You rewire us, You work with us from exactly wherever each one of us starts. You are the great awakener of our lives, the One who gives purpose and who makes life shine brightly. Make these things true in our lives this very week, that not one of us would fall prey to the kinds of things that would rob us from seeing the good things You have spoken to us, Jesus. It is in Jesus' name, our Father, that we pray. Amen.