

THE NIGHT STALKER

MATTHEW 6:25-34

Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?

Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing?

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' "For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

There was a man plagued with problems. His many worries created for him a horrible case of insomnia.

One night he tried to count sheep. He heard *counting sheep put you to sleep*. But his plan backfired... Listen to the poor fellow's account of what happened...

"Last night I started counting sheep; while lying in my bed; I have so many worries; I thought it'd clear my head. The sheep were in a pasture; full of grass and pretty flowers; but the sky was dark, clouds overhead; I worried there'd be showers. The sheep I counted one by one; they all seemed fat and strong; but what of their real condition? What if I were wrong? Where did these sheep get water? I saw no streams around; and on some of their faces; I thought I saw a frown.

What of the care they'd gotten; where was their Shepherd anyway? How did these sheep get in my mind? Perhaps he'd gone away. The sheep had many little lambs - what would happen to the young? Oh, if I could find that shepherd; I think he should be hung!

All night long I worried; about this deserted flock of sheep; and about that sorry shepherd; who didn't give a bleep. I had started counting sheep; to help my mind unwind; but now my worries started up again; just of a different kind.

I was really fretting; by the rising of the sun; the sheep would be without me; until my day was done.

What would they do all by themselves; how could they possibly survive; I had to leave them helpless; while I worked my eight to five. I thought I'd take them with me; but they're better left behind; at work I have many other worries; floating through my mind." Wow, talk about a worry wart! *Are you a chronic worrier?*

Do you ever worry about a snake coming up through the toilet?... Do you ever fear that a burglar is hiding under your bed?... Do you worry that the gas gauge in your car broke overnight, and you really need gas?

Do you ever worry that one day they'll turn off your utilities because there was a bill you forgot to pay?

At this moment, some of you are sitting here worried that your wife left the iron on and your house is on fire.

Some of you worry that you're pregnant.

Others of you worry that you're not pregnant.

Some of you are worried that you have an incurable disease... Or that your days with the company are numbered... Or a child is going to flunk out of school...

Some of you worry about buying a house. Others of you worry about paying your rent... *We all have different worries... but we all worry about something!*

Worry is a robber! It robs us of the joys of life. It tarnishes what should've been golden moments.

While playing with your kids in the yard - or out with your spouse - or in the midst of a party - or even while listening to a sermon - the moment should be fun and meaningful, instead the worry assassin is firing at us.

Worry keeps forcing its way into your consciousness. It kicks down doors and barges into our brains. Worry wants to steal our enjoyment of God's blessings.

The Greek word translated "*worry*" is "*merimnao*" - a combination of two words, "*merizo*" which means "*to divide*" - and "*nous*" is "*the mind.*" To *worry* is "*to divide the mind, to distract and disrupt our concentration.*"

And that's exactly what worry does. It distracts us from our priorities. It divides our attention. It clouds our vision. Worry creates a thick fog over our soul.

According to the US Bureau of Standards, it takes less than a single glass of water to create a fog that will cover seven city blocks, 100 feet deep. A mere gallon of water can effectively shut down an entire city.

And likewise, all it takes is just a little bit of worry - a few meager drops of anxiety - to paralyze a person's life, and cripple their faith, and plunder their peace.

Worry has been described as, "*a small trickle of fear that meanders through the mind until it cuts a channel into which all other thoughts flow.*" Worry creates a rut.

Anxiety begins as a *consideration* - it grows into a *preoccupation* - ultimately, it results in a *desperation*.

Worry is like a cancer. It grows and spreads and metastasizes until it takes over. Suddenly, we no longer think straight. Worry paralyzes other initiatives.

It stunts our growth. It can shut us down.

One day, a man met death, and death bragged that he was on his way to kill 10,000 people. This man loved and cared for people, so he immediately began warning everyone about death's diabolical plans.

Yet despite his best efforts the death toll exceeded 10,000. Nearly 70,000 people died in the plague.

When the man found death, he asked why he'd lied. He'd killed 70,000, instead of the 10,000 he promised.

That's when Death explained, "I didn't lie. I only killed 10,000. It was worry and fear that killed the rest."

Worry is lethal - both spiritually *and physically!*

Charles Mayo, of the famed Mayo Clinic, gives a clinical summary of worry's medical effects, "Worry affects the circulation, the heart, the glands, and nervous system. I have never known a man to die of overwork, but I have known a lot who died of worry."

The English word "*worry*" is from a German word, "würgen." The term means "*to choke or strangle.*"

Worry strangles our faith. It chokes out our hope.

This is how Jesus viewed worry. In Mark 4:18, in the parable of the sower, He spoke of folks, "who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in **choke the Word**, and it becomes unfruitful."

Think of worry as a night stalker...

He jimmy's the latch and prowls into your mind. He's wearing two gloves with which he strangles his victims.

On the back of one glove is written the word "**what.**"

On the back of the other hand appears the word "**if.**" "**What If**" becomes the criminal's deadly chokehold.

"What if we can't make the payment?"

"What if the traffic is bad?"

"What if the baby throws up?"

"What if the weather doesn't cooperate?"

"What if the computer goes down?" "What if, what if, what if" - our lives become strangled by "what ifs!"

I want us to look very closely at how our text begins here in Matthew 6:25... Jesus commands us, **"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life."**

Realize, the same God who commands His people, **"do not commit adultery"** and **"do not murder"** also commands us, **"do not worry."** These words of Jesus aren't just an ideal, or a suggestion - *but a command.*

Worry isn't just a problem, or a weakness, or a dysfunction. It's nothing less than a sin against God! It's a denial of God's faithfulness to keep His promises.

Realize, I'm not talking about appropriate planning, or even looking ahead. You can prepare for tomorrow without being fixated on it. I'm talking about the wasting of time and energy brooding over things I can't control.

Worry is a failure to trust God with life's uncertainties!

It's been said, **"Worry is not fore-thought, it's fear-thought."** The sin of worry is nothing but *futile fretting.*

Matthew 6 contains encouragement for people who worry. *There is hope for the chronic worrier!*

Worry loses its stranglehold when we understand its futility. Jesus highlights three characteristics of worry...

First, Worry is *irresponsible*. Second, Worry is *irrelevant*. Third, Worry is *irreverent*. Let me say it again, **worry is irresponsible, irrelevant, and irreverent.**

First, **worry is irresponsible.** Worry is a waste of valuable time and effort. God gives us only 24 hours a day - 168 hours each week. Your life is a vapor - *a puff of warm breath on a cold day*. Blink... and life is over.

That's why it's totally irresponsible for us to waste a single second worrying and fretting over situations we can't control. Worry robs us of time and effort we could invest in what will make life better for us and others.

Understand, being a good worrier is a demanding occupation. It takes countless hours of practice, and it involves tremendous sacrifice... While everyone else is out enjoying life, a faithful worrier is losing sleep and depleting his strength, dwelling on all his problems.

Worry is a tough job. I've heard it said, "**A day of worry is more exhausting than a week of work.**"

There was a woman, who for years worried about a burglar breaking into her house while she and her husband were asleep. This was a terrible problem.

Once, the woman heard a bump in the night.

She woke up her hubby and made him check out the noise. When the man walked into the kitchen he found a real burglar... The husband shook the man's hand, and

gave him a warm welcome. He said, "It's so good to see you. Let me take you upstairs to meet my wife. She's been waiting on you for the last ten years."

The point being, we can waste years, irresponsibly waiting on something that may or may not happen.

In verse 34 Jesus says, "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." In other words, no one can possibly know what tomorrow will bring?

Thus, *babies and maybes* need to be put to sleep!

Tomorrow is God's responsibility - not mine. And it's *irresponsible* for me to worry about **His** business. God is fully capable of handling what belongs to Him.

Yesterday is gone forever. Tomorrow may never come. Today is the only day we really have. Today is our gift from God. That's why it's called, "The Present."

Corrie Ten Boom once said, "Worry doesn't empty tomorrow of its sorrow. It empties today of its strength." Worry robs us of joys we could know right now. "Worry pulls tomorrow's cloud over today's sunshine."

I'm sure you've heard of the worried cow. If not, I'll tell you about her, "The worried cow would've lived until now, if she had saved her breath. But she feared her hay wouldn't last all day, and she mooed herself to death." Some of us, have been mooing ourselves to death. We've worried *far too long* about *far too much*.

Jesus makes a revolutionary statement in verse 25, "Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?" He targets the source of most of our worries.

Think it over, 90% of our worries are about *food* and *fashion* - *taste buds* and *taste in duds*. Jesus is saying there's more to life than what we put in our mouth and wear on our back - *a full belly* and *a hip image*?

If all that matters to you is *feeling good and looking good* - you're living a shallow, superficial existence!

Jesus tells us, "**Life is more than food and the body is more than clothing!**" As followers of Jesus we're more than *consumers*. Life is more than *consumables*.

If you trust in Jesus you're a child of God - an heir of His kingdom - a member of His body - an ambassador for Christ. An *unlimited God* with *bountiful resources* is your Father - yet so many of us live like orphans.

We've been promised "**all spiritual riches... in Christ Jesus.**" Yet we worry about stuff that's passing away!

We have an eternity of blessing before us, but we get all worked up over issues that won't matter one iota a hundred years, or ten years, or even one year from now. "**Worry will give a small thing a big shadow.**"

In His Word, God's promises to meet all a believer's needs - *the food we eat* and *the clothes we wear*.

In verse 26 Jesus says, "**Look at the birds of the air** (one was probably flying overhead that instant), **for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?**" And we are! Jesus has promised us riches for eternity, *He'll keep us warm and fed for now*.

Don't worry! When we do, it's terribly **irresponsible**.

Secondly, **we shouldn't worry because it's irrelevant.**

Look at what Jesus says about it in verse 27, "**Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?**"

The cubit was an ancient measurement of about 18 inches - *from the king's elbow to the end of his finger.*

Let's say you're short... You're tired of going to parties and looking everybody's knee-caps... You hug a tall guy and catch a belt buckle in the throat...

You decide the answer is to worry.

Well, go ahead, start worrying... Please, worry long and hard... strain yourself... then measure your height and see how much your worrying caused you to grow!

The answer is zero! Worry is not only *irresponsible*, it's *irrelevant*. Worry is *wasteful* and *ineffective*.

Imagine boarding an airplane - you're excited about your long awaited vacation. Everything is fine, until you buckle your seat belt. Suddenly all kinds of worries rush you, "**When was the last time this plane was inspected?**" "**Do the landing brakes work?**" "**Does the pilot have a valid license?**" "**Did he get his AM coffee?**"

Your mind is flooded with "**What ifs...**"

Yet by this time you're in the air, it's too late! There's nothing you can do about it now... *so why worry?*

Mickey Rivers, a former outfielder for the Texas Rangers, once utter a profound statement, "**Ain't no sense worrying about things you got control over, cause if you got control over them, ain't no sense worrying... And there ain't no sense worrying**

about things you got no control over either - cause if you got no control over them, ain't no sense worrying..."

What a great philosophy! None of us have life under control. Just about the time we think we do, life has ways of surprising us... But God is sovereign. He has definite control over every situation... *so why worry?*

A study reported, "40% of our worries are about things that never happen... 30% are about issues in the past (*circumstances we can't change*)... 12% are about what other folks think of us (*which really doesn't matter*)... 10% are about health issues (*which we can't always control*)... Only 8% of things we worry about are over issues we can actually do something about."

As a French philosopher once said "My life has been full of misfortunes... most of which never happened!"

Worry is like a rocking chair - it'll give you something to do, but it won't get you anywhere. Worry is not only *irresponsible*, it's also **irrelevant** - it accomplishes zip.

Third, and most importantly, **worry is irreverent.**

Just as parent is obligated to meet the basic needs of his children, likewise God has promised to meet our needs. God is a father who provides for His kids!

Jesus not only pointed to a flock of birds sailing overhead, but He drew the disciples' attention to a meadow full of gorgeous flowers. He may've reached down in the grass - and picked one - then held it up...

That's when He said the words, verse 28, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"

Birds are just birds - they flap, sing, fly, and die - then turn to dust... *Flowers are just flowers* - clip them with the grass, charge some sucker \$40 a dozen, his wife enjoys them for a few days - then they're thrown out...

Yet God caters the birds' three square meals a day - and He decks out the lilies in designer pedals.

God provides for *birds and blossoms* - but you... If you follow Jesus, you're His child. You're His image-bearer! You're recreated in the likeness of His Son.

In comparison, you're of an infinitely greater value than "*the birds of the air*" and "*the lilies of the field.*"

Why then don't you believe that God will provide for you, your needs? That He'll feed and clothe you - *and provide you a home - and obtain for you a job - and help you pay your bills - and get you that needed promotion - and find you a dependable car?...*

Why don't we trust God more?

At the time of Jesus, sparrows sold for pennies. They were virtually worthless. Yet in Matthew 10 we're told that God's air traffic control charts the flight-path of every sparrow. He knows when one falls to the ground.

Thus, Jesus draws His conclusion, "Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."

If God shows such care for a seemingly insignificant bird how much more does He care for you and me?

The Bible teaches us that God even numbers the hairs on our head! In Matthew 10:30 Jesus tells us, "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

On average a **redhead has around 90,000 hairs**, a **brunet has 125,000 hairs**, and a **blonde has more, 140,000 hairs** - and incredibly, our God in heaven bothers to keep tabs on every single hair on your head.

And the really amazing fact is the exact number of hairs fluctuates daily. Run a comb through your hair, and the number alters. Yet God tracks a running count.

God has your exact hair tally at all times. *And with some of the men in this church, we're losing our hair so fast, God has to work overtime to stay current.* Imagine the ciphering in heaven when you go for a haircut?

Here's the point Jesus is making, **God is attentive to every detail of our lives.** David sings a beautiful praise in Psalm 40:5, "Many, O Lord... are your thoughts toward us... they are more than can be numbered."

This is why worry reveals a lack of faith. It doubts God's love, and power, and integrity, and faithfulness...

Worry is an insult to God. It's the antithesis of faith!

This is why the great church leader, John Wesley, once said, "**I could no more worry, than I could curse or swear.**" Worry is a sin with dangerous consequences.

Notice what Jesus tells us in verses 31-32, "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'"

For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things."

In other words, worry is a *pagan preoccupation*.

Gentiles, folks estranged from God, are the worriers. The pagans deny the God Who can meet their needs, thus they *fret and fear* about *eat and drink and clothes*.

I like this poem, "Said the robin to the sparrow: 'There is one thing I would really like to know, why these anxious human beings, rush about and worry so.'

Said the sparrow to the robin: 'Friend, I think that it must be, that they have no heavenly Father, such as cares for you and me.'" We act like unbelievers when we worry, fret, and take matters into own hands. We become **practical atheists**, instead of trusting in God.

I like this quote, "Worry is praying to the wrong god."

That's why whenever we're tempted to *worry*, that means its time to *pray*. Rather than *rubbing our brow* or *wringing our hands*, we should *drop to our needs*.

Paul wrote in Philippians 4:6. Here's the NLT, "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything."

When you feel the night stalker closing in with his "what ifs" - you need turn your *cares* into *prayers*.

In verse 33 Jesus sums up our passage with an antidote for worry. Here's the cure for chronic worriers,

"Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." Notice the contrast between verses 32 and 33...

On the one hand, we're told in verse 32 that *unbelievers* seek after **"all these things"** - whereas in verse 33 *believers in Jesus* seek after just **one thing**...

Unbelievers - people without God - busy themselves worrying about a bunch of stuff - while Christians focus on a single priority, God's kingdom and righteousness.

Lloyd Ogilvie offers an interesting interpretation of verse 33. He writes, **"Jesus says the cure for anxiety is anxiety. Care about many things is cured by the care of one thing."** You overcome *wrong worry* with *right worry*. In other words, to be free from earthly worries, you need to worry about surrendering your life to the King of the universe, and doing what's right in His eyes.

In short, *if you're going to worry about something, why not worry about...* The millions of people who'll die this week and go straight to hell!... Or the believers around the world languishing in prison for their faith?...

Or the poor folks who rarely get a good meal?... Or the Christians in India persecuted by radical Hindus?...

Or the Christians suffering in Muslim prisons?...

Or the millions of babies aborted each year?...

And while you're worrying... why not worry about the fatherless child down the street who has no one in his life who can teach him how to be a godly man...

Why not worry about the single mom who's trying to make ends meet... Why not worry about the kid in your own home who needs more of his parents...

Why not worry about the friend who's lost, lonely, and only a phone call away!... Why not worry about how you can get involved in your church, and help make CC the kind of church God wants us to be!...

Hey, seek God's kingdom... get concerned with what concerns God... Start worrying about the weaknesses and sinful strongholds in your own life... About the habitual sin that's taken hold and needs to be cut off...

Worry about the grudge you keep holding onto, even though the Holy Spirit has told you more than once to let it go and forgive the person who's done the harm...

Worry about the pride in your heart that's keeping you from apologizing to your spouse or coworker...

If you want something to worry about, why not worry about your insufficient Bible knowledge... or your sluggish prayer life... or your lack of compassion for people in need... or your lukewarm witness...

These are all issues worth worrying about.

But not food and clothes - or whether the Bulldogs can win the rest of their games and contend for the national title! *Of course they will! You heard it here first!*

Recall the day Jesus came to eat dinner at Mary and Martha's house? Now, it's not everyday the creator of the universe is your dinner guest... So, Martha was *worried*. She wanted everything to be just right!

She was busy in the kitchen when she noticed her sister, Mary, just sitting at Jesus' feet, enjoying His presence. Martha was *loathing* - she thought Mary was *loafing*. Martha figured Jesus would set her sis straight!

Instead Jesus told Martha, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about *many things* (Martha, you're acting like the pagans), but *one thing* is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her." Martha worried for she cared about *many things*. Mary cared about *one thing, Jesus!*

If you're strangled by worry, recall **the cure for wrong worry is right worry**. Worry about God's kingdom!

Worry about what's right, and eternal, and spiritual, and you won't have to time to focus on other issues.

It is time we all put an arrest warrant out on worry.

Lock up the night stalker... In light of God's *promises to us* and His *love for us* - worry is **irresponsible**, and it's **irrelevant**, and it's **irreverent**. When you set your heart on *God's stuff*, you'll trust Him with *your stuff!*