

# Followers of the Way

## The Antidote to Anxiety

Steve Campbell, 01-03-2026

### Matthew 6:19-34

At a General Election each political party tries to woo the voters, claiming they are the best ones to run the country. They do this by producing a manifesto, outlining their policies and what they promise to do if elected as the next government. Sadly, most end up as broken promises!

If Jesus was standing for election, His manifesto would be found in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7. However, unlike politicians, He never breaks a promise. Politicians use various means when communicating to get their message across. One tool is repetition. Repeating a word or idea ensures it is embedded in people's mind and consciousness. E.g. Kemi Badenoch – U-turn (Video)

Jesus is the master communicator, and He too used the tool of repetition to marvellous effect. In His memorable treatise on prayer, culminating in the Lord's Prayer, He repeats three times, 'When you pray.' Here too, in His teaching about the antidote to anxiety, He says four times, 'Do not worry.' You can imagine the crowd repeating the line with Him!

The Greek word translated worry or anxious means to pull in different directions; and our English word *anxiety* comes from the Latin meaning 'to torment.' So we can see that worry/anxiety causes stress. Research from Harvard found that work stress is as harmful to health as smoking or not taking any exercise. And, in the UK, 6.5 million working days are lost due to sickness caused by stress. It is now more prevalent than the common cold.

We live in an age of anxiety, where people worry about many things: some even worry about worry! Is this just a modern phenomenon? Was life much simpler in Jesus' day where people didn't live under such stress? Well, if there was nothing to cause anxiety, why would Jesus say, 'Do not worry?' So what are the worries that Jesus is addressing in His Sermon on the Mount? He begins His discourse on worry with the word 'Therefore' and when we see that we must ask, 'What is it there for?' The verses immediately preceding are key, vv.19-24 – 'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth... where your treasure is, there your heart will be also... You cannot serve both God and Money.'

The people of Jesus' day were worried about money, and that is a major cause of anxiety today. John says the biggest concern people have today is not having enough money: 'We lose our health to make money, then we lose our money to restore our health.' Who are we serving, God or Money? I trust we all will say, 'I want to serve God.' In that case, Jesus says, 'Therefore, do not worry.' This is not a suggestion, it is a command!

Advertisers fill us with a sense of longing, of yearning for the products they are trying to sell us. Wear *these* clothes, drink *this* beverage, eat at *this* restaurant, use *this* perfume ... and your life will be so much better. After all, you deserve it. This then causes anxiety if we can't afford all this stuff that's going to enhance our wellbeing and offer us the life-style it promises. And so we worry.

But Jesus shows us the absurdity of worry through the example of nature – 'Look at the birds of the air,' He says, 'they don't sow or reap or store away in barns, yet your Father feeds them.' You are more valuable than the birds. Or what about the flowers in the field? They neither labour nor spin, yet they are clothed more grandly than even Solomon. Worry is absurd. No amount of worrying can add a single hour to your life: in fact, it may even subtract several hours or years! Michael Green writes, 'Worry is not a little weakness we all give way to from time to time. It is a sin that is strictly forbidden.' And R. H. Mounce declares, 'Worry is practical atheism and an affront to God.'<sup>i</sup>

The past cannot be changed, the future cannot be charted, so worrying about them is useless and debilitating. Worry can also blind us to the truth. It refuses to learn the lesson of God's providence taught us by the birds and flowers. Short-lived as they are, in their quiet dependence on their environment, they display that 'peace' that ought to mark believers who know that behind their environment there is a loving Heavenly Father.

Elizabeth Cheney's poem brings this out beautifully –

Said the Robin to the Sparrow,  
I should 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.

Worry is essentially a failure to trust God. No wonder Jesus called His disciples, 'O you of little faith!' Worry is not only absurd and unnecessary, it is also dangerous. As I said, we live in an age of anxiety – 20% of young people suffer from poor mental health, this rises to almost a quarter of 17-19 year olds. This can lead to all sorts of problems, including suicide, especially among young men.

What we have looked at so far has been very negative, the results of unnecessary worry. So what is the antidote to anxiety? Jesus tells us in v.33 – 'But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.' We live in this world; this fallen world full of sin, brokenness, anxiety and fear. But we are not of this world, as followers of Christ, we do not belong here. C.S. Lewis famously said:

'If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world.'

That other world is known as the Kingdom of God. This is what we are to seek after, to pursue; not financial gain or worldly pleasure. Now I am not saying we mustn't work hard

to make ends meet. Jesus said, 'Look at the birds of the air.' Look at, behold, take careful note of. As we do we see that birds are hardworking creatures. Yes, the heavenly Father supplies all their needs, but they still must find their food, feed their chicks, build their nests. We too are to work hard; not to earn more money than we need, to build bigger barns. We are called to help build the kingdom. How do we do that? How do we put God's priorities before our own desires?

First of all, we must pray. Doesn't Jesus tell us in the Lord's Prayer to say, 'Thy kingdom come'? And Paul writing in Philippians 4:6-7 also says this is the antidote to anxiety,

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Can prayer really bring us a peace that is beyond our understanding? Well, many Christians experience this for themselves, but it has also been proved scientifically. An American research team in 2022 published their findings:

'prayer has been found to lead directly to a lower heart rate, reduced muscle tension, and slower breathing rate [and] may also contribute to feelings of tranquillity.' <sup>ii</sup>

Do we know any examples to show the reality of this? One very famous illustration of this is John Wesley. He, along with his brother Charles, was the founder of Methodism, which led to the Evangelical Revival in England. Before this, however, he was uncertain about his own salvation. In 1736 he was on-board a ship bound for America to 'convert' the Natives. During the voyage a severe storm broke out, with waves so high they split the sail and swamped the deck. While most passengers were screaming with fear, Wesley noticed the Moravians stayed calm, prayed and sang a psalm. When he asked them, 'Are you not afraid?' they answered, 'Thank God no. We are not afraid to die.' Their lack of anxiety profoundly affected him, and two years later he had his own conversion experience. John Wesley of course is a well-known historical figure, and that happened almost 300 years ago. But are there any examples from today? Yes, there are many. I want to tell you about one.

Rev Bro David Jardine is ordained in the Church of Ireland and also a member of the Franciscans. He's had a long and influential ministry: chaplain to the infamous Crumlin Road Gaol where many terrorists were held, a spell in New York, then for many years heading up the Church's Ministry of Healing. As a Franciscan, he has taken a vow of poverty, chastity and obedience. I asked him recently how he copes with that lifestyle and how he avoids anxiety? He told me that although he isn't *of* this world and doesn't strive after financial gain, he still lives *in* the world and must eat. So at times anxious feelings did well up within him. When that happened, he remembered his vows which symbolized the surrendering of his life to God. Then he meditated on and prayed Psalm 55:22, 'Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.' He let go of his anxiety and gave it over to the Lord.

Prayer, then, is where we start when we seek God's kingdom, but it's not where we end. If we stop with prayer we are as bad as the one James speaks of in his Epistle:

*Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? (Jas 2:15-16)*

Our prayers must lead to action. Just as supporters of an election candidate are to canvass the area promoting their manifesto, so we are to live out Jesus' kingdom values. That means we are to live humble, peaceful, merciful lives, being salt and light, loving our enemies, turning the other cheek, generous with our time and money, and hanging on Jesus' every word. Living the Golden Rule – 'Do unto others what you would have them do unto you.'

Seeking God's kingdom and righteousness in this way is, in the words of John Stott, counter cultural. It goes against the flow of society and may attract criticism and, yes, even persecution. But if we, like my Franciscan friend, surrender our lives to God daily, it will prevent those anxious thoughts and feelings.

The final words Jesus spoke in this section are full of wisdom,

*Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (v.34)*

As Corrie Ten Boom said, 'Worrying is carrying tomorrow's load with today's strength – carrying two days at once. It is moving into tomorrow ahead of time'

I believe Jesus is not only talking about tomorrow, the day after today, but He's meaning don't worry about the future. We do live in an age of anxiety, and people worry about politics, health, education, employment, policing – all sorts of things, including the Church. For many years now the prophets of doom have predicted the extinction of Christianity, with falling Church attendance and the number on census returns identifying as Christian dropping drastically. However, in 2025 the Bible Society published a report, *The Quiet Revival*, which shows a dramatic reversal of these trends: a 50% increase in Churchgoing since 2018; 16% of young men attend, a fourfold increase; Bible sales at an all-time high; and reports of those with no Church background turning up and showing interest in faith.

God is moving. His kingdom is growing. Let us be aware of this, pray and become involved.

*Therefore I tell you, do not worry... But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matt 6:25&33)*

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<sup>i</sup> Green, Michael, *The Message of Matthew*, IVP, Leicester, 2000, p.104

<sup>ii</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9713100/>