

# EXTREME MAKEOVER

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus commands us not to be anxious about our lives. On the surface, this seems about as realistic as telling us not to breath air or use our eyes to see. We all have worries and concerns that have the potential to have a deep effect on our lives.

Anxiety at its core level pertains to *deep-seated worry*. Now it is important to understand that being concerned about something and being anxious are two different things.

We are to be concerned with things like getting a job, growing in our faith, raising children, and making good decisions that are redemptive in nature. In fact, often a lack of concern and planning leads to lives that become more difficult in the long run. However, being anxious is an entirely different monster. It involves fear and being fixated at what lies ahead.

So, why does Jesus care so much about anxiety? It does not seem like a bad thing to worry about the basic necessities of life, such as what you will eat, or drink, or what kind of clothes you will wear. Jesus addresses this in verse 25. Here he says, as important as the basic necessities are; there are other things more important in life.

<sup>25</sup> **“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious 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?**

## **Life & the Basic Necessities**

Jesus' implication here of course is that life is more important than food, clothing and drink. In other words, when a person lives in this anxious state, they do not concern themselves with what really matters more to God, namely as we will see later, investing in His kingdom.

Let me give you an example. I have a younger brother very close to me who is unable to leave Tacoma Washington because he has an anxiety disorder. Every time he approaches the city limits, he becomes fixated on why he cannot leave. For example, during my wedding in Portland, he wanted to come, but when he sat in his car, his mind became filled with thoughts such as, "it is too hot to drive, the gas will be too expensive, or he may even blame me I because I wanted to get married so far away.

In the end, all this fear induced anxiety causes him to miss what is truly important, namely being at his brother's wedding. The surface issues like heat, cost of gas, or me not getting married far away, paralyze him so he cannot be part of the experience. Jesus does not want us to miss what is truly important in life. Anxiety camouflages us from pursuing the more important things in life. Now some of you may conclude, I cannot focus on what God wants when I am just trying to survive in life. Jesus would say, you do not have a good handle on the reality that God is our Provider. You have not discovered the value God finds in you. You see this in the following verses 26-27.

**26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?**

**28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?**

### **God finds Value in You**

Here Jesus uses creation to illustrate the reality that God by nature is a Provider. In a sense, creation is a metaphor that serves to assure us that God will provide. God provides for it every day, even that seagull that flew off with my sandwich at the beach. If God provides for nature, how much more will He provide for you because He places even more value on you?

You may think, well God has not always provided for me, there are things I have asked for and He has not delivered. Unfortunately, our biggest flaw when it comes to God's Provision is that we think we know what is best for us, and we usually want it now. You may think it is this job opportunity, or that relationship, or that location to live, yet, God knows what will help you and what will hinder you. He knows what the finished product already looks like and ultimately what is the best way to Provide for His child. Therefore, if you have not received what you have sought after, it just may not be the right thing, wait and you will discover He was right.

Some people wonder why it took me so long to marry in life (38 years). I am the spokesperson for singles in their thirties who are still searching. Yet as I look back in my life, I definitely wanted to get married in my twenties. I even prayed about a certain person. Yet at that time in my faith, I was not grounded enough and my mind was more consumed with this particular young lady than it was for God. I had these anxieties going on in my head like, "What should I say, what should I not say. How can I win her affection?" At that stage I thought and valued her more than God, which at the basic level is a form of idolatry. God said no. Therefore, I waited and I waited, and I waited, until God knew that He was first in my life. Inevitably, after years of praying, he Provided someone far more beautiful than I could have ever expected.

Why? God found too much value in me for Him to compromise my calling for that coveted relationship in my twenties. Had he answered my request, it is more than probable that I would not have been involved in the ministry. Jesus ends that section by challenging us to have more faith in God as Provider. He begins this next one by telling us we should not focus on what we want; but rather what He wants.

**<sup>31</sup> Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' <sup>32</sup> For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. <sup>33</sup> But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.**

### **Focusing on what's Important to God**

You see, when we live our life focusing on our needs, Jesus is saying we are no different from the Gentiles, an allusion here to those who do not know Christ. In our culture of materialism, people spend their life trying to meet their own needs in life. Jesus says as Christians, we have other work to do. We are to focus on seeking first the kingdom of God, or the things God values. God wants us to get to the point where we do His work and completely trust Him to take care of our earthly needs.

Now I will be honest with you. Such a mindset takes a radical perception change. It challenges us to see the world differently. It requires us to see ourselves as part of God's plan and be willing to sacrifice some of those earthly desires we have to "keep up with the Jones'." I am not saying that everyone should quit their day job

and go into ministry. For many of you, there is a mission field in your office, or where house, or educational institution, or out in the field somewhere. What I am saying is that we should ask ourselves the question, "What am I toiling for in life? What keeps me up at night and causes me anxiety?" Then, we have to remember that this life is not the end of things. The reality is that you may never accumulate the treasures you desire here. You may struggle. You may experience tragedy. But it is fundamentally important to remember life does not end here. For everyone that has accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior, everything and more we did not achieve in this world will be fulfilled times a million in heaven.

- Perfect health
- Continuous Joy
- Beauty beyond our comprehension
- Abundant Provision

The list goes on and on. If we can wrap our minds around the fact that things will be much better in heaven, then we will be able to better work toward doing more things for God out of deep appreciation. What this requires is for us is that we think of God as One of Provision and of Providence.

Providence means God is working things out in life according to His purpose and plans. Everything that will happen has been determined and it is a sure bet. Jesus wins in the end and every tongue will confess him and knee will bow. And no matter how good or grim life may seem, the reality that God's people experience the prize when it is all said and done should propel us to live confidently in this life.

Ultimately, Jesus ends by stating:

**<sup>34</sup> "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. Each days has its own trouble or stress,**

For the fifth time Jesus commands us not to be anxious. There is no doubt that anxiety, living in worry and fear, is not something God wants us to emulate in our lives. My favorite verse on anxiety is found in Philippians 4:6 and it reads.

**do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

Paul the apostle instructs his readers when they share requests they should do so with thanksgiving. Here is why this is important. You are thanking God before you even know the answer to your requests. You are thanking them in advance. Now some "name it claim it" preachers thank God in advance by trying to manipulate God. They teach thank God for giving you physical healing or the financial miracle in advance. That is not what the Scriptures teach. Here is what this passage is saying.

"God, here is my request. I really would like you to give me this request.....but I know there is a possibility this is not in accordance with your will. Therefore, what I want to do is thank you in advance, for however you decide to answer my prayer requests. I trust that you know what is best for me and that is good enough for me. So God, here is my prayer. I am not going to get anxious. I will be all right if I receive it or not. Thank you in advance for what you will do." When you understand God has your best interest at heart and he values you, you will be less anxious in your requests.

I want to close with something that happened to me a while back. Back in the early days, Monday Night Football used to be on at 7pm Pacific time. There was an hour delay on the west coast. What that meant was that when the Pittsburgh Steelers played on ABC, I was not seeing it live. I could not take it, I had to know the live score so I listened to the final score on the radio. On one night, I was pleased to find out the Pittsburgh Steelers won.

Nevertheless, I still wanted to watch the game. As it unfolded, I found myself battling a number of emotions. I became frustrated, upset, happy, all frequently pacing all over the room—yet I knew the final score. I became anxious, as I rooted for the Steelers defense to stop their opponent. Had anyone walked into the room they would have assumed I did not know who won the game.

Isn't that how we sometimes live out our Christian faith? We know Jesus wins in the end and we get heaven—but many who are around us would not know it. For many of us, there is this tendency to live anxiously like we do not know the final score.

I am not saying that we are never going to worry or even fear things in this life. But what I am saying is that we have to develop a higher provisional and providential view of God. He has already determined the score and we have to confidently believe good things will happen along the road to heaven. Let us thank Him in advance as we make our requests to Him because He is good and loves us.