

## Letting Go of Worry

Matthew 6:25-34

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This morning, instead of looking inside the empty tomb, I want you to look somewhere else, like your wallet. For all I know, it might be empty as well.

Some of you are thinking, "I was just starting to like this church."

This isn't a trick to get you to put more money in the offering plate. Just play along. You're already here, after all.

I'd like every man to reach in your back pocket and pull out your wallet. Don't worry. I'm not going to ask you to pass it to the next person or even to open it. I just want you to hold it in your hand.

Ladies, if you have a wallet in your purse, or whatever you use to carry your cash or credit cards, will you put it in your hands? I want you to hold on to your wallets throughout my sermon this morning.

Lots of people are used to holding on to their wallets at church anyway, so it shouldn't be a big deal for some people.

Seriously, I want to ask a few personal questions.

- How many of you worry about what this wallet represents? It represents a lot, doesn't it?
- Do you worry about providing enough for your family?
- Do you worry about having enough money for retirement?
- Do you worry about paying off the house or having enough for rent?
- Do you worry about paying for your children to go to college?
- Do you worry about keeping up with the bills, paying for vacations, day care, credit card bills, cell phones, clothing, cars for teenagers, cell phones, child support, insurance, food, or taking care of aging family?
- Do you worry about the people whose pictures are in your wallet or your cell phone?
- Do you worry about paying for health care?
- If you don't carry a wallet or a purse, do you worry about those who do?

- Do you worry about your friends, your grades, or any part of your life?

How can we live without worrying about all these things?

Life is sort of like taking a hike. We leave the comfort of home to explore the big world that's out there. We don't always find our way. Just like some people who go hiking in the woods, we sometimes get lost.

Every year, hundreds of inexperienced people set off for a day hike in the woods and end up getting lost. Many of these people didn't tell anyone where they were going or carry a map or compass with them because they were not planning on getting lost.

One mistake people make when they are lost in the woods is that they just keep walking even though they have no idea where they are going. All this does is get them more lost, if you can get more lost than lost. They become exhausted and often find themselves in trouble.

If you are lost in the woods, here is some advice: commit to a route only if you know you will be able to retrace your footsteps or if you know you can complete the route safely, because every step in the wrong direction places you one more step away from safety.  
(<https://blog.nols.edu/2015/08/03/what-to-do-when-youre-lost-in-the-woods>)

“Never descend something you can't climb back up or climb something you can't descend unless you are absolutely sure you want to commit to the route.” Ibid

I've been lost in the woods before. Eventually every tree looks the same. It's easy to become disoriented and walk mile after mile and only end up going around in circles.

People get lost in the woods of life every day. When you are lost, one of the things that accompanies that is worry. Worry is the opposite of faith.

Worry is like sitting in a rocking chair. We expend a lot of energy but we never make any progress. We are in constant motion but we never go anywhere.

It is not unusual for people to become lost in worry. There are more clinical names for worry like anxiety, phobias, panic attacks, obsessive-compulsive disorders, PTSD, phobias, social anxiety. Millions of people suffer from these problems.

If we were wise, the first time we ever showed any signs of being lost in any of area of worry, we would stop and try to retrace our steps and find our way back to that place where we were living a normal healthy life. We would try to figure out where we took a misstep in our journey.

Please hear this. Sometimes we didn't a misstep. In other words, we didn't do anything wrong. Life just threw us a curve. Sometimes an event can trigger our anxiety and worry begins to spike.

Most of the time we don't know what to do or how to get back to that place emotionally, relationally, financially, or spiritually where we had a measure of peace.

Often, our old world cannot be put back together, so we must adapt to a new world. We must find our way out of the woods. We are people who become filled with denial and our tendencies are to continue to walk on deeper and deeper into the forest of anxiety, even if we don't have a clue where we are going.

Do you still have a grip on your wallets? How much of your worry is associated to what is tied to your wallet?

Jesus told the story about a rich farmer had a bumper crop so big that all of his crop would not fit into his barn. That's good news.

So he tore his barn down and built a bigger one thinking he had enough to last the rest of his life. Now he could eat, drink, and be merry. This was his solution to "no more worry."

Jesus said the man was foolish because that very night his soul was going to be demanded of him.

We are always thinking about way to end our worry problem. "If I can just win the lottery; if I marry the right person; if I become vested with the company; if I draw a good retirement; if I will buy a certain product; if I pay off my house; if I work things out with my spouse or ex-spouse; if my children are healthy and protected; if I can beat cancer."

But have you noticed, even when one worry is defeated, another one pops up? We have become a nation that is literally sick with worry.

We are worried about guns, either having them or not having them. We are worried about nuclear war. We are worried about immigration. We are worried about sending our children to school. We are worried about the morality of our nation. We are worried about terrorism. We are worried about our government. We are worried about wages, health care, college tuition, and jobs.

Jesus said that we should not be anxious, that we should not allow the things money can buy to master our thoughts.

He still wants us be good stewards, good planners, and good savers. Jesus still wants us to look for solutions to our problems. However, Jesus is telling us that what we can do with what is in our wallets should not be priority in our lives.

Material things didn't rule Jesus' life. Jesus invested his life in the Kingdom of God.

However, let me tell you about a time when Jesus dealt with some major anxiety.

Anxiety is a part of living. Even Jesus dealt with it because he was human. Yet he demonstrated how to deal with anxiety by allowing God to direct him rather than allowing his anxiety to direct his life.

When Jesus was in the woods of distress and was threatened with losing his way, He stopped where He was to become reoriented.

He was on the Mount of Olives, along with his disciples, and the anxiety he was feeling was the anxiety of death, which was hanging over him. He could see and imagine a painful crucifixion awaiting him.

Perhaps Jesus remembered the temptation of Satan that he first encountered in the wilderness anew, as he was tempted to jump from the highest part of the temple and call on the angels to catch him to prove he was the Son of God.

This was Satan's way of tempting Jesus to avoid any kind of suffering. He could avoid death. All he had to do was call on the angels.

Jesus knew that he could escape such a cruel, suffering death as a cross. The temptation was there and it was producing such anxiety that the gospel writer Matthew says that Jesus was sweating as though he were sweating great drops of blood.

Through prayer, Jesus' anxiety was resolved. By the time the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, he had complete peace.

Jesus' disciples didn't. Peter was enraged and drew his sword to defend Jesus, nearly killing one of the soldiers, but only cutting off an ear, which Jesus healed.

Jesus was calm and asked for calm as he was led away by the Romans.

Do you still have hold of your wallets?

Jesus gave his life for something much bigger than what we can put in a wallet or purse. Yet one of his disciples betrayed Jesus for a few Roman coins.

We betray Jesus too when we decide to live our lives wrapped up day after day worrying about things that can be reduced to what we put in our wallets. When things become the major focus of who we are and what we do, we will easily find ourselves lost at some point.

We may not worry about money as long as we have enough, but most of us don't have any concept of enough. We always want more. Too many of us want to keep too much of it for ourselves and that gets us lost right there. If we do not trace the origins of all we have back to God and become generous with whatever we have, we will stay lost.

As you hold your wallet in your hands, are you lost in the woods of worry about what it represents?

If so, what do you do?

Here's what you do. Turn around and retrace your steps until you get back to where You can find your way out. When you are lost in the woods of worry, greed, or materialism, or anything that's worldly, turn around and find your way to the cross of Jesus.

Then run with the disciples down to the empty tomb. Remember that Jesus died for our sins and was raised to new life.

There is a Christian word for turning around. It is "repent." When we recognize the way we are going is not the way God wants us to go, we turn around. That's repentance.

Another way to find our way when we are lost in the woods is to stop right where we are and wait until someone comes and finds us.

You know the beauty of God's grace is that God does most of the work. God just asks us to surrender. Just give up. Send up a distress signal. God knows where you are.

Through His Holy Spirit God will come and begin the healing process in your life.

After the disciples looked into the empty tomb and once they saw him, their lives were changed forever. A reorientation process took place. That is what Jesus wants to do for us.

Not only does Jesus want us to stop worrying about the things money can buy; Jesus wants us to reorient our lives so that we are seeking the things that are important to God. That's what He means by "the Kingdom of God."

Above all else, Jesus wants us to live righteously. Jesus wants us to focus on right living. Jesus taught us how to do that. He said to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. This is the antidote for worry.

Jesus was raised from the dead for a reason. This is one of the very practical ones.

Today, when you stand and put your wallet back in your pocket or purse, decide whether your life needs reorienting.

Are you seeking the things that are important to God above all things or are you worrying about the things that wallet represents?

Jesus died and was raised from the dead to set you free from worry and He has promised to take care of you. Will you accept his promise today?

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