

Sounds like pretty good advice that this text brings to us today. Don't worry! Don't worry about that wedding coming up in less than two weeks now! Don't worry about finding a job, now that school's over. Don't worry about those tests the doctor wants to run; or has run; or the treatment looming ahead. Don't worry about your kids— young or older. Don't worry about them finding their way; finding their fulfillment and the happiness in life you hope for them. Don't worry about your parents; all the twists and turns the years bring to their lives; the increasing responsibility you feel for them as you watch them become more and more vulnerable; less and less in control. Don't worry about the bills that grow larger as the cash-at-hand grows smaller and smaller. Don't worry about the war; about friends and family deployed; sons and daughters-fathers/mothers fighting and serving; sacrificing more than can ever be repaid. Don't worry about the countless victims of earthquake/flood/wind and fire; don't worry about trust so fragile among people that we cannot even reach out to help one another. Don't worry about the state of the earth deteriorating away in hands too intent on taking care of #1 that they can't look across the aisle and understand we're all together on this runaway bus!. Don't worry! Just pull up to the gas pump and fill that tank; pay whatever it takes today, because tomorrow it will only take more!

We read this text and may well wonder if Jesus had any inkling about what went on in life; then and now. We may wonder how he looked around his world; looked at the sorry state of life around him; looked poverty and fear and uncertainty and loss right in the eye and said not to worry. The people of his day faced every agent of worry in life that we do in ours; and even more. They took on one more worry that might not make it on our list of top ten worries. That "extra" worry had to do with their faith. They worried about losing it; about losing their faith. In the face of persecution they worried about denying their belief. It happened so quickly to Peter there at the end of Jesus' life. Remember? Peter denied knowing Jesus; denied the power of his relationship with Christ three times *before the cock crowed*; just as Jesus had predicted he would! But there was another thing that threatened their faith as well. Many were certain that the end of time was near; that God would usher in his kingdom; that the Risen Christ would return in their lifetimes and that would bring the rule of God to reign on this earth as it *did in heaven*. In the face of the anticipated tribulation that would come with the predicted *end of the age*, the people of Christ's day worried; worried again that they would lose their faith.

We worry about things that are precious to us. Think about the litany of worries we began with; about the litany that just flows through a normal day in your lives. Jobs; health and well being; happiness; many worries centered around money; and maybe our "best" worries saved for our loved ones—worrying about them. We worry about things and people that are precious to us; about things happening or not happening in their lives; about not having them; about losing them. I wonder in this 21st Century, if many people worry about losing their faith; if Christians worry about denying their relationship with Christ; if any of us worry about losing our faith if it is too sorely tested.

Faith too sorely tested or too sorely tempted; I think that was of concern to Jesus as he studied his band of followers; as he looked into the eyes of the wondering crowds that were drawn to him. Remember how he began his ministry—there in the wilderness having his own faith tested? From the very beginning he learned that faith was a precious gift; not a part of life to be taken for granted. From the very beginning he learned that

faith could be stolen away; brushed aside by the very things life depends upon. We do it all the time. We know how to get by in this world. We know what we have to do and we do it. We reach and take everything that we need most of the time without even asking. I think it all begins right there in that most basic of moves; this “thing” that inevitably winds up on our plates called “worry.” In other words, we rely upon ourselves and most of the time, succeed at that and in the process, we forget about our relationship with God; forget that gift of understanding that everything in our lives depends upon God.

In the beginning, our Bibles begin, *God*; in the beginning, God and then everything else; and significant to the story, that everything else was chaos; was empty; was darkness until God stepped in and began to put things in order; began to speak the Divine word of “good” into the emptiness. Right there is a pretty good description of worry; chaos and emptiness and darkness. How many of those adjectives could you attach to those situations that you worry about—either in your own lives or that you worry about for those you love?

Where do we begin to not worry—not be anxious; live this life of perfect peace and trust that Jesus holds out before us? Jesus reminded us right there as we began reading the text. It is the principle upon which the entire Nation of Israel based its faith—the great Shema—*Hear O Israel...the Lord your God is One God; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.* Jesus’ disciples may have been reminded of that principle as he told them to be aware that they could not live their lives with divided loyalties; that they must love God first; and everything else in life would follow; love God first—above all things; all relationships; all ambitions. It wasn’t love this, and not that. It was love God first and everything else in life would fall into place.

And that brings us back to faith. Our faith comes from God—it is a gift. It is that tiny “seed” in our lives that guides all we do; keeps our minds; steadies us in any circumstance. Do any of us worry about losing our faith in God? Or are we too wrapped up in our other, more practical, more life threatening worries? Jesus was right on when he spoke these words—*don’t worry.* He knew what was happening in his world and what is happening in our own. He knew the circumstances we all face and will continue to encounter. And he brought the message—the only message that can address everything we can possibly worry about—even when we worry about worrying and I know some of us do that too!

Don’t be worrying about life. Your heavenly Father knows what is needed. Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be yours. Seek first his kingdom; start with God—with your relationship with God. Basic to every disciple, Jesus gave us the Lord’s Prayer. Right there, we acknowledge God first in our lives. Right there we acknowledge God’s care over all life. Right there we acknowledge our dependence upon God. Right there we acknowledge God’s love—for us; for everyone; all that God has created; all the goodness of God’s kingdom intended to come.

Don’t be worrying. We all know it’s easy advice to give; hard advice to follow. Begin with God—every day. Begin with God when things get so much larger than you that the worry sets in. Begin with God. Amen.

“Don’t Worry” Matthew 6:24-34 052508 Mkh