

What To Do With Anxiety
Matthew 6:24-33; 1 Peter 5:6-10
May 25, 2008 Pastor Draeger 10AM

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus, Amen.

How many of you are interested in increasing your life span? It doesn't matter how old we are we all want to live a little longer. So we do some things so we can live a little longer. What are some of those things we do to make our lives longer? Live in a healthy manner. What would that look like? Exercise, eating greens, fruits, vegetables, low fat diet, low carbs. We know all those things, right? And exercise, good for your body so you live longer. How many of you believe that? OK. let me ask you another question -- how many of you do that? A lot less, right? Or you raise your hand not quite so high because it's sort of part way. So we're a little bit conscious about those things, the exercise we get maybe - push yourself away from the table, your arms are in good shape. Or exercise you get from the remote control, your thumb is in great shape. So we do those things because we want to live a longer life, we want to add to our life span. Not a bad thing. God says He's the One who decides when we are born and when we die, so it not ought to be in our hands, we ought to do what we can to walk with God in that process.

Well, let me ask you this - since you value living longer and since you think there's some things you can do to add to your life span, I presume one of the things that many of you do to enhance your life is worry. How many of you worry? The same people that think that eating healthy and exercise is a good thing, you must believe therefore, that worry adds value to your life. You worry because you think it will do something for you. Let me just take you through this because I hear this constantly from people (I'm not making this up): 'I worry because if I worry, I won't forget things. I'll be more mindful of my responsibilities. I will do a better job if I stay a little bit anxious because my anxiety gives me an edge -- maybe a competitive edge.' How many of you hear those things? How many of you say those things?

When I listen to people talk they tell me about how they don't want to lose their competitive edge so they worry about things. I think we do that because we think it has value. I mean, how many of you want to forget important responsibilities? Not many of you would want to do that. You want to make sure that you don't forget things that are important to you. You want to do the best you can, and the result is that we oftentimes worry so that we keep ourselves alert. True? Now let me ask you, does that make your life longer? Probably not, in fact there was a study done in the 1960's in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. In 2006 the results of this 40 year study were brought forward. There were about 1500 people who took the MMPI, (Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory), which is one the finest

tests of mental health. It's a standard for determining a person's mental health. And one of the features of it is your attitude toward life -- whether you're an optimist or a pessimist. Roughly two thirds of the people who took the test were optimists and one third were pessimists. They tracked these people for 40 years and guess where the death rate was the highest - do you know any pessimists that don't worry? Pessimists are people who look at the glass as half empty. The optimist sees the same glass and says, 'half full.' Now how many of you look at the glass and say it's half empty?

My dad was always an optimist, I believe he was a *true* optimist -- the epitome of an optimist, because we'd go driving and the gas gauge would be down on E and going below E, and he would say we still have fumes in the tank. So we drove cross country many times on the fumes in the gas tank, not the gas but the fumes; and you know what, he never ran out of gas. I don't know how he managed to do that -- I've tried and I've failed. I've had to get gas out of a gas can a couple of times when I thought I could be like my dad, but I couldn't do it. He didn't worry about those things, he'd just go along and it was fine; whatever happened, happened.

Well, I'd like to suggest to you the reality is that worry stops energy and creativity because it wears you down. Worry can make you tense and edgy and impede your relationships. Worry shortens life as we've just demonstrated by this study, where people would die more rapidly because they were pessimists and worried. So clearly Jesus was right, He didn't need the study from the University of North Carolina to know the truth. He asked, "By worrying can you add one hour to your life span?" And the answer is absolutely not -- in fact you can shorten your life by years through worry. Because what can worry do physiology? Worry will create in some people high blood pressure. Some of the outcomes from high blood pressure are strokes, heart failure, blood clots - those don't sound exciting to me -- they're not good. Are there any effects on your digestive system if you worry? Yes, you produce too much stomach acid which leads acid reflux. What else can you have as the result of worry? Intestinal disturbances which we don't want to talk about before lunch.

You guys laugh at all this because you know the truth, don't you? You know the truth about worry and how it doesn't really help you. Not only do we know that medically we know that personally. So the amazing thing to me is that some people continue to worry. Do you ever wonder why you do that to yourself? You're being human, but what kind of human are you being though. Do you think God created us human? Yes. Did He create you to worry? No, so what's the problem? Do you realize that we worry because we think there is too much responsibility that remains on us? In fact, someone once said, "worry mounts in direct proportion to self trust." The more you trust yourself the more you will worry, because you are acting like everything depends on you.

Now let's look at the text again. Now when I first read this text years and years ago, I started in verse 25 because that's where most Bibles started. They put their little heading to sections in the Bibles, and most headings start with verse 25. The first word in verse 25 is therefore - now you remember the Draegerism right? Whenever you see a "therefore" you want to find out what it's there for. This week I used the Draegerism on this text, and I've looked at it and I thought, 'that's why they put verse 24 with 25 in our Gospel reading for today.' Because 24 fits with 25 - 25 links back to 24 with the word "therefore." So now we go back to 24 and it says, "Jesus said to His disciples, no one can serve two masters." That's important, "for either a slave will hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." It's either/or isn't it? You either love the one and hate the other or despise the one and love the other. And He uses some pretty extreme language, hate and despise are really strong words. He says it's either/or people, and Jesus is like that, He says, "You're either for Me **or** against Me." There is no fence riding with Jesus, He says you're either with Me **or** not. He says, either you're going to come to Me and trust Me **or** you're going to trust yourself. And the more we trust ourselves, the more we are inclined to worry because you're not God.

But think about how this has occurred for us, you go back to the Garden of Eden and the temptation by Satan was, "eat the fruit because when you do your eyes will be open and you will be like God." In other words, God's holding out, you get to be on His level. And you see, worry puts us where we *think* we're at His level - where we are trying to serve Him **and** us and it doesn't work that way. That's why it's not such a cool idea to worry. So you can't serve both God **and** wealth at the same time, *therefore* He says, "I tell you, don't worry about your life, what you shall eat or drink or about your body what you shall wear." How many of you worried about what to wear this morning? "Is not life more than food in the body more than clothing?" And the form of the question of the original is absolutely yes, life is more than that. It demands the answer yes by the way it's asked. Of course life is more than these things.

Look at the birds of the air and I can just imagine this since it is the Sermon on the Mount. It was given on the hillside overlooking the Lake Gennesaret, the Sea of Galilee, Sea of Tiberias. And for those of us who have been there, we can imagine what this was like. And I can imagine that this was a springtime just by virtue of the text, and in the morning you can imagine what's flying overhead. All the birds are there, and maybe over here in a tree somewhere birds are singing away. So what does Jesus do, as He normally does? He sees stuff that's happening right there and he puts these images right in front of people that they already are very familiar with. So I can imagine there were some birds flying and maybe a few of them in the trees chirping away and He says, "Now look at the birds of the air. They don't sow, they don't reap and they don't gather in the barns." Guess who most of His audience was; *farmers*, who sowed and reaped and gathered in barns. So He's saying, "hey guys, the birds don't do what you do, yet your Heavenly Father feeds them." It says *your* Heavenly Father feeds

them; not just *the* Heavenly Father or not just God, but *your* Heavenly Father. So if *your* Father is feeding the birds, He'll take care of you too. See that's imbedded in there isn't it? That's the message.

Then He goes on and says, "Why do you worry about clothing? Consider the Lilies of the Field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin." And guess how some of the people made their own clothing in those days? They spun the yarn, they spun the thread, and they wove it together. They made their own clothes. Now I can imagine it's springtime and guess what's blooming; right there by the lake there are some lilies blooming. I can just imagine that Jesus was pointing to something that was right there in front of their face. He says, "now let's think about those lilies out there -- how they grow. They neither toil nor spin yet I tell you even Solomon in all of his glory was not clothed like one of these. Solomon owned I Magnin; he was the Warren Buffet of his day. He owned the clothing business, and yet he wasn't even dressed like the flowers of the field, which today are alive and tomorrow are thrown into the fire. Will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? And the answer is of course He will. That's the implication of the question -- of course He will. Notice what word follows - *therefore*. "Therefore, do not worry saying what shall we eat or drink or what shall we wear, for it is the gentiles, (some translations say the pagans,) who strive for all these things. And indeed, indeed, your Heavenly Father knows that you need these things.

Now the next word is a very interesting word because you all know what happens with that word, and the word is **but**. But reverses everything that's coming. *But* instead of worrying about all this stuff, instead of focusing on all this stuff, *focus on the kingdom*. That sounds a lot like verse 24 -- no one can serve two masters. You hate one love the other, despise one and love the other. So here's the deal. He says, "but strive for the reign, if you will, of God." Not just kingdom, but the reigning of God is probably a better translation. "Strive for the reigning of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you because your Father knows you need them. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow brings worries of its own." Have you ever noticed that? He says, "But today's troubles," you have enough for today, don't borrow from the future. How many of you go on a future trip? You get all anxious, what if the price of gas goes up to \$5.00. What if your grocery bill goes up by \$1000.00 this year? "What if" is future stuff.

Do you think God knows what the future holds? Absolutely He does. Do you think that He doesn't care about what your future is? Of course He cares! How do you know He cares? Because you see the kingdom is always about God's reign. And for Jesus the reign was not about this world but it was about His rulership in our lives. The kingdom of heaven is amongst you, it is within you. And how is it within you? It's in you by grace; it's a gracious rule of God in the hearts and minds of believers. *That's His kingdom!* It's not something external to us it's something within, it's a spiritual kingdom and it's ruled from a cross. Where mockingly they

put a crown on Him, a crown not of silver or gold, but a crown of thorns and a robe. And yet it was the truth -- He is the King, He is the One who reigns and rules everything for our benefit.

There's one guy that learned the lesson the hard way. His first name is Peter. And let's just remind you of Peter a bit. Peter was the guy who when the disciples were out in the water, and they see Jesus walking out there. He says if that's you Jesus, invite me to come and of course Jesus said come on down. So Peter gets out and he sinks. He's no longer looking at Jesus *but* the waves. Remember, you can't serve two masters. So Peter started with God and ended with stuff. Thank God Jesus was there to reach out and pull him back and I suspect walked on water with him back to the boat.

Who was with Jesus the night He was betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane? He had also proclaimed that everybody let Him down, but I won't. So there he is out there with these women when Jesus was taken to trial in the courtyard, and what does Peter do? Denies the Lord 1, 2, 3 times. Later in life, much later in life, Peter wrote some very poignant words in his 1st letter, the 5th chapter - these words, "Humble yourselves therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time." Not that you have to lift yourself up, but He will lift you up. And then the next word is significant, he says, "Cast all your anxieties upon Him because He cares for you." And who's the Him? God, and how do we know He cares for you - we studied that for six weeks, "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life." In other words He's saying He's going to reign from a cross, through an open tomb. We know how much He cares for us, "So be self controlled and alert, your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion for someone to devour." Do you think Peter had any personal sense of what that meant? I think he was thinking of water and a courtyard when he wrote that. He knew from personal experience what it meant that Satan is like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour, because he was nearly devoured multiple times. He says, "Resist him standing firm in your faith, because you know your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings." He's saying you know, you're not alone in struggles. You're not alone in anxious moments or anxiety producing moments. You've got a whole team of Christians who have gone through that too.

And then he has some very interesting words that follow, verse 10. "And the God of all grace." How much grace? **All**. Don't you love the word grace, too? And this God of *all grace*, this God of undeserved love and mercy, this God who called you to His eternal glory in Christ. That you already live in His eternal glory through the waters of baptism. "After you've suffered a little while," in other words you know there's going to be difficulties, it's not always going to be a cake walk, "will Himself restore." I'd like to pause on that word *restore* because that word in the original is a medical term. It means to set a fracture. So He's looking at our lives and saying our lives are sometimes fractured, and He says I will set the

fracture. I will mend what is broken is what He's telling you. "And make you strong," and the word *strong* here is solid as granite. And if you've been to some places where there's granite rock you know how solid granite is. He says I'm going to make you as solid as granite, and you're going to be firm. And here's an interesting word, *filled with unknown strength* is how you can translate it. And He uses this example because it's a word that's used to describe a disciplined athlete. So you can imagine someone who's a disciplined athlete and their muscles. I watch disciplined athletes pass me on bicycles going up hills. And I know they are disciplined athletes because their legs so strong, their muscles are popping out with muscles, and they fly past me. And I'm thinking how did you do that? Well I know how they did that -- they have strong legs and I know how they got them -- they're disciplined athletes.

George Hincappe, one of the finest cyclists in the world who used to ride with Lance Armstrong, Hincappe has gone up Old La Honda in something around 13 minutes -- I've never broken 30 minutes. I saw Hincappe in person a few months ago and his tiny little body and his amazingly strong legs -- *disciplined athlete*. He says I'm going to make you like that.

Steadfast -- it is to lay a firm foundation to settle. I think about how I was watching them build a new building out here a couple of years. They scooped out a bunch of our old dirt and they brought in new dirt. They are out there compacting that dirt, watering it and compacting it, watering it and compacting it some more. And they did that so it would settle, so it would be a strong bed on which to build a foundation. He says that's how I'm going to treat you -- I'm going to *settle you down* because you're going to trust in Me.

That's what God is saying to you this morning, that is if you do the *therefore*. Seek first the opinion of God and His righteousness. If you but seek this God who reigns forever and ever and ever, and you do what Peter says, "Cast all of your anxieties upon Him because He cares for you," that will lengthen your life. And when you let go of anxiety your creativity pumps up. When you let go of anxiety you don't have brain freeze anymore, you remember things that you wouldn't otherwise remember. So what to do with anxiety? I think the answer is simple, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," because you can't serve you as God, and God as God at the same time; it just doesn't work.

So since you want to have a high quality life and since He offers you an abundant life, and since He gives to you a refreshment that truly refreshes when you drink of Him, come to Him, those of you who are thirsty and I will refresh you. Why would you hold on to anxiety for a second longer today?

I want to encourage you on this Memorial Day week-end, not only remember those who have died for the defense of our country in wars over time, I'd like you to remember Him who died to give you freedom. Freedom from anxiety, freedom from stress, freedom to love and serve the Lord with your whole life. If you

remember anything this Memorial Day week-end, would you remember that? In Jesus' name, Amen.

And now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep and guard your hearts and minds as you live by faith in this Jesus who reigns, Amen.