

Our Heavenly Father

Devotional Reading: Ephesians 1:3–10

Background Scripture: Exodus 34:4–7; Psalm 103:10–14; Isaiah 40:27–31

Today's Scripture: Matthew 6:24–34

I. Serve or Despise the Father?

Matthew 6:24

²⁴ “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

24. Jesus continues his teaching about living as citizens of the kingdom of heaven, a teaching he began in Matthew 6:19. The word *master* in this context implies a singular individual who has overall charge of a group and its mission. Can any group function smoothly with two bosses who are equal in authority? Think about a *maestro* (an Italian word meaning “master”) who conducts an orchestra. The orchestra is composed of many individuals and their instruments, but there can be only one maestro. Otherwise, there is confusion. The same can be said for trying to live one’s life under *two masters*. Those who attempt to do so will find themselves constantly torn between who or what receives their attention.

The specific contrast that Jesus depicts is service to *God* versus service to *money*. Older English translations of this verse include the word *mammon* in place of the word *money*. The word *mammon* comes from an Aramaic word that refers to wealth and riches. It is found elsewhere

in the New Testament. Jesus is saying it is impossible for a person to give their total allegiance both to God and wealth. We note that financial wealth can be used to serve God and the church. However, these things are secondary to serving God.

II. Worry or Trust the Father?

Matthew 6:25–32

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?”

²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”

²⁸ “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the pagans run after all

these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

25. By saying *do not worry*, Jesus is not expressing his opposition to careful planning. However, concerns regarding planning and provision should not create worry or anxiety. It can be challenging in today's culture to hear Jesus' words above the barrage of sounds and allure of sights in advertisements that encourage us to consider various aspects of material consumption. Jesus encourages us to see the more significant, heaven-oriented picture regarding such matters: there is more to life than food and clothing.

26. In a lesser-to-greater argument, Jesus illustrates his point with an image familiar to anyone in his audience: *birds*. Humans *sow, reap, and store away in barns*, but birds do not. Since the *heavenly Father* feeds them, will he not also provide for those who are created in his image?

27. Of additional interest here is the translation regarding adding *a single hour* to one's *life*. The idea is to ask the rhetorical question: *Why be overly concerned about things beyond your control?*

Worry can consume us as we waste time stewing over matters that we have no power to change. Excessive worry can contribute to a wide range of health issues and actually shorten our lives in the process.

28–29. Jesus now addresses the issue of clothing. To illustrate the counter-productive nature of worry, he again uses a lesser-to-greater comparison. This one involves a word picture, specifically *flowers of the field*. God provides what is necessary for them to *grow* and develop. He is responsible for their beauty.

The *splendor of Solomon*—referring to the wealth and glory of his kingdom—was known and admired. The queen of Sheba remarked, after having witnessed several examples of that splendor, “I did

not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard” (1 Kings 10:7).

Yet nothing produced by human wisdom or creativity can match the simple beauty seen in the flowers God has created and provides for. The God who invests such care regarding flowers is the same heavenly Father who created and cares for us.

30. The life expectancy of some vegetation is quite long, redwood trees being an example. But those are an exception. The life expectancy of most plants is relatively short compared to humans. And so it is with *the grass of the field*. Whether thinking about its natural life expectancy, or it being *thrown into the fire*, grass' lifespan is brief. “Thrown into the fire” refers to the use of flowers and grass to heat ovens for baking bread. Jesus' point is that if God bestows such beauty upon items in nature that are so short-lived, how much more will he care for human beings? Even so, we must do what flowers and grass are incapable of doing: exercise faith that God will provide such care for us.

31–32. With his repeat of *do not worry*, Jesus returns to the challenge he issued in the first verse of today's study. In the first century, pagan worshipers often sacrificed to their gods, hoping to appease them and receive blessings. However, for followers of Jesus, the situation is different. Jesus demands nothing besides faith, highlighting the stark contrast between pagan practices and the assurance provided by faith in him.

A tunnel-vision focus on the necessities of life is characteristic of *the pagans*. The underlying term points to non-Jewish peoples. Jesus calls his followers to possess an outlook or mindset different from the culture around them. The new mindset

is based on acknowledging an awareness of the *heavenly Father*. He knows that we need the necessities of life (*all these things*). The question is whether we possess the faith to trust in his provision for us.

That does not imply that God endorses carelessness regarding our earthly responsibilities. Followers of Jesus should be known for their diligence, respected for their honest work, and worthy examples of loving service.

III. Kingdom Living Matthew 6:33–34

³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

33a. The verse now before us switches the instruction from the negative (what to avoid) to the positive (what to seek as *first* priority). That priority is *his kingdom and his righteousness*. Jesus does not want his followers to be so consumed by the concerns of this world that those concerns influence the priorities they set, the decisions they make, and the time they spend. To seek first the kingdom of God is to make his will the most important pursuit and priority in our lives.

33b. The phrase *all these things* refers to the food, drink, and clothing previously discussed. Jesus promises that when we dedicate ourselves to the pursuit of the kingdom of God, the things that consume so much of the world's attention will no longer dominate our thoughts since they will be provided. As Jesus has already clarified, our loving heavenly Father will be the provider.

We note, however, that countless Christians throughout history and from around the world have suffered and died

from dehydration, malnourishment, and starvation. This verse is not saying that these things result from a lack of faith. Instead, it is a promise that God is the ultimate provider for his people. One way that he provides is through the generosity of others. As believers “seek first [God’s] kingdom and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33a), they will show generosity to others in need.

Jesus’ words transcend all times and cultures. They are meant to be a standard for his followers, no matter the time in history in which we are living. Since Jesus’ kingdom is “not of this world,” his promise still holds true, regardless of the time or place in history, when and where we are living.

34. The degree to which we hoard for *tomorrow* may indicate the degree to which we trust God to provide for our daily needs. An excellent example of this problem is found in Exodus 16:4, where the Israelites were instructed to gather enough manna only for the day (except for the sixth day). Most followed the instructions, but some didn’t (Exodus 16:20).

Fear of the future can keep us from seeking first the kingdom of God by making us overly earth-centered (compare the case of Demas in 2 Timothy 4:10). We cannot be servants of “two masters”!

Each day will likely include some measure of *trouble* or tragic, unpleasant circumstances. That’s because we continue to live in a world reeling from the curse of sin. Yet, we are to discipline our thinking and focus our attention on kingdom priorities, we must maintain our intent. Paul’s words challenge us: “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Colossians 3:2). This is also part of being “transformed by the renewing of your mind” and living all of life as an act of service to God (see Romans 12:1–2).

Involvement Learning

Our Heavenly Father

Into the Lesson

How often do you think about your fears?

How often do you let your fears consume your thinking?

How do you handle your fears?

We all feel fear and worry. Sometimes, these things take up a significant part of our thoughts and concerns. Today's study on Matthew's Gospel will recount a teaching from Jesus regarding our trust in God's provision.

Into the Word

Read Matthew 6:24–34. Explain Jesus' claim in verse 24.

What is the significance of God caring about "the grass of the field" (v. 30)?

What does it mean to seek God's kingdom and righteousness?

What reasons does Jesus give as to why we don't need to worry?

What do these verses teach us about God?

Key Text

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

—Matthew 6:34

Into Life

One way we can deal with worry is to notice the needs of others in our community. List difficulties that people in your community may face.

What is already being done to help with these difficulties?

How can we partner with those already addressing these difficulties?

Thought to Remember

No one knows our earthly needs better than our heavenly Father.