

OpenTheo

Worry (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this thought-provoking talk, Steve Gregg explores the theme of worry and how it relates to our attitudes towards work, faith, and self-reliance. Using biblical references and personal anecdotes, he argues that worrying is ultimately futile and only serves to undermine our trust in God's guidance and provision. Instead, we should focus on living a life of purpose and integrity, regardless of our circumstances, and trust that God will sustain us and provide for our needs.

Transcript

Well, let's turn to Matthew 6, and today we want to finish up Matthew 6 in verses 25 through 34. There is one theme of these verses, and in other words, it is a section that is by itself. It stands out as developing a particular thought.

That thought is concerning worry. It's interesting that Jesus would devote a major section of the sermon to a subject like worry. I mean, the subjects that the previous portions have been devoted to are the big subjects of righteousness, proper religious conduct, one's values that are the fundamental underpinning of all their life and their choices.

And then you've got something like worry, which you might think is not a major issue. I mean, it's sort of a little formal. We know people, maybe we are people, who sort of joke about being worriers, or we describe certain people as worriers because that's the leading characteristic of their lives.

It's almost something that's accepted as part of their personality. It's just something, you know, a little quirk, a little, maybe even a humorous idiosyncrasy that they worry about everything. Well, Jesus doesn't speak as if worrying is an idiosyncrasy or a minor thing.

He forbids it outright, which means that to worry is to violate his commands and to sin. Worry is not a product of weakness. It is a choice.

Now, I can only say that on the basis of Jesus commanding us not to worry. Jesus could not legitimately or fairly command people to do something that was not in their power to do. Now, of course, God could do so if he was unreasonable.

God could ask us to run a three-minute mile or go to hell, and he'd be within his rights to make such a demand, but we couldn't call that reasonable because none of us can do it. And to my knowledge, God has never given any commands that he does not expect us to be able to perform. When it says in 1 Corinthians 10, in verse 13, that God will not permit you to be tempted above that which you're able to endure, that means that there will never be a demand placed upon your conduct that you are not capable of fulfilling.

That is with God's help. We're not trying to suggest that in your own power that you can do everything God wants you to do, but in fact, Jesus said, without me you can do nothing. Yet, there are things which God has commanded and expects us to do with his help, which we can never claim weakness as the excuse if we fail him.

We can't just say, well, I've always just been this way. Well, that may be true, but what you need to do if you've always been in such and such a way, and if that way is described in the Bible as sin, what you can do is repent and stop being that way, and realize that you can't just make jokes about it or pretend like it's a small matter, but this is a major concern. And the reason it's a major concern is because to worry is to lack faith, and faith is fundamental to everything, especially it's fundamental to our relationship with God.

And so I'd like to read this passage, and we'll see very clearly that the person who is a worrier, or the person who worries, is described by Jesus as one of little faith. Therefore, worry and little faith, or no faith in some cases, they go together. Great faith or even adequate faith, ordinary faith, the kind of faith Christians ought to have, worry cannot coexist with that faith.

Let's see what Jesus says, beginning with verse 25. Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. It's not life more than food, and the body more than clothing.

Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin.

And yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, What shall we eat? Or what shall we drink? Or what shall we wear? For after all these things, the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things, but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things.

Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. Now I said that this section stands alone as an extended discussion on the subject of worrying, but there is a sense in which it is obviously connected with the previous segment, which began at verse 19 about not laying up treasures for yourself on earth.

Now verses 19-24 had to do with where your treasure is or where your heart is. He said where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. And so verses 19-24 are concerned about your heart and your values and what you value and lay your affections on.

That is not, of course, exactly what verses 25 and following are talking about, but there is a connecting link. Because when Jesus says do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, there is two problems with laying up treasures on earth. One is it reflects perhaps wrong values, as verses 19-24 are talking about.

You may be trying to serve God and mammon. You may be placing too much value on mammon, on riches. But there is another problem with laying up treasures on earth.

It suggests in many cases a lack of faith. One reason that people want to lay up treasures on earth is because of lack of faith. They don't believe or they're not sure that their needs will be met in the future.

Now I must confess I'm of two minds about some practical applications of this point. For example, many people, most people I suppose, make provision for their retirement years. They either have a program through their employment or else they arrange for something through treasury bills or some other way.

They put away money knowing that they have their retirement years ahead in which they will not be productive and they will not be able to work. At least they won't be able to continue in the same job they're in perhaps. Is this wrong? Well, in a sense it is laying up treasures on earth.

But there is an argument in favor of doing this, part of which is scriptural. One is that in the Old Testament we know that God forewarned certain people, like Joseph, of impending times of dearth, times when they would not have the abundance they now have and instructed them to lay up in times of prosperity for the times of lack, for the times of famine. In the book of Proverbs the ant is commended and given as an example for us to learn from who gathers up extra food in the summer because of an instinctive awareness that the winter months will come when food is not available.

And therefore she stores up her food in the summer, she works harder in the summer in order to have something laid away for the winter. This is called wisdom in Proverbs and the slothful man is told to go to the ant and consider her ways in this respect and get wisdom himself, which suggests that there may be some parallel in the way we should be. Also in the Proverbs a couple of times it tells us that the wise man, the prudent man,

foresees the evil and hides himself, whereas the foolish man just proceeds incautiously and is punished or suffers for it.

That particular principle, which is stated I think twice in Proverbs, probably has a variety of applications which could include possibly foreseeing the days of your life when you will not be able to provide for yourself and just having the wisdom to say well, I'll put aside a little bit right now to hold me over at that time. Now, that is the argument in favor of making some provision for retirement. Now, there are some things that I would suggest are not in favor of it and this is why I said I'm of two minds about it and I really don't feel like I would be in a position to judge anybody as to the decision they made, but I'd like to give you both sides of the issue.

On the one hand, where in the Bible does it say people should retire? Now, I realize that some forms of employment enforce retirement upon people after they reach a certain age. My grandfather, now deceased, was forced into retirement at age 65 from, I think, the post office and he spent the rest of his life until he was about 83 or so, or older, 85, I forget how old he was, from age 65 until in his 80s, spent the rest of his time trying to find ways to stay employed even though he had retirement from the post office. He just wanted to stay productive.

He didn't want to just get a motor home and cruise around the country and vegetate and cease to be a productive citizen. Now, there is a mentality in our own day that if a person has worked hard at the same job for 30 years or however long it takes to be entitled to retirement, that they have put in their productive years and they've earned the right to vegetate and to spend the rest of their life just enjoying, you know, what they've laid aside. I do not believe that the Bible encourages that mentality.

I don't read anywhere in the Bible that people are supposed to stop working before the time comes that they must stop working. And when I say must, obviously, as age advances, for most people, weakness, physical weakness, and maybe arthritis or diminished vision or other sickness takes its toll and a person is no longer able to be productive in the same ways as before. And obviously, when that happens, the Bible says their children should support them, which means that it's not necessary for them to lay up for their golden years money for retirement.

Biblically, people should work as long as they can. The Bible does not indicate that a time comes in your life where your stewardship years are over, where you are no longer required by God to use your gifts, your time, your expertise in ways that will benefit the kingdom of God. It may be, in fact, that you will retire in a circumstance that you have retirement, it's been laid up for you, I mean, it just comes with the territory with some jobs they've just taken out for you.

And if that is the case and you find yourself in old age, released from your employment with a pension or something coming in, consider that you have a stewardship of your

time. And, you know, God has given you providentially a situation where you don't have to work for a living, therefore you can just work for free, or whatever, you know, you can serve others. And there are people who are retired from their employment, well, I think of Dan.

And most of you know Dan, he comes around here quite a bit, Dan Harris. He was forced out of work a few years ago because he had a heart attack. And he was a contractor in California, a hard-working guy, not only making a living for himself, but serving the church and everything, doing a lot of odd jobs.

And he had a heart attack, no insurance company would insure him after that, and therefore no contracting firm would employ him because he couldn't be insured. And therefore he's kind of forced out of his employment. But he's spent the years since then doing nothing but serving the body of Christ.

I mean, he mows old people's lawns, he fixes cars, he builds, he repairs, he's as busy as he ever was when he was making money, but he refuses to take money for it now, because it's a ministry. He finds himself released from employment, almost against his will by circumstance, but not released from productivity. Now he is free to minister.

He's free to use all his time to serve the saints, and that's what he wants to do and does. To my mind, people like this sort of put to shame the average retired person who just sees life, like most Americans do, as, you know, the value in life is to grab as much leisure as you can, even during your youthful years. Work as little as possible, have as much recreation and enjoyment and fun as possible, and of course, after you reach the time where you're enabled to retire, then your whole life just becomes fun.

Your whole life is just, you know, enjoy the grandkids, tour the country in your motorhome, and live off Social Security and your pension. Now, I'm not trying to say these people who live off their pensions are wrong. I'm saying, though, that the productive years end when God decides they end, not when you reach some magical age.

That God providentially removes your ability to be productive in life, by age or health considerations usually, and yet you should consider that you should be productive as long as God permits. And if you remain productive, even if you're not in a job, if you are working for God, Jesus said the laborer is worthy of his hire, and he said that in a context where he was sending his disciples out to work for God and trust God to provide. There have been many people who have only begun a ministry after they retired or reached what others would call retirement age.

My own father-in-law is 70 years old. He's starting a business from scratch because he wants to leave money to certain ministries that he supported in the past in Haiti. And most people at age 70 would retire.

He could retire comfortably on the royalties from his previous inventions, but he's not content to be just retiring. He wants to produce. He wants to serve.

He wants to be useful for God until the day God takes him. And he's looking at probable heart attacks before very long. He's had heart problems.

But, you know, he wants to die with his boots on and with mud all over him, probably. He wants to go out and dig wells and toilets and things for orphanages in Haiti. And there's no reason why a person shouldn't do this as long as they're able to do that.

But there are people who, because of the nature of their employment in their youth, are not free to go out and do much ministry, but because their circumstances release them at a retirement age, they can begin only then doing something like the mission field. We had a couple go through the school here two years ago, I think it was, Joe in Virginia, Marcheschi. He had just retired from a career with the telephone company.

He was now free. They went through the school. They went into YWAM.

They went to the Philippines. You know, they began a ministry when he was freed from his employment, sold their property, and just kind of went into YWAM. George Mueller ran an orphanage until he was 70 years old.

And then at age 70, he became a missionary for 20 years. And he traveled to many, many countries, preached all over the world for 20 years. At age 90, he returned to England and had up the orphanage until his death at age 93.

But at age 70, most people, at least in our culture, aren't thinking in terms of being productive anymore or doing anything of value. Whereas a guy like George Mueller entered the ministry of missions. He was in the ministry of running an orphanage for 50 years before that.

But he began a missionary career that went 20 years. And he began it when he was 70 years old. Now, when I say that, what I'm saying is this.

There's two categories of old people. Those that are physically able to remain productive and those who are not. Those who are should be.

They can still either be productive supporting themselves, if that seems to be what God calls them to do. Or if God calls them into missions or something else, they should live by faith just like anybody else. They wouldn't have to lay up money, lay up treasures on earth, to support that anymore than a young missionary should have to.

If a person is serving God, God will provide. That's the message Jesus taught his disciples to count on. Now, the other category, of course, old people who are physically not able to be productive anymore.

The Bible indicates that they should be supported by their children. And in most cases, as God has ordained it, most people have children. By the time they're 65 or so, most people have adult children.

Now, you might say a lot of children, though, won't support their parents. Then their parents didn't do a very good job of raising them. You know, there definitely is a price to pay for mismanagement in earlier years.

And parents who, in their early years, take the easy route, let the public schools raise the kids and let the culture pass on its values to their kids instead of passing on to their children their own values and their own religious scruples and so forth and training them themselves, as the Bible says they should, there's a price to be paid in the end. They may find it like pulling teeth to get their kids to take care of them. In fact, most people who failed in this area end up in rest homes, sadly.

And either the government or their children end up paying for them. But for a grown child to pay for their parent to be in a rest home is scandalous, unless that parent needs inpatient care. In fact, most old people do not want to live in rest homes.

And most of them who are there are fairly embittered by the fact that someone has left them there. And yet it's partly their fault. I'm not saying we shouldn't pity them.

I pity everyone who comes into hard consequences, even if it was their fault. But it is partly their fault because they should have trained their children in the biblical manner. And if they had, their children would understand that they need to take their parents into their home and support them, just as their parents supported them in their home when they were young and impossible of supporting themselves.

So God really has left no stone unturned. He's covered all the bases. It's just that when people disobey God, problems arise, and people have to make provision for themselves in ways that the Bible does not dictate as necessary.

But as far as laying up money for retirement, I don't personally think that is something that is recommended in Scripture, because a person can either be productive in terms of finances until he's disabled to do so, or else he can be productive for God in ministry, in which God takes on the duty of supporting him, like any other servant of God. And they can live by faith. The problem is even most people who are in ministry now don't live by faith.

But Jesus indicated that that was possible to do and recommended it. Now, I want to say another thing. In our culture, people sometimes also feel they should lay up treasures on earth for their children, for their children's college education, or simply so they might leave their children an inheritance.

Again, this might seem commendable and justifiable, and it might seem to go against

what Jesus said about laying up treasures on earth for yourself. I would say that one could argue that if they laid up treasures for their children, that they're not laying up treasures for themselves. And it's a somewhat less selfish thing to do than if they were going to spend all their money before they died and leave their children nothing.

Like those, and most of you have probably seen the bumper sticker that's usually on the back of an RV, that says, what, we're spending our children's inheritance or something like that? We're enjoying our children's inheritance or something like that? Well, obviously, I would say to use up your excess money is perhaps more selfish than to leave it to your children. But why should leaving it to your children be the obvious thing to do with your money when there may be other people more needy than your children? Does God care more about your children than others? And if your children are not particularly needy, for instance, if your children aren't poor, would it not be more biblical to give that excess money to people who really are poor and let your children spend it for themselves? To leave an inheritance for your children when they don't necessarily need it, that is, when they're not particularly the most needy people you know of, is in a sense selfish because it shows that you have a greater, it's sort of like nepotism, you know, it's like giving an honor to your children who are not particularly in need over other people that are equally on God's heart who are more in need than they. As far as I'm concerned, I don't even want my children to go to college, but if they choose to do so, they'll put themselves through college.

Many people have done so in history and it can be done. It's not easy, but I know some people who are doing it right now, and some of them even have families they're raising. It's just working harder.

If you want the college education, you can work harder at it. I don't see any reason why parents should put their kids through college. For one thing, I don't see anything in the Bible that encourages anyone to college as a valuable thing unless you're called to a ministry, medical missions or something like that, where to be a doctor or something would be useful, or any kind of a professional career that requires an education that God calls you to.

Of course, you'll need to go to college, but then God can provide for you to go through it if that's his calling on your life and will. But to lay up money on earth for things like leaving an inheritance to your children, you know, it's an interesting thing. People feel that they want to leave an inheritance to their children because they love their children.

It says in Mark chapter 10, when the rich young ruler came to Jesus and said, What do I need to do to be saved? And Jesus said, Well, if you want to be perfect, sell all you have and give to the poor, and you'll have treasures in heaven. In Mark chapter 10, somewhere around verse 20, I think it is, and there's parallels. But in Mark's version, unlike Matthew and Luke, just before Jesus gives that command to the rich young ruler, it

says, Jesus looked on him and loved him.

Verse 21, Mark 10, 21. Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, One thing you lack, go away, sell whatever you have and give to the poor. Isn't that interesting? Jesus told this guy to divest himself of all of his money because Jesus loved him.

And we can see that the sequel justifies that because the man went away unhappy. Not unhappy because he got rid of his money, but unhappy because he had so much money. It says the man went away greatly sorrowing because he had great possessions.

It's interesting that the love that Jesus has for people is just the opposite of the love that many parents profess to have for their children. They want to leave their children rich because they profess to love their children. Jesus' love is of a different sort and much more wise.

He loves a man and says, therefore, get rid of it. Don't tie yourself down with it. Get yourself something of value, treasures in heaven.

Now, all of this really connects mostly with what we were saying yesterday, but it connects very closely with the present passage too. Because people lay up treasures on earth, whether for their children, for their old age, or simply for tomorrow. You know, maybe I'll lose my job tomorrow.

Maybe there will be a health crisis ten years from now. Maybe I'll have cancer. Maybe I'll, who knows what will happen.

I better lay up some money. I better get insurance or whatever. Well, part of that is, of course, placing a higher value than ought to on money and being in the service of mammon.

The other part of that is lacking faith that the God who has provided for you up to this point will still be around in all the future points when you need things too. Think about it. Can you deny that God has given you everything you need from the day of your birth until this present moment? You have no difficulty trusting that God will provide for you in the past.

That's the point. God has provided for you in the past. You probably don't have any problem believing that God will provide for you to make it through the rest of this hour at the present simply because it so appears that God has already provided.

You're not going to starve to death before this class is over. But what about a year from now? What about 10 years from now? What about 30 years from now or 50 years from now? Will there still be a God then? Or will God change his mind about you? Will he decide that he's wasted the time and effort he's put into supporting you up to this point and that he can't do that anymore? He's already invested too much. It's turned out to be

a bad investment, so he's going to go and put his money elsewhere.

If that's what you believe, then you have something to worry about. But that's just the point. Worry is believing the wrong thing.

Worry is in fact not only lack of faith, it is negative faith. It is believing something bad. If I didn't know for sure what the future holds, but I had no reason to believe it would be negative, that wouldn't be called worry.

When you worry, it's because you suspect or fear that something very bad is going to happen, something for which you will not have adequate resources. And that is therefore worse than no faith. It is faith in something negative happening.

It is believing that God may abandon you, that God will not keep his promises, that the God who has said he will provide all your needs according to his riches and glory by Christ Jesus is going to exhaust his riches and glory before the time of your need and won't have any left for you, or simply that he won't keep his promises. And David said, I've been young and now I'm old, yet I've never seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread. Also in the psalm it says, the young lions do lack, Psalm 34 says, young lions lack and suffer hunger, but those that fear the Lord shall not lack any good thing, or those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing.

The Bible says elsewhere, no good thing, I think it's Psalm 80, something, 82 maybe, no good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly. Do you believe that? Well then what are you worried about? You cannot worry while you believe those things. You can only worry when you stop believing those things.

That is why worry is a sin, because it suggests that God has lied, or that if God hasn't lied yet, it still may be in him to lie and to break his promise in the future. That is a slander of God. God has never failed anyone yet, he's never even failed you yet.

And therefore to suggest that maybe he'll fail me in the future is scandalously libelous of God's character. And that is why worry is no small matter, it's a libel on God's character. And just to joke around about, oh I just worry about everything, is obviously, you might as well say, I just spit in God's face every day.

No big deal, I just blaspheme every day. It's just in me to do that, it's just kind of in my nature, I just blaspheme a lot. Would you think that a tolerable position for a Christian to take? I think not.

Well, in this passage, Jesus, I guess we could say Jesus gave, I find seven reasons here given not to worry. Now even if he gave only one good reason that should be enough, or even if he gave no reasons but just said don't worry, then we should assume that worrying is wrong. Now let me just say this, how could we not worry if Jesus just said don't worry but didn't give us any good reasons not to? Is it possible that if Jesus gave us

no reasons at all why we shouldn't worry, but if he just said don't worry, is it possible we could not worry? It seems to me that the answer would have to be yes.

Because one could deduce that if Jesus said not to worry, that there must be no fruit in worrying, and in fact there must be some evil in worrying. And that means that the things I'm prone to worry about, it's better for me to suffer them than to worry in advance of them happening. Let me say this, there are excellent reasons not to worry, and Jesus gives a bunch of them, and there's a few others one could think of besides the ones he gives.

But let's look at the ones he actually gives first of all. In verse 25 he says, Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Now these of course are the main things people would be inclined to be concerned about, although the funny thing is people who worry not only worry about those things in particular, they assume they'll have adequate clothing, they assume they'll have adequate food, it's enough money to get a new car every few years, or enough money to keep their standard of living high, that people are more inclined to worry about now in this society.

In biblical times people didn't have the affluence we do as a rule, and just eating and being clothed, having those things necessary for subsistence and survival, were the things that the average person would be worried about. And Jesus said don't even worry about that. It seems to me much less justifiable to worry about superfluous provision, when we know that we probably won't have any problem eating or being clothed, although to tell you the truth, if you live the way Jesus said you may have occasion to be so low on your finances that the temptation to worry about whether you'll have something to eat or wear could be there.

Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy chapter 6, he said therefore having food and clothing, let us with those things only be content. Now Paul was not saying it's wrong to have something more than food and clothing, but he certainly implied that the circumstance is realistic that some Christians may be in a position to have nothing more. That's 1 Timothy 6.8. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

And so since Paul and some of his companions often were even short on those commodities, food and clothing, yet they were content and they did not worry, I think it's more scandalous for us to worry when we don't even wonder whether we'll eat our next meal. There's not even any question about that, or whether we'll be adequately clothed if we have cold weather. Now, Jesus says don't worry about these things, and he gives a reason in this way at the end of verse 25.

Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Now what does that mean? What is that argument? How does that put forward his position? Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Perhaps one could think that Jesus is talking

values here again. Well, be happy that you have life, no matter whether you have food or not. Be happy that you have a body, whether you have clothing or not.

And yet that wouldn't be a very sensible argument, because if you're rejoicing in having life, but have no food, you won't have much life to rejoice in for very long. You know, you need food in order for life to be sustained. You need clothing, at least in severe climates, in order for your body to survive.

I believe his argument is this. What do you already have? You have life. You have a body.

Who gave you this life? Who gave you your body? Well, God did. Well, isn't that something greater? Harder to provide, more expensive than the food and the clothing to sustain it? If God has already given you the greater, can you doubt that he'll give you the lesser? Life is greater than food, and he's already given you life. Can you doubt that he'll give you food? The body is greater than clothing.

He's already given you a body. Is it unlikely that he'll give you clothing for that body? After all, if it is indeed God who has given you life and a body, does it not follow naturally to think that if he wants you to have life and a body, that he also wants you to have the things necessary to keep it alive? And therefore, in providing the greater, you can count on him to provide the lesser. Now, what he's saying here is, God has already demonstrated his commitment to your life and to your body by giving you those.

And how could such a commitment allow him not to sustain you in your life and your body at least as long as he wants you to retain them? Obviously, the time will come when he'll let your body die, and your life will go away. But at that time, he doesn't want you to have them anymore. As long as he wants you to have them, he will sustain them.

And the wonderful thing that the Christian can be assured of is that to live is Christ and to die is gain. And if the time comes when I die, I will know that it is only because that is God's intention, and God's preference, and his higher will for me. It might be that I could think of good reasons that I'd like to live a little longer, but so what? God has better reasons for everything, and whatever choice he makes is for my highest benefit ultimately anyway, and for his glory.

Therefore, I can live without worry knowing that as long as I am supposed to be alive, God will keep me alive. That means I'll have enough food, I am guaranteed that I won't starve to death until I die, and that I won't freeze to death until I die. I will live until I die.

I will have all things necessary for life until I die. Now, that might sound like, you know, a silly statement, but it's actually quite a profound statement. If people thought like this more often, they'd have nothing to worry about.

The trouble is, of course, most people have something to worry about even in dying. They don't want to lose those life supports, because then they lose their life, and losing

life is a scary thing to the one who's not prepared to meet God. But one who says to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

What is there to worry about then? The worst thing that could happen is you don't have a meal, or that you don't have enough meals to stay alive, and then you die. That's gain. That's advantage.

That's graduation. That's promotion. There's nothing to worry about, nothing to fear.

So, what Jesus is saying is God has given you life. He's given you a body. He's shown that He wants you to have those things by giving them to you.

He's shown that He can give you such things, and those are harder to give than, say, food and clothing. Man can provide food and clothing, but only God can provide life and a body. God has provided that which is harder to provide, and you therefore should know that He intends and can.

He intends to provide and can provide those things that are lesser. As long as you have a body, you don't have to worry that God's capable or willing to give you clothing for your body. As long as you have life, you don't have to worry whether God's going to have the ability or the incentive to give you the food to sustain that life.

So, the first argument Jesus gives is from the greater to the lesser, that kind of argument. God's given you the greater. In so doing, He's shown His ability and His commitment to you to provide great things.

How much more can you trust Him to have the ability and commitment to give you lesser things, like food and clothing? Verse 26, Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns. The things that people usually have to do in order to have food for the future, the birds don't even do that. And yet, your Heavenly Father feeds them.

And are you not of much more value than they are? Now, by the way, this scripture is sometimes raised by those who advocate high self-esteem. Jesus said, you're of much greater value than they are. You see, we do have value.

But how much do birds value that? Jesus said, five for two pennies. Actually, two for a penny and five for two pennies. So, half a penny each.

Are you not of much greater value than they are? Of course you are, but that's not saying an awful lot. Of course you are of potential value far more than they, because you can glorify God in ways that the birds of the air cannot. There is a value in humans.

And a desire to react against a wrong emphasis on high self-esteem in the current church should not incline us to say, but man has no value, because man does have

value. Jesus said, he has more value than the birds do. And that's not only true, he's got a considerable more value than the birds do.

We do not deny that there is a value in human nature, in human life. But that's not always reason to boast. In fact, it's never reason to boast, because we don't have anything that we haven't received.

But there in verse 26, Jesus points out that God has provided and continues to provide for the birds of the air, though they are not even capable of storing up in barns. Now, the statement he makes about birds, they don't sow, they don't reap, they don't store in barns, he's not saying therefore you shouldn't sow or reap or store in barns. He's simply saying they don't, because obviously they can't.

You can, and there is such a thing as doing all you can before you ask God to do more for you. I mean, there are things that are your duty to do. Those who don't work should not eat, the Bible says.

And if God has given you the ability to work, then do so. But the important thing about birds is they can't work. Someday you may be in that position.

Someday you may be too old or infirm to work. Or you may be in a position of ministry, where you're called away from financially profitable labor into that which is spiritually profitable, and you have to trust God to provide your finances. Well, in that case you're just like the birds, they have to trust God every day too.

Their whole duty is just to glorify God, to sing his praises, and that's all they can do. They can't provide for themselves either. Many people are in that condition, either because of infirmity or because of a calling in ministry that prevents them from having the time to go out and work for money too.

Whereas if they do all the things God calls them to do in ministry, they just have to trust that God will provide, because they can't go out and work. They are then in the same position as the birds are. They don't because they can't sow and reap and store in barns, but God feeds them, certainly he'll feed you too.

Now the disciples that he was speaking to on this occasion were in that exact position. He had called them away from fishing and away from tax collecting and away from things that were profitable labor in that respect, and therefore their life was very analogous to that of the birds. But most of us are not called to quite that same level of itinerancy and vagabond lifestyle that the traveling disciples were to have.

Most of us will find our calling in God in some form of employment. Now some won't, some of you will be called to mission full time. Even then you can be in employment if God allows it.

There are people who go and teach English in China or in other places in Japan to support their missionary work. Tent making is something Paul himself did. But there will be places you'll go where it's not legal for you to work because you just simply don't have the opportunity to work and you'll have to trust God like the birds do.

But here's the point. Even if you're called to employment that generates income, you still have to trust God. I would say I know more people who are worried, who are in profitable employment, than I know people who are worried who are just trusting God on the mission field.

Is that not interesting? There seems to be more of a temptation to worry when you become accustomed to providing for yourself. If you live by faith as a rule, in the sense that you don't work in a profitable employment, you're not better than others, but you have an enviable situation. You see the providence of God all the time.

You have to or else you die. And because you live by faith in that manner, you see God provide. You become accustomed to expecting God to provide.

Your faith is increased. You expect God to provide and He does. But when you are called to employment where God has called you to work in a job where your support generally comes as a direct result of the hours put in on the job, this is God's provision too, but it's not quite so obviously so.

Because the unbeliever next to you in the assembly line or in the factory or in the office is making the same wage you are and he's not even trusting God. Therefore, the temptation when one works in some financially prosperous employment is to, even if they say, I'm thanking God that I'm employed, I'm thanking God I've got good health and so forth to hold this job, I'm giving God the glory for my provision, and that's the right thing to do, there is still the very great temptation to begin to by little and little see that my support comes from my working. And therefore, what happens if I get laid off? What happens if the factory closes? What if the jobs all go down to Mexico? What if, what if, what if? And the problem is, you see, that shouldn't worry anyone any more than a missionary out on the field trusting fully in God every day should worry them.

Because you realize that if you're doing what you're called to do, then God's providence will always be on your side. As someone said a long time ago, wherever God guides, he provides. And therefore, if he's guided you to work at Ford Motor Company or Hewlett-Packard or McDonald's restaurant, he will provide for you, usually through that employment.

If through no fault of your own and through his sovereign providence you find yourself unemployed, he will either provide other employment or else just provide for you without employment. I mean, if you find yourself incapable of acquiring employment and you just apply your time and your energies to serving God in whatever ways you are capable of

doing, you can just rest assured you've now changed categories. There are two categories, those whom God provides for through their employment and those whom God provides for in spite of the fact that they can't hold employment.

And if you're employed now and later find yourself through no fault of your own, no choice of yours, you're unemployed, you've just changed categories. But you haven't changed God. The same God provides for both.

This is the most obvious, of course, in the cases where people can't hold a job or don't, like the birds. They can't go out and provide for themselves. They expect and must, I mean, I don't know how much they expect, but they find that God feeds them all the time.

Now, someone could say, but birds die. You know, birds do freeze to death on the telephone wires. Birds do starve.

How can you say God provides for them? Well, he provided for them all their lives. But birds die, so do people, everything dies. That's no argument against the command not to worry.

Once again, as I said a moment ago, just embrace death when it's time. When God says, OK, I'm not going to provide for you anymore because I don't want you here anymore, then say, Amen. Glory to God.

You know, if we live, we live under the Lord. If we die, we die under the Lord, Paul said in Romans 14. So, you know, if the birds live as long as God wants them to, because God provides for them and they can't provide for them, you might say, but they work hard.

Well, sure they do. They work hard doing what God wants them to do. They raid your garden, and they do whatever God made them to do.

They don't just lay around and God fills their belly miraculously. They do go out and hunt for food and forage. But God provides for them.

They do what they're made to do. They do what they're called to do, and God provides for them, even though they can't do what we normally associate with profitable work and laying up in barns and so forth. OK.