
Anxiety Bible Study

Matthew 6:25-34. 4 sessions of about 45 minutes, or one longer session. For small groups and personal study.

In Matthew 6:25-34 Jesus tells his followers not to worry about food, drink and clothes, because their heavenly Father knows what they need. He points to the birds and the wildflowers, tells them to seek God's kingdom first, and to take one day at a time. Paul adds prayer with thanksgiving and the promise of God's peace (Philippians 4:6-7), and Peter says to cast every anxiety on God, "because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). These words comfort. They do not shame anxious people, and they do not replace medical or professional care when anxiety is a health condition.

READ TOGETHER: MATTHEW 6:25-34

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 gather into barns—and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothes? Consider how the lilies of the field grow: They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his glory was adorned 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 furnace, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the Gentiles strive after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Today has enough trouble of its own.

Scripture from the Berean Standard Bible (BSB), public domain.

BACKGROUND

Where Jesus says it

These verses come in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount. Just before them Jesus says, "You cannot serve both God and money" (6:24). Then comes "Therefore" (6:25). If God is your master, you do not have to carry the whole weight of tomorrow yourself.

Jesus was talking to disciples who had left work and home to follow him. Tyndale's study notes put it this way: "Jesus' disciples had abandoned all (4:18-22; 9:9; 10:5-14); Jesus gave them comforting reassurance that God would provide for their needs." The worry in view is about food, drink and clothes, the plain question of whether there will be enough.

Worry, and anxiety as a health condition

Most people know the everyday worry Jesus describes. Anxiety can also be a health condition. Anxiety disorders, panic attacks and the effects of trauma involve the body and the brain, not only a person's thoughts. They are not a failure of faith, and Jesus' words here are not a diagnosis of them. Seeing a doctor or a counselor, and taking medicine when it helps, is wise. Prayer and Scripture can go alongside that care. They are not a replacement for it. The Psalms show believers telling God

plainly that they are not all right, and asking themselves why.

Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why the unease within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him for the salvation of His presence. (Psalm 42:5)

Two letters to churches under pressure

Paul wrote Philippians from prison (1:13) to a church that was also facing hostility. Tyndale's notes sum up the closing chapter: Paul "encourages the Philippians to fill their lives with joy, prayer, and thanksgiving, focusing their minds on God's good gifts, even in their persecution (4:2-9)." His advice not to be anxious comes from a man in chains.

Peter wrote to believers in what is now Turkey who were being insulted and mistreated for their faith (1 Peter 4:12). His line about casting anxiety on God sits inside a call to humility (5:6) and a warning to stay alert (5:8). Neither apostle writes from a calm, easy life.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be apparent to all. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think on these things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me, put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:4-9)

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, so that in due time He may exalt you. Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. (1 Peter 5:6-7)

WHAT THE PASSAGES SAY, LINE BY LINE

Six steps in Jesus' teaching, then three short passages from the letters. None of them pretends that life is easy.

Life is more than food (Matthew 6:25)

Jesus starts by asking a question. "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?" Food and clothes matter, and he does not say otherwise. He says they are not the whole of life, and the God who gave life can be trusted with what keeps it going.

Look at the birds (Matthew 6:26)

Birds do not plant or store food, "and yet your heavenly Father feeds them." Tyndale's notes call this an argument from lesser to greater: "If the Father tends to birds (the lesser), and the disciple is far more valuable to him (the greater), then he will certainly tend to the disciples' needs." Birds still look for food. The point is who provides it.

A single hour (Matthew 6:27)

Worrying cannot add an hour to anyone's life. Jesus is not mocking people who worry. He is naming something they already know: going over the same fear again does not change tomorrow.

Consider the lilies (Matthew 6:28-30)

Wildflowers do no work, and Solomon in all his glory was not dressed like them. The grass of the field is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, yet God clothes it. "O you of little faith" is said to disciples, and it reads as a gentle rebuke from a friend. It is not a verdict on anyone with an anxiety disorder.

Seek first the kingdom (Matthew 6:31-33)

People who do not know God chase after these things, but "your heavenly Father knows that you need them." Tyndale's notes say verse 33 is "the positive alternative to worrying." Jesus does not ask his followers to stop caring about needs. He asks them to put God's kingdom first and trust him with the rest.

One day at a time (Matthew 6:34)

"Today has enough trouble of its own." Jesus does not promise a day without trouble. He tells his followers to deal with today's and leave tomorrow's for tomorrow. Planning is not the problem. Living tomorrow's fears today is.

The Lord is near (Philippians 4:4-5)

Paul tells a suffering church to rejoice in the Lord always, and to be gentle with everyone. Tyndale's notes: "Joy is not dependent on circumstances; believers find joy in the Lord even in the midst of suffering." Then four short words: "The Lord is near."

Pray about everything (Philippians 4:6-7)

"Be anxious for nothing" is followed straight away by what to do instead: pray about everything, with thanksgiving. Tyndale's notes say believers can do this "because the heavenly Father loves his children and cares about their needs, and he has invited his children to pray about everything." The promise is that God's peace will guard hearts and minds. Paul does not say how fast the feeling comes.

Think on these things (Philippians 4:8-9)

Paul lists what is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely and admirable, and says to think on these things and practice what the Philippians saw in him. It is not positive thinking. It is choosing what to dwell on, and it comes with a promise: "the God of peace will be with you."

Cast your anxiety on Him (1 Peter 5:6-7)

Peter joins two things: humble yourselves under God's hand, and cast all your anxiety on him. Handing worries over is a kind of humility, an admission that you cannot hold everything. The reason Peter gives is short: "because He cares for you."

SESSION 1 OF 4

Your Father knows

Read Matthew 6:25-30. See what Jesus says about worry, and why he says it.

Also read: Matthew 6:19-24; Matthew 7:7-11.

Observe: what does the text say?

1. What three things does Jesus say not to worry about in verse 25?
2. Jesus asks four questions in verses 25 to 30. Find them. What answer does each one expect?

Interpret: what did it mean then?

3. Read Matthew 6:24. How does "You cannot serve both God and money" lead into "Therefore do not worry"?
4. Jesus argues from the birds and flowers (the lesser) to his followers (the greater). What does that say about how God sees you?
5. Jesus says "O you of little faith" to his own disciples. How would you hear that if a friend said it? How is it different from blame?

Apply: what does it mean for us?

6. What do you most often worry about when it comes to having enough?
7. Go outside this week, or look out a window, and notice one thing God feeds or clothes. Bring it back to the group.

SESSION 2 OF 4

Seek first, one day at a time

Read Matthew 6:31-34. See what Jesus puts in place of worry.
Also read: Matthew 6:9-13; Lamentations 3:22-23.

Observe: what does the text say?

1. What does the Father know, according to verse 32?
2. What does Jesus tell his followers to seek first? What will be added?

Interpret: what did it mean then?

3. Does verse 33 promise that Christians will never go without? Read Philippians 4:12 before you answer.
4. In the Lord's Prayer Jesus teaches us to ask for "our daily bread" (6:11). How does that fit with "do not worry about tomorrow"?
5. What is the difference between planning for tomorrow and worrying about it?

Apply: what does it mean for us?

6. What would seeking God's kingdom first look like in one ordinary day this week?
7. What trouble belongs to today for you? What belongs to tomorrow and can wait?

SESSION 3 OF 4

Prayer, thanksgiving and peace

Read Philippians 4:4-9. See how Paul, in prison, tells a church to handle anxiety.
Also read: Philippians 1:12-14; Philippians 4:10-13.

Observe: what does the text say?

1. List every command in verses 4 to 9.
2. What two promises of peace does the passage make (verses 7 and 9)?

Interpret: what did it mean then?

3. Paul was in chains when he wrote this. How does that change how you hear "Rejoice in the Lord always"?
4. Why might thanksgiving belong in prayers about the things that worry us?
5. The peace of God "surpasses all understanding" and "will guard" hearts and minds. Is Paul promising a feeling, protection, or both?

Apply: what does it mean for us?

6. Take one worry and turn it into a prayer with a request and a thank you. Share it if you are willing.
7. Look at the list in verse 8. What do you fill your mind with in the hour before you sleep?

SESSION 4 OF 4

Cast it on Him

Read 1 Peter 5:6-7. See why casting anxiety on God is an act of humility, and pray together.
Also read: Psalm 42; Matthew 11:28-30; 1 Peter 5:8-10.

Observe: what does the text say?

1. What does Peter tell his readers to do with their anxiety? What reason does he give?
2. Read Psalm 42. What does the writer say about how he feels? Does he hide it?

Interpret: what did it mean then?

3. Why might Peter put humility (verse 6) right next to casting anxiety on God (verse 7)?
4. Psalm 42 asks "Why are you downcast, O my soul?" twice, and the feeling has not lifted by the end. What does that tell us about faith and feelings?
5. How do prayer, friendship, and help from a doctor or counselor work together for an anxious Christian?

Apply: what does it mean for us?

6. Who could you tell honestly how you are doing this week?
7. Close by praying for each other by name, handing over the worries you are each carrying.

ONE-SESSION PATH

Anxiety in one evening

Read all of Matthew 6:25-34. About 45 to 60 minutes.

Observe: what does the text say?

1. What does Jesus say not to worry about in Matthew 6:25? What reasons does he give in verses 26 to 30?
2. What does Jesus tell his followers to seek first (6:33), and what does he say about tomorrow (6:34)?
3. Read Philippians 4:6-7 and 1 Peter 5:7. What do Paul and Peter tell anxious people to do?

Interpret: what did it mean then?

4. Jesus argues from the birds and flowers to his followers. What does that say about how God sees you?
5. Paul wrote from prison and Peter to persecuted churches. How does that change how you hear their words?
6. How is everyday worry different from anxiety as a health condition? Why does that difference matter when we read these verses?

Apply: what does it mean for us?

7. Take one worry and turn it into a prayer with a request and a thank you.
8. Close by praying for each other, and agree on one person each of you will talk to honestly this week.

FOR THE LEADER

- Read the passage aloud at the start of every session. People who are anxious often find it easier to listen than to read.
- Some people in your group may live with an anxiety disorder, panic attacks or trauma. Say early on, in plain words, that anxiety can be a health condition, that it is not a sign of weak faith, and that seeing a doctor or counselor is wise. Then leave it there. You do not need to make it the topic of the night.
- Do not use "do not worry" as a rule to measure people by. Jesus said it to reassure his friends. If someone hears these verses as one more thing they are failing at, slow down and point them to "your heavenly Father knows" (6:32) and "He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).
- Avoid quick fixes. Phrases like "just pray more" or "just trust God" can make an anxious person feel worse. Listening helps more.

- If someone shares something that needs more than a group discussion, follow up with them privately and involve your pastor. If anyone talks about wanting to die or not being safe, take it seriously, stay with them, and help them contact emergency services or a crisis line. In the US, call or text 988.

WHERE CHRISTIANS READ IT DIFFERENTLY

Is worry a sin?

Some Christians read "do not worry" mainly as a command, so that settled, ongoing worry is a lack of trust to be confessed. Others stress that Jesus is comforting people, not charging them, and that fear itself is not the same as unbelief. Most hold the two together: Jesus calls his followers to trust, and he does it with kindness. Nearly all agree that these verses should not be used to accuse someone with an anxiety disorder.

Does Matthew 6:33 promise that Christians will have plenty?

Jesus says "all these things will be added," and the things are food, drink and clothes. Christians broadly read this as God's care for real needs, not a promise of wealth or a life without hardship. Paul, who wrote Philippians 4, says he had known hunger and need as well as plenty (4:12).

Does Philippians 4:6-7 promise you will feel calm?

Some read God's peace mainly as a felt calm that comes through prayer. Others read "will guard your hearts and your minds" as God's protection, which holds whether or not the feeling arrives at once. Many Christians testify to both. Scripture does not promise that faithful people will always feel calm, and the Psalms are full of believers who did not.

Should Christians use medicine or counseling for anxiety?

Most Christian traditions see medicine, counseling and practical support as good gifts that can sit alongside prayer, friendship and pastoral care. People are bodies as well as souls. A few voices treat therapy or medication with suspicion, but they are not the mainstream, and nothing in these passages tells anyone to refuse help.

SOURCES

Berean Standard Bible. Berean Bible. Public domain. Scripture text of Matthew 6:25-34, Philippians 4:4-9, 1 Peter 5:6-7 and Psalm 42:5.

Tyndale Open Study Notes, Matthew and Philippians. Tyndale House Publishers. CC BY-SA 4.0. Notes on Matthew 6:25-34 and Philippians 4:4-6, and background on Philippians, quoted with attribution.

Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible (1898): Lily. James Hastings. Public domain. The wildflowers of the land behind "the lilies of the field".

Protos study editorial. Protos. CC BY-SA 4.0. Study structure, questions, leader notes and summaries, drawing on the Protos topic guide on worry and anxiety.

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Protos

The full study, with links to the commentary and dictionary, is free at protos-app.com/study-guides/anxiety. Protos is a Bible app for iPhone and Android that puts the history and context beside the passage you are reading.