

Good morning to The Creek—whether you are here on site or joining us on-line. I'm grateful to our pastor for asking me to preach this morning's message. Dan began this series, *Your Kingdom Come*, beginning in December and we will continue through the book of Matthew well into April when we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday. This week, we move into Matthew 6, the middle of the Sermon on the Mount. Teaching a vast crowd, Jesus taught...

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 important than food and the body more important than clothes. Look at the birds of the air. They do not sow or reap or store away in barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than them? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 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, O you of little faith?

So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things yet your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (Matthew 6:25-34)

While preaching to a great crowd of people seated on a hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee, Jesus told them, "Do not worry!" No less than three times, Jesus *commanded* the people, "Do not worry." And why? They were consumed with worry and anxiety. It was a command to stop doing what was already happening, and not to start worrying again. They were worried about every aspect of their daily existence because the word "life" is an all-inclusive term, applying to their *every* daily need.

"Worry" (in Greek) means to be troubled with cares (plural), and cares come in all shapes and sizes, and from all different directions. Worry happens when our minds are pulled at from every direction. Jesus preached to people in a survivalist culture who worked to keep themselves and their families alive for one more day. Their only food was in front of them. Their only clothes were on them. So, He asked them, "Why do you worry about what you will eat or drink, or worry about your clothes, what you will wear? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?" Like them, we worry about "food, fashion and fitness," but not in the same way. Our worry is more of WHAT we will eat and WHEN, of WHAT will we wear, and HOW long will we live.

Worry is as real today as it was in the day of Jesus. Worry is excessive fear, and that worry-filled fear impairs and impacts our everyday lives. Worry manifests itself in several ways, such as in panic or anxiety attacks. The CDC reports that one in five adults struggles with some type of anxiety disorder. The National Library of Medicine concluded a thirty-year study in 206

countries, and it revealed that anxiety disorders among teenagers have risen dramatically, to where now one in four teens struggles with worry and anxiety. And these are people, not percentages. More than ten million teens and more than fifty million adults wrestle with worry, struggle with anxiety. I'm one of them.

My dad was the younger of two sons, and his only sibling contracted spinal meningitis as a teenager in an era when treatments for that disease were non-existent. Sadly, my dad's older brother went to the hospital and died. That had an enormous impact on my dad because he was ten years old when his big brother suddenly died. Then, a few years later, when my dad was in high school, his dad contracted pneumonia, was admitted to the hospital and died. As a teenager, this was another life-impacting loss in the life of my dad. Those two losses, how they happened and when they happened in my dad's life, caused my dad to wage war with worry for the rest of his life, and even led to him being hospitalized a couple of times with emotional breakdowns. When I was growing up, if my brothers and I stayed home from school with a fever, dad called multiple times from work, asking our mom if we were any better. Sickness threw him emotionally into an orbit of excessive fear and panic.

Growing up, then, in a family where worry was a huge part of life impacted my life. My dad's DNA became my DNA. I don't struggle in the way he did. My worry is assuming the worst in situations. When our son Jared went to college at Lincoln Christian University (Illinois), he returned to campus one January during a serious winter storm. I wanted him to wait out the storm, but he is strong-willed just like his—one of his—parents. This was in BC days—before cellphones. Well, Jared set out on his 4+ hour drive in the storm and around 6 p.m. on a Wednesday, right before I was going to church to teach Bible study, I noticed that we had a voice mail on the message *machine* (remember those?) and it was from Jared. His message was, "Dad, I hit some ice. Spun out of control. Hit a power pole. Totaled the car. Call you later." He never did call me later, but I called him repeatedly. Was he in the hospital, did he hit another car, how badly was he hurt? The questions were endless. It's easy for me to assume the worst in a situation, to jump to conclusions—the wrong conclusions.

How do you and I know if we have a problem with worry? Think with me and ask yourselves these questions. Do we wake up in the middle of the night and stay awake, tossing and turning with worry? Are we often angry, living on edge? Do we self-medicate our anxiety with food, with spending, with a drink or drug of choice, by escaping into a world of porn? Do we have a "sky is falling" mindset as we make a "mountain out of a mole hill"? Do we find ourselves playing the "What If" game about the future? A teething baby's new teeth appear crooked and we worry about paying for braces 15 years into the future. "Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Worry is a problem and problems call for solutions. Doctors and counselors help solve the problem of worry. Supplements sometimes have a calming effect. Diet and exercise may be a solution. Yet, smack-dab in the middle of Matthew 6, Jesus provided the solution to worry! Did you catch it? Jesus said, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you." How do we battle against anxiety and lift the weight of worry from our minds? Jesus commands us to *seek first His kingdom and righteousness*, and this part of His

sermon provides us with four specific ways to seek. But before identifying those four actions, let's talk about verse 33.

**Seek first** is a command from Jesus that we are to obey throughout our lives (present tense imperative). It does not mean “name it, claim it.” You're a child of the king and the king's kids can have what they want. That theology is nowhere in Scripture. Also, verse 33 does not mean to seek out something that is not present. To the contrary, it means to look for something already here, and that *something* is *Someone* whose name is Jesus. Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is near (Matthew 4:17). His kingdom does not refer to a geographic territory, but to a rule as in a way to live *under the rule of the ruler*. A kingdom comes with a king. Jesus commands us to seek the Ruler and then living under His rule. When we live under His rule, His will, His authority, we pursue His righteousness. When King Jesus rules over me, His righteousness will be in me.

One more thing. Seeking His kingdom and His righteousness is not casual and passive, but constant and active. Jesus said that when we “seek His kingdom and His righteousness” then “all these things (i.e., food, drink, clothing, etc.) will be given to (us) as well.” That's how we win against worry. When God is in His rightful place over us, everything falls into its rightful place in our lives. God is priority one.

How do we “seek first” so that we win against worry? The answer to that question is right here in the Sermon on the Mount. The first word in our text is “Therefore” (v. 25), and we ask the question, what is “therefore” there for? In Matthew 6, we find four essential ways to “seek first” His kingdom and righteousness. Using S.E.E.K., we can remember the four-fold formula.

### **Think S for STRONG**

In verse 30, Jesus preached, “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, O you of little faith?” Jesus called it what it was then and is now. We worry when our faith and trust in God is small and weak. Hebrews 11:6 says that “without faith, it is impossible to please God.” Faith in God is essential for us to be in relationship with God. A strong, unwavering faith in Almighty God destroys worry, whereas doubt destroys us.

Dr. Charles Mayo, founder of the world-famous Mayo Clinic, said, “Worry affects the circulation, the heart, the glands, the whole nervous system. I have never known a man who died from over work, but many who died from doubt.”

Throughout Scripture, the most common command is to “fear not, do not be afraid, be strong and courageous, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.” A classic example of this happened in Acts 27, when the Apostle Paul was being transported as a prisoner from Caesarea to Rome, sailing in a two-week long typhoon on the Aegean Sea. On board the floundering ship were 276 men, worried and panic-stricken that they were going to drown. The captain of the ship and his crew threw cargo overboard to keep the ship afloat and even passed ropes under the ship to hold it together. An angel of God told Paul that he and the men would not die, so Paul did not keep that message to himself. With the wind causing the waves to crash over the side of the ship, Paul shouted out, “So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he

told me” (v. 25). His faith was not in the captain of the ship nor in the ropes under the ship. He declared unashamedly an unwavering faith in God. His strong, resilient faith washed worry overboard.

When panic paralyzes us, we can have an unshakable conviction in who God is as He declared, “I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is there anything too hard for me?” (Jeremiah 32:27).

### **Think E for EYE**

Did you notice Jesus telling the people, “Look at the birds of the air. See how the lilies of the field grow?” In other words, at what are we looking? What is our focus, our perspective in life? Earlier in Matthew 6, Jesus preached, “The eye is the lamp of the body. If the eyes are good, the body will be full of light. If the eyes are bad, the body will be full of darkness. If then, the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness” (vs. 22-23).

In other words, the eye is the portal to our minds. What we take through our eyes and into our minds forms our thoughts, our desires, our values. What we take through our eyes determines how we look at life. What we take through our eyes and into our minds determines our perspective on life. So then, what are you and I reading with our eyes? What are we watching? From books, to movies, television, to podcasts and more—what are we taking through our eyes for “the eye is the lamp of the body” and we become what we consume with our minds. When up to bat when playing baseball or getting ready to tee off when playing golf, we must “keep our eye on the ball!” If we hope to seek first His kingdom, we must keep our eyes on our King!

The mind—our interior world—is a path to seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Just as we become what we eat, we also become what we think. Negative thoughts cannot produce a positive life. Similarly, sinful thoughts cannot lead to a godly life that is worry-free. When riding a horse, we pull on the reins, the reins turn the head of the horse, and the horse’s body follows its head. The same is true of us. The head moves the body. What we put into our heads (i.e., our minds) impacts how we live. Paul admonishes us: “Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds” (Rom 12:2). A thought becomes a desire, a desire becomes an action, an action becomes a habit, and a habit becomes a destiny. A couple of years ago, my pastor preached a sermon, and I still remember a statement that Dan made, “Whatever captures my heart shapes my life.”

A close friend and brother of mine died a few days ago and is now home with the Lord. Dr. Billy Strother was a New Testament professor, preacher and close friend—and was on the staff of this church in the early 2000s. Billy called me on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend last year (2024) from the intensive care unit of a hospital near his home in Missouri. He had been diagnosed with an extremely rare terminal disease, so rare that only five people in a million contract it. It is untreatable and always terminal. My friend suddenly found himself in the “valley of the shadow of death.” Billy and I talked frequently while he was on this journey. Could he have struggled with worry, waking up in the middle of the night paralyzed by panic? He could have, but he didn’t. I know because I asked him, and he said he could sleep well knowing that death was soon to come. And he was able to do so because he was seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness with a STRONG, resilient faith in God. Through his short life, Dr. Billy took

through his eyes, the lamp of his body, the unchanging Word of God. And my friend had an unshakable faith and trust in God that to be “absent from the body is to be home with the Lord.” Faith is being confident of what we do not see. Dr. Billy was able to be free of worry, panic, anxiety, and fretting as he stood on the truth of hope-filled Scripture.

Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary but what is unseen is eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

Listen to this verse I memorized years ago—and in the KJV! I’ve prayed it over and over again, holding to its promise. “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee because he trusteth in Thee” (Isaiah 26:3). We can have *perfect* peace, not just any peace, when our minds are anchored on, rooted in the One Alone who we trust! That is how we “seek first” His kingdom and righteousness.

### **Think E for Effort**

Matthew 6 begins with Jesus saying, “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men to be seen by them. If you do you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.” What did Jesus mean by “acts of righteousness”? The Jewish faith was full of actions, of ways to pursue God. James, the brother of Jesus, declared “faith without works is dead” (James 2:17)! The brief New Testament book of James, with only 108 verses, has 54 commands to practice and obey. Think of these “acts of righteousness” as spiritual disciplines.

In Matthew 6, Jesus preached about giving, about praying, about fasting. He preached: “So when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that your giving may be done in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (v. 3). Jesus preached: “When you pray, go into your room and close the door and pray to your Father who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (v. 6). Jesus preached: “When you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (v. 17-18).

These are spiritual disciplines, and when we *exercise* (i.e., practice) these disciplines, we move into a deeper, stronger relationship with God. But just as we make a disciplined effort to go to the gym to have a stronger core, we must make an effort to have a stronger *spiritual* core! We “seek first” His kingdom and righteousness by making an effort and then we receive the blessing of a worry-free life.

Reason with me. In John 9:1-7, we read of a man who was born blind. Jesus spit on the ground and made some mud with the saliva. Jesus took that mud, put it in the man’s eyes and told him to go and wash the mud from his eyes in the Pool of Siloam. The man obeyed and he was healed. Could Jesus have healed him without the command to “go and wash”? Sure thing. Again, in Luke 17:11-14, ten men with leprosy cried out to Jesus for Him to heal them. He told them to go

and show themselves to the priests, as the Law required them to do. The text reads that “as they went, they were healed.” Again, could Jesus have healed them on the spot without the command for them to go and show themselves to the priest? Sure thing. In both texts, Jesus required them to *make an effort to receive the blessing*. Nothing has changed. We live in an era where we want something for nothing.

If we want a robust, dynamic life with God, we must make an effort. If we want a powerful prayer life, a deep understanding of His Word, the fullness of the Holy Spirit within us, we must make an effort. The late Juan Carlos Ortiz, a pastor and author who preached and taught the Word of God all over the world, from handfuls of people living in jungle villages in Argentina to a gathering of world leaders in the White House, said “the greatest threat to the Church is the perpetual childhood of the believer.”

Speaking to the Jews in Babylonian exile, God promised: “You will seek me and will find me when you seek me with all of your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13). Seeking first requires making an effort.

### **Think K for Kneel**

“But seek first His kingdom.” A kingdom has a king. The question is—is He your king and mine? Once again, earlier in Matthew 6, Jesus preached about this reality. When we pray, we are to surrender to God: “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Life is not about me, myself, and I, but about God and God alone. Jesus preached: “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” (v. 24). God is king and I am not. If I am to seek first His kingdom and righteousness I kneel to His rule in my life and my loving, powerful, ever-present Father will care for my every need according to His perfect will. Soldiers have their needs provided for as they serve our nation in the military, and Christians (i.e., followers of Jesus) have their needs provided for by God, their Father, as they serve Him.

Worry is one of the most common sins committed by Christians and it strikes at the very person, the very character of God. When we wrestle with worry, we’ve forgotten who our Father is. Corrie ten Boom said, “Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow. It empties today of its strength.”

In 1904, young William Borden graduated from a high school in Chicago and he was already a millionaire. An heir to the Borden Dairy dynasty, his parents sent him on a high school graduation trip that took him around the world, and while on that global tour, young William was overwhelmed with the suffering of others. While away, he wrote to his parents that he was going to give his life in service to God as a missionary. This was a defining moment for him and he wrote two words in the back of his Bible: “No Reserves.”

When he returned home from his lengthy trip, he enrolled at Yale University, where he excelled academically and spiritually, starting a campus ministry that grew to over 1,300 students by the time of his graduation. He committed himself to serving among those of the Muslim faith in

China and at this defining moment, young William wrote two more words in the back of his Bible. Next to “No Reserves” he wrote, “No Retreat.”

Refusing an executive position in the family dairy empire, Borden graduated from seminary and went to Egypt to learn Arabic as he planned to live among the Muslim people of China. While in Egypt, he contracted spinal meningitis, and within one month, 25-year-old William Borden was dead. Just prior to dying, young William wrote two final words in the back of his Bible. Alongside the words "No Reserves" and "No Retreats," he wrote, "No Regret."

Whether we are 25 years-old when we die as was William Borden or 66 years-old as was Dr. Billy Strother, my hope is that on the day we die, every one of us as Christ followers will have written, have etched on our souls: “No Reserve”—we never held anything back from our God; “No Retreat”—we never stopped pursuing our God; and “No Regret”—we never regretted *seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness.*