

Series	Sermon on the Mount
Study	Study 13
Topic	The Lord's Prayer
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Welcome back to another edition of the Sermon on the Mount. In this Gamma series we're now looking at episode 13. Today we'll be looking at the very common topic of anxiety. Why we have anxiety? What are the problems associated with anxiety and how do we actually find relief from anxiety?

Anxiety is the most common adverse emotion that's experienced by almost everyone of us at some time or other. Most of us have experienced it but when it's debilitating, it is considered a disorder. The prevalence of anxiety disorders worldwide is a huge, about quarter of the population 24.5%. In Malaysia there was a study in 2012 when it was found at 7.8% of Malay women attending a primary care clinic was suffering from some sort of anxiety disorder.

There are many disorders of anxiety that plague our community. You can have a panic disorder which is recurrent panic attacks and sweating, trembling shortness for heart, pounding of heart and a feeling of dread and these things happen suddenly without warning or phobias which are intense fears about certain objects or situations; spiders, snakes or even flying an aeroplane or obsessive-compulsive disorders characterized by anxiety with a need to perform rituals like cleansing of your hands. Then the social anxiety disorder which is basically the shy person. Person with this disorder of fearful social situations in which they feel embarrassed or judge. Then there's a post-traumatic stress disorder which can happen after severe physical or emotional trauma like being a soldier in a war or natural disaster, having been the victim of a crime. Then there's a general anxiety disorder which is persistent, worry or anxious feelings all the time. They worry about any number of things; health problems, finances and then the general sense that something bad is going to happen.

The problem with anxiety is that the adverse effects are huge. They include insomnia, being irritable, loss of concentration, chronic fatigue, headaches, loss of libido and even distraction. One of the larger studies on anxiety was conducted in Denmark and this showed that anxiety lowered the lifespan by a whole decade. On average a person anxiety disorder was 43% more likely to die an early death compared to the normal population. Now they found that it was one anxiety disorder the risk of death was twice that than of the normal population but the risk of death from an unnatural cause in such a situation was 4.4, three times higher than a normal population.

If there are two anxiety disorders then the risk of death was two and a half times that of the normal population but the risk of death from unnatural cause like suicide was 6.5 times higher. Now if there were three anxiety disorders then the risk of death more than three times that of the normal population and the risk of unnatural death like suicide rose to almost nine times. So the effect of anxiety is huge.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is interested in leading us towards Makarios, blessedness, which is a state of human flourishing, optimal state of function, ultimate state of joy. In God's eyes to be

blessed and approved. We are blessed and approved. Anxiety has no place in Makarios or blessedness.

In today's passage we will deal with three questions, which is easily discerned in the passage.

1. We're going to look at the root of anxiety.
2. We are going to look at the fallacy of anxiety. Why it's so stupid to be anxious.
3. How do we get relief for anxiety?

Let's start off with the root of anxiety. Look back in last week's passage.

No one can serve two masters for either he will hate the one and love the other or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

Now look at the next verse. It says

Therefore, I tell you do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink or nor about your body, what you will put on.

You see anxiety must be put in its context. He doesn't speak in verse 25 simply about commanding us not to be anxious. Not to be anxious is a outflow of wrong worship, of idol worship. He says you cannot serve God and money, therefore I tell you do not be anxious. The sermon on the mount is not about how to, it is not going to give you tips on how to deal with anxiety, how to be more confident and teach you about techniques, how to get peace, to make you feel better. The Sermon on the Mount strikes right into our hearts. Jesus is saying anxiety is related to who you are and what you worship. If you worship mammon, money, material goods, you will have anxiety. If you worship God you simply will not have anxiety simply because mammon is temporary and fragile and God is eternal.

All your worries and anxieties and fears are merely symptoms of a deeper disorder. There is something wrong with our hearts. If you're anxious it means you're worshiping mammon or money. If you worship the eternal God there would be no anxiety because no one can take him away. Now if you will look to this passage today and last week's passage, you will notice, they are actually two sides of the same coin; greed and anxiety. Greed is the accumulation of excessive wealth simply because we worship material goods. Anxiety is the fear that the wealth or health that you actually have or material goods you have will be taken away. Now both conditions are hard to detect. For greed Jesus has to say watch out. There is never enough. The problem greed is ambition. The effort and focus in getting more and more. There is no control. We live in a world where there was recently an article that predicted that Elon Musk would one day be the first man who basically a trillionaire.

Imagine we live in a world where there are people who are going to be trillionaires, you know extreme poverty to get rid of it somebody else called, Jeffrey Sachs calculated that the total cost per year would be about 175 billion easily paid off by the billionaires and this represents less than 1% of the combined income of the richest countries in the world and yet we are allowing poverty to continue. Now let's read. On your hand there is anxiety. The problem with greed is getting more and more, than problem of anxiety is protecting what you have with a fear that you will lose what you already have. You say that I'm not greedy, no I'm just a worker modest means. Even if you're poor I'm just looking to survive, what's wrong with a few more ringgit, nothing wrong but your problem will be anxiety. You worry about when the next meals is going to come. Whether your children would be educated.

When you finish worrying about that you worry about health, your car, your promotion, COVID-19 whether it'll get you and if that's not enough worry about yourself you spend time worrying about your children. How they will turn out? Whether they will marry? Whether you have grandchildren? And if that's not enough you worry about your company, your country and whether there is freedom, whether when you retire there will be enough EPF money. So the list is actually endless.

Now having said all those things, we need to differentiate between ungodly worries versus godly worries or concerns. If you look in 2-Corinthians 11 verses 28. This is Paul describing his difficult ministry

And apart from other things there is the daily pressure on me my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am the weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

Psalm 38

3 There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin. 4 For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me. 5 My wounds stink and fester because of my foolishness, 6 I am utterly bowed down and prostrate; all the day I go about mourning.

Now none of these description by the psalmist or by Paul are purely selfish worries. They are not worried about whether God will be able to provide. In fact these worries are actually God directed. They are a result of looking at things from God's perspective and seeking to ensure that his will be done on earth. It is a deep desire that mourns over the difficulty of seeing the pain and sinfulness in the world and you desiring to have God's kingdom come on earth. That's a different sort of worry.

What Jesus is meaning is in Matthew chapter 13 verse 22 when he tells the parable of the sower. There are four different kind of seeds and this seed verse 22

For what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word but the cares of the world, deceitfulness of riches choke the word and it proves unfruitful

That is what Jesus is talking about. When the word comes inside and we are so distracted either by accumulating wealth or worrying about it being taken away that it actually takes the effectiveness of the gospel and the person is not transformed.

So this is the second section where Jesus lays down the fallacy of anxiety. In other words he shows us how stupid it is. It is very stupid to be anxious, why because there are four things.

Life is more than things

We are more valuable than the rest creation in God's eyes.

Anxiety brings no tangible benefit.

God knows what we need.

Let's look at this verse,

Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing.

The one who is constantly anxious about the basic necessities of life is behaving as with an ungodly

underlying conviction that this life is all there is. There's no real conviction of eternal life or spiritual dimension of our lives. Even if there was, it was never affected in our thinking, so we operate in the same plane as lesser forms of life like animals.

Man is the highest form of life in creation because we have been built with a spiritual dimension in the image of God with a divine purpose. Jesus is rebuking those who worried daily about just how to *Cari Makan*. That they're really not living as God would have meant them to live. Life is meant for so much more. To live in community of God, to please him, enjoy him, to glorify Him and that will bring peace and joy to our hearts. Instead if our anxieties are focused on the wrong things, is either the accumulation of things or fear or losing things. The problem here, there's a life span to all the things that we desire in this life. The food doesn't last long, it goes bad. Every electronic appliance that we buy will become obsolete and as a society just focus on this life we're accumulating so many things which we once crave for and save for and treasure but within six months yesterday's pleasures treasures become today's junk. Every year we dump a massive 2.12 billion tons of waste. If all this waste was put in the trucks they would go around the world 24 times. This stunning amount of waste is partly because 99% of stuff we buy is trash within six months.

Life is more than the pursuit of material things that solely belongs to life today. You know let's take an example of this famous radio and TV personality called Jimmy Savile from the UK in 1960s to the 90s. He hosted BBC shows including *Top of the Pops* and *Jim will fix It*. He raised an estimated 40 million pounds for charities and during his lifetime was widely praised for his personality, qualities and as a fund raiser. After his death it was discovered in horror, he was one of the UK's most prolific sex offenders, abusing young girls with almost 450 complaints to the Scotland Yard. His gravestone read cynically it was good while it lasted.

He had a good time but that about sums up Jimmy's life and if we live in the same way just for things and how we use them and use people to have a good time it'll only be good while it lasted. You see anxiety is a symptom of a concept of life or dimension of life that's solely focused on this life. If all there is in life is this life then like Jimmy Savile all there is for us to do is to make money, use people and if we don't get caught, it would be good while it lasted. No, Jesus is telling us life is more than this and our anxiety is the symptom that we're living as if this life is the only life that matters and we risk our own gravestone reading it was good while it lasted.

Let's look at the next reason why we are not to be anxious. So there are two illustrations in this actual next reason. Verse 26,

Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

Jesus is saying you are more valuable than birds. If God bothers with these tiny little creatures, how much more will he look after us and gives another illustration; verse 28,

28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

See, he is applying the same argument of the birds to clothing. Jesus is using a form of

argumentation called "A Fortiori Argument", which is structured as if this then how much more than. Just like a father gives his son a brand new BMW, which cost half a million dollars. Should the son worry that he won't buy him lunch today, just like if a mother can give up a career to look after a child should the child worry that she will not cook her dinner tonight. Jesus is using the same argument. Later on Matthew 7:11 he says,

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father is in heaven give good things to those who ask him

Which means we should pray and God will give us good things. Romans 8:32

He who did not spare his son but gave him up for us how will he not also with him graciously give us all things, who shall bring any charge against God's elect

So anxiety over the basic necessities of life betrays our lack of faith in the loving and faithful God. We can easily see that he amply supplies the birds and clothes of flowers but despite the evidence we're not convinced he can provide for us. Our anxiety is rooted in our distrust in either his ability, his love or his willingness there's no other conclusion. Let's look at the third argument against anxiety.

And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?

Imagine you are standing just outside your house surrounded by dense fog so thick you can't see the other side of the street in front of you. You look to the right and the left you cannot see more than 50 feet in any direction you're surrounded. How much what do you think it takes to create a blanket of fog that completely surrounds you isolates you from your world. Well the total volume of water in a blanket of fog one acre around and one meter deep wouldn't even feel an ordinary drinking glass. How is this possible? Well because water evaporates and resulting vapor condenses as tiny droplets that permeate the air in a one acre block of fog one drinking glass worth of water dispenses 400 billion tiny droplets suspended in air, so it really obscures your view, shuts you out and makes you shiver. That's exactly what happens with anxiety. It is an expansion of problems, obscuring your perspective so you can see nothing but your worries and your worries does not bring any benefits.

The final reason is given in these verses,

For the gentiles seek after these things and your father in heaven knows that you need them all.

First of all we need to clarify what Jesus means by these things. Because there are those who would distort what Jesus means. Anxiety over the basic necessities of life is what it means, it betrays the feeling that deep down we either believe God doesn't know or doesn't care. It is so ironic because even non-believers know that these are common needs, everyday necessities that everyone needs. Hence is it not unreasonable to expect God to provide them for us. Even though non-Christians know you need them, your anxiety says you don't even believe that your God knows that you need them.

Some years ago there was a great TV show called Fear Factor where contestants were each challenge to meet the greatest fears by performing feats there were dangerous or scary. I remember one contestant was a woman who volunteered to bungee jump from the top of a tall tower into a tiny pool at the bottom. You might think that's no big deal but the fear factor was at the end of the rope that would hold her back was at the last minute save her from breaking her neck by pulling on it. It was tied to her husband's waist. So entire safety or her life was literally in his waist. If he was

not strong enough to pull back the last minute she would smash in the bottom of the pool and die. The only thing between her and death was her husband. The only way she would find out if the husband is strong enough was actually to jump off the tower. There is no trial run.

You see our anxiety is like that. God says,

If God so clothes the grass of the field which is today alive and tomorrow thrown into the oven will he not much more clothe you. O you of little faith

Jesus say anxiety is actually based on a lack of faith in Him, which is a sin. If you don't want to jump off the deep end because you're not sure if he can support you that's anxiety. Anxiety at its core is a lack of faith in his existence and his purposes for us, a lack of faith in his ability, a lack of faith in his love and lack of faith is his concern for us.

Right, so finally we come to the last section, which deals with the relief of anxiety. Now when we talk about anxiety the first thing that we need to know is to recognize that there are pathological anxiety disorders, phobias, panic disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorders, post-traumatic stress syndrome, psychosis, certain medical conditions and drug abuse. These all cause anxiety disorders and they need to be referred to a medical professional who may actually give them medications like antidepressants, benzodiazepines and then maybe there's relaxation techniques, of which there really no harm but for the rest of us Jesus says,.

Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you.

Now if you look very carefully back in verse 24. Anxiety is an issue of worship. You cannot worship God and money at the same time. So therefore the fact that we actually have anxiety means there are idols in our lives which we need to identify and basically seek to move away from them.

The next step in the relief of anxiety is making the kingdom of God a priority. Verse 33

Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you.

Now there's a story told of one night of a group of thieves broke into a jewelry store. Rather than stealing the jewelry you know what they did, they switch all the price tags, expensive when people came in the next day they suddenly found out expensive jewelry became cheap as chips. Costume jewelry Sawatzky crystals virtually worthless suddenly become extremely expensive. Customers who thought they were purchasing valuable gems were getting fakes and those who couldn't afford the higher prices of the expensive gems were leaving the store with treasures. You see that's the problem with the world. It is like Satan comes in the world and he actually switched the price tags. Fake and useless things are priced and prize very much higher than eternal treasures price low dead cheap

So we focus on the fake goods and we pay a high price and we prioritize the wrong things, because we worship mammon we see things with an evil eye and get the wrong perspective. Just like the mislabeled piece of jewelry we treasure and accumulate things of little eternal value and that is greed. In the same way when we worship mammon we grow anxious about losing money and the anxiety that which you have marginalizes God and his kingdom because we don't prioritize it and we leave it to the last bits of our time. It has no part in our life, which actually makes a mockery when we actually pray the Lord's Prayer, thy kingdom come but we are distracted and filled with

everything else except the kingdom. The solution to this anxiety is making the kingdom a priority. Most of us have the wrong priority. We say we have too busy a life. We cannot make enough time. You know everything I can't fit in Church, Gamma studies, career, my tennis, I can't fit everything. Imagine we have a jar and this jar represents our life, the capacity all that we can take and imagine we start filling the jar with all small pebbles and these pebbles represent the small things in life, what we have to eat, what we will wear, where we live, whether we're married or not, have kids, our health, the mundane needs of life. We fill the jar with that and then when this leftover space will then fill it with rocks. Rocks are the big things in life. The worship of God, church attendance, sharing gospel, reading the word, church camp, prayer, Gamma discipleship.

The trouble with us is that we prioritize the small things first. We put it on the pebbles and by the time we put in all the pebbles, there's no space left for the big things which are the big rocks. As you can see you can't feel it this then we say or there's no time. There's no time for God. As you can see there's no space, there's no capacity in our lives for the things of God if we fill our lives with all the small things first. Now if you look at another way in which you can do this, which God is saying to us seek ye first the kingdom of God. It is like having a jar and we're going to do it this time differently. We are going to fill it with all the big things. We put all the big rocks first; our time with God, our prayer, worship, serving, sacrifice time, sharing the gospel with our neighbours, discipleship, etc. Whatever it is all the big rocks go in first, which means you prioritize the things of God first and then you pour in all those small pebbles and low and you actually find you could fit them all in. Big rocks and small pebbles as well.

You see priority determines capacity. So Jesus is asking us to seek first his kingdom. He is not asking us to serve God in order to get things, instead Jesus is asking us to set our hearts completely on him because he is our treasure. Now God knows what we need. Philippians 4:19

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. 20 To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

You see the word, 'these things' can be distorted to mean so many things. Some people think that if I were to seek God's kingdom, I pray, go to church and I will get all that I want. The best job, the most beautiful girl to marry and all desires of our heart what you need is actually not the same thing as what you want. Think about Job. He suffered and actually what he needed needed in the end was actually God to allow him to undergo temptation and trials through suffering and in truth is he discovered a new dimension of trust in God and if he won't for suffering he wouldn't have experienced that.

Think about Paul, 2-Corinthians chapter 11 verse 25

Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea;

These were terrible things, but it was the things that he needed.

Lastly look at the last verse.

Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

What he is saying to us here is that we must address ourselves with today's concerns. All the trouble that we have for today is more than enough. We must bring that to God, believing that tomorrow is in the hands of our loving Father. You see the Father expects us to put him first. He delights to meet all our needs. We must not permit our needs to dominate our prayers, our thoughts and our activities. That's immaturity.

Neither must we think that God doesn't care about our needs because that's unbelief. We must prioritize our allegiance to God, his rule and his righteous stance. In doing so, we will receive all that we need to eat or wear as fringe benefits, but if we prioritize our own needs and prayer and activities we will never experience the joy of resting in God's providential care and provision.

So that is our relief from anxiety.

Seek first His kingdom.

Get the proper focus in life and all the rest will fall into place. May God bless all of you as we strive to put his kingdom first. Amen.