

# Antidote to Financial Anxiety

## Group Study and Discussion

**Worry** is a real and persistent problem. And in recent days, financial anxiety, more specifically, is a significant threat to our mental and emotional well-being. Like the Covid-19 virus itself, worry lurks in the shadows and is ready to take hold of anyone not prepared for it. But the worry virus doesn't need to threaten our emotional health or rule our lives. It can be addressed—and prevented—from the perspective of our Christian worldview. There is a solution. There is an antidote!

Jesus addressed anxiety head on in his Sermon on the Mount—his guide on how to live as a citizen in the Kingdom of God. (See Matthew 5-7.) We will look at the portion of the sermon (5:19-34) that addresses one's view and pursuit of material possessions and its link to anxiety. His argument goes something like this:

It begins in the heart. Yes, worry is not simply a mental and emotional issue, but something that originates in the human heart. Jesus begins laying out some Kingdom principles as an antidote for anxiety. He first argues that those who make the eternal things of God their heart's truest treasure, their life's primary pursuit, will find their hearts gravitating toward Him. And as they do so, their attachment to earthly things will loosen, as will their worries about them. They also can take great comfort in knowing that as they are laying down their present material preoccupations, they will be laying up for themselves future treasures in heaven.

We only worry about what we truly value. If it's stuff we value most, and that stuff can be eaten, rusted or stolen, then we will always worry. But if what we most value is immaterial and eternal in nature, then we are worry-free knowing our growing investment is safe with God. Wherever our treasure is, we'll find our heart (our ambitions, passions, longings) right there with it.

But can't we give our hearts to both pursuits: present-world material devotion and future-world spiritual investments? Jesus answers with an emphatic "no", because whatever you give your heart to will rule your heart. It's one or the other. You'll have to choose between God and Mammon. Who you choose will be your true God. And the implication in the entire context is that if you give your heart to God you can expect providential care and heavenly rewards. If you give yourself to Mammon you can expect worry and an all-consuming "running after" earthly acquisitions.

So having established these counter-culture economics, Jesus goes on to argue: "*Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life.*" Why? Because as a cherished child of God, it's unnecessary. If God is willing and able to "give you all these things", then obsessing about one's material and financial welfare is a colossal waste of time and emotional energy.

Jesus then adds a second reason not to worry: because as Jesus-followers who are now part of God's Kingdom, worry is unbecoming. Pagans, understandably, are preoccupied, even consumed, with pursuing their needs because, in their worldview, it's all up to them. They must frantically pursue meeting all their needs on their own. But in stark contrast to the prevailing culture, Christians don't need to be preoccupied with material pursuits because they have a heavenly Father who is fully aware of their every need and can provide for those needs (as He does for lesser aspects of His creation—like birds and flowers). Hence, the need to worry is eliminated. In its place we choose faith which brings peace. Trust, not worry, is becoming of Christians. This is the new normal for those who are citizens of the Kingdom of God!

In this Kingdom that Jesus was inviting people into, He wanted them to understand that He was its King, and that living according to his directives was the pathway to his providential care. So He tells them to seek FIRST—to prioritize—the Kingdom of God, and his redefinition of a righteous life, and in so doing they would get God and "all these things as well". No wonder He called this invitation the Good News!

Jesus concludes his address on worry by acknowledging the reality that, in this current fallen world, each day can bring its share of trouble. But the antidote to anxiety, He says, is to entrust EACH DAY to the God who loves us. Resist the temptation to worry about tomorrow. And when tomorrow arrives with a new set of challenges, we will choose to trust God all over again—living one day at a time under the benevolent rule of our God.

### Group Discussion

1. Jesus asked His audience: "Why do you worry?" Why do you think people worry? What lies behind or underneath the widespread human propensity to worry? In what situations are you most likely to worry? Why?
2. What would Jesus say? How can we apply this teaching by Jesus to our current situations: For example:
  - Loss of employment: How could the teaching of this passage be an antidote for worry for a follower of Jesus who has lost their job and has little or no income?
  - Loss of savings: What from this Bible passage could we say to a follower of Jesus who has lost a significant portion of their investments (to prepare for retirement, to provide for their children, to bless Kingdom ministries)?
3. How has this Bible passage personally: bothered you? challenged you? comforted you? surprised you? helped you?