

June 6
Lesson 1 (NIV)

FREED FROM WORRY

DEVOTIONAL READING: [Ezekiel 34:11–16](#)

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: [Matthew 6:19–34](#)

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 store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

²⁸ “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed 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 fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”



Photo © Getty Images

KEY VERSES

The pagans run after all these things, and 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.
—**Matthew 6:32–33**

CONFIDENT HOPE

Unit 1: Jesus Teaches About Faith

LESSONS 1–5

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the nature of God’s faithful care.
2. Compare and contrast the concepts of “being worried” and “being concerned.”
3. Write a prayer that hands over worries to God.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. What, Me Worry?
- B. Lesson Context
- I. More Than Birds (Matthew 6:25–27)
 - A. Freedom from Worry (v. 25)
 - B. Provision for the Weak (v. 26)
 - Bird Watching*
 - C. The Futility of Worry (v. 27)
- II. More Than Flowers (Matthew 6:28–30)
 - A. Provision for the Helpless (vv. 28–29)
 - B. Provision for Small Faith (v. 30)
- III. Trusting God (Matthew 6:31–34)
 - A. Questions Worry Asks (v. 31)
 - B. Worry and Ignorance (v. 32)
 - C. Replacing Worry with Faith (vv. 33–34)
 - The Priority Principle*

Conclusion

- A. With Us to the End
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Galilee	<i>Gal-uh-lee.</i>
Gentiles	<i>Jen-tiles.</i>
omniscient	<i>ahm-nish-unt.</i>
Solomon	<i>Sol-o-mun.</i>

Introduction

A. What, Me Worry?

From its appearance in 1952 until it stopped monthly publication in 2019, *Mad* magazine poked fun at politics, television, movies, and everyday American life. Its irreverent theme was that the powerful and influential were continually phony and corrupt. In the pages of *Mad*,

everything was falling apart.

On the cover of nearly every *Mad* magazine from 1954 until 2019 was a cartoon image of a gap-toothed, grinning boy who looked like he cared for nothing except making mischief. Christened Alfred E. Neuman, his motto was “What, me worry?” *Mad* was saying that the world might be unraveling, but those who read *Mad*’s cheeky parodies could adopt the cover boy’s devil-may-care indifference.

Worry is a universal human experience. Our brains constantly provoke us to evaluate our circumstances and identify threats to our well-being. Threats are many, but even when they are minor, we exaggerate them or imagine threats that do not exist. We leave ourselves with restlessness, sleeplessness, loss of appetite, short tempers, and feelings of hopelessness. We would like to have Alfred E. Neuman’s carefree outlook, but we cannot pull it off.

Jesus addresses our deep capacity to worry in today’s text. He tells us not to worry, but he does so differently from others. And his conclusions are cause for great faith in God.

B. Lesson Context

Today’s text is near the middle of Jesus’ discourse known as the Sermon on the Mount ([Matthew 5–7](#)). Containing some of the best known of Jesus’ teachings, the sermon answers the question raised by Jesus’ announcement of the coming of God’s kingdom ([4:17](#)): What is life like under God’s rule?

Jesus’ answers touch on the most sensitive areas of human experience. God will bless the weak and lowly ([Matthew 5:3–6](#)), those who reflect God’s character ([5:7–9](#)), and those who suffer in the name of Jesus ([5:10–12](#)). God’s people will be ambassadors of his redeeming truth ([5:13–16](#)), fulfilling God’s will with lives that are righteous inside and out ([5:17–30](#)). Their integrity and love will reflect God’s own, extending even to those who wish them ill ([5:31–48](#)). They will be godly not simply on the outside, where others can see, but also inside, where God alone sees ([6:1–8](#), [14–24](#)). God’s people will let him judge others, as they pursue his righteousness and give help to others in that pursuit ([7:1–6](#))

Repeatedly in the sermon, Jesus addressed the problem of worry. Subjects under God’s rule are to pray for God’s will to be done in all the earth, dependent on him to supply the resources, grace, and strength that they need daily ([Matthew 6:9–13](#)). They live in confidence that God is a kind, generous Father who gladly gives his children what they need to thrive ([7:7–12](#))

Our text is preceded by statements that contrast the trust of a citizen in God’s kingdom with the life of someone who lacks that trust. If God cannot be trusted to provide for us, we must provide for ourselves by accumulating and hoarding possessions. But we know those will fail us in the end. Only storing “treasures in heaven” works in the long run. This happens

as we put our confidence in God’s reliable promise to provide ([Matthew 6:19–21](#)).

I. More Than Birds

([MATTHEW 6:25–27](#))

A. Freedom from Worry (v. 25)

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?”

The focus of *worry* is first on survival. For the vast majority of people in Jesus’ day, food was grown on one’s own land, water drawn from wells daily, and clothing sewn by hand. Those tasks required an enormous share of one’s time, energy, and resources. Most people did not have disposable income. They used all they had to meet their most basic needs.

Jesus was reorienting their focus away from worry and toward trust. For the person who knows the true God and believes that he now rules the world, the perspective is different. There is *more to life than food and clothes*.

B. Provision for the Weak (v. 26)

26. “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?”

In Jesus’ day as now, *the birds of the air* are of little value and very vulnerable. But in God’s design, they are fed not by their industry but by the *Father*. They gather whatever food God provides for them in the natural ecosystem. Jesus used this imagery to argue from the lesser to the greater: if God provides for birds, how much more will he care for people created in his image?

Jesus was not encouraging people to stop growing food. He assumed, rather, that sowing, harvesting, and storing are what people ought to do. After all, God created humans to work in the garden ([Genesis 2:15](#)), and he commanded Israel to work ([Exodus 20:9](#); compare [2 Thessalonians 3:10](#)). The idea, rather, is one of trust as a hallmark of faith: because God feeds the birds, how much more are we to trust him!

BIRD WATCHING

What would our world be without birds? How silent the earth would be without the tweets, chirps, honks, quacks, hoots, and whistles that fill the air with musical serenades!

Think of the wonder of a bird’s nest. Birds use whatever materials are available—sticks,

grass, moss, mud, and their own saliva—to build places of protection from bad weather and dangerous predators. And what would our lives be if birds had not inspired us to develop the power of flight? Tiny hummingbirds can hover or fly forward, backward, upward, sideways, and upside down—all with their wings averaging 53 flaps per second. Eagles soar by catching thermals like sailplanes. Feathers adorn wings that are strong but lightweight, flexible but sturdy.

The heavenly Father endowed birds with amazing abilities, and he provides for them daily. As you ponder how much he cares for them, do you trust the Father to care for you?

—D. F.

C. The Futility of Worry (v. 27)

27. “Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”

To the comparison with birds, Jesus adds the observation that *worrying* can *add* nothing to *life*. Worry, the stressful anticipation of terrible things that might happen in the future, accomplishes nothing lasting. The word translated *hour* can refer either to time (length of one’s life in this context) or height. Older translations of the Bible opt for the height idea in speaking of “one cubit” instead of *single hour*. (A cubit is a measure of physical length, about 18 inches, the distance from an adult’s elbow to fingertip.) However, the context is about length of life rather than physical stature.

What Do You Think?

How would you respond to a real worrywart who says, “I’m not worried—I’m concerned”?

Digging Deeper

If you were to ask the worrywart to rephrase “can add one ___” in verse 27 with a word that personalizes the verse to him or her, what might that word reveal?

II. More Than Flowers

(MATTHEW 6:28–30)

A. Provision for the Helpless (vv. 28–29)

28. “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.

Clothing is a necessity for humans. For Jesus’ audience, clothing was difficult to come by (compare [Matthew 6:25](#), above). Nothing was automated; there were no textile mills. Rather, sheep had to be raised and shorn personally. Flax had to be grown and harvested. Fibers had

to be spun into thread. Threads had to be woven into cloth on manual looms. Cloth had to be cut and sewn into garments.

All these processes were done by hand, requiring much time and energy. In the end, only the wealthy owned much more than a single garment per person (compare [Judges 14:12](#)). Being without adequate clothing left a person without protection from natural phenomena and signaled a low status as society saw things (compare [1 Corinthians 4:11](#)).

Jesus contrasted this situation with that of common wildflowers. These plants did no work, and certainly did nothing that compared with the tedious handcraft by which Jesus' audience clothed themselves. *Flowers* were quite ordinary in Galilee, as they are today. Even so, God made them beautiful.

29. “Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

Solomon was the wealthiest king on earth when he ruled over Israel ([1 Kings 10:14–29](#)). When people the world over came to Solomon to hear his wise teaching, they regularly brought rich gifts for him, including “robes, weapons” ([10:25](#)). Surely the king with the most splendid palace also had the most beautiful clothing!

But the sight of the wealthiest king's clothing could not rival the sight of a meadow in full bloom. God's care for common flowers surpasses how any person can dress himself or herself.

B. Provision for Small Faith (v. 30)

30. “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—you of little faith?

Again Jesus argued from the lesser to the greater. The *grass of the field* lasts only for a season. Then, even the most beautiful blooms dry up and are used in fires for cooking. If God gave splendid clothing to the common plants, how *much more* would he do so for his people? Jesus' audience could see that God cared for the plants. They should see the same for themselves.

In Matthew Jesus used the phrase *you of little faith* to rebuke his disciples when they failed to trust him while in danger or need (compare [Matthew 8:26](#) [see lesson 2]; [14:31](#) [see lesson 4]; [16:8](#)). In every instance, Jesus provided what his “little faith” followers needed.

Jesus commended great faith on occasion ([Matthew 8:10](#); [15:28](#)). But faith as small as a mustard seed can accomplish great things ([17:20](#)). Even so, faith that doesn't grow is a stagnant faith (compare [2 Thessalonians 1:3](#)).

III. Trusting God ([MATTHEW 6:31–34](#))

A. Questions Worry Asks (v. 31)

31. “So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’

With the word *so*, Jesus began to shift from what not to do to what to do. Another context in which Jesus instructs them *do not worry* is [Matthew 10:19](#) and its parallels in [Mark 13:11](#) and [Luke 12:11](#). The idea is not one of ignoring common-sense planning (see [Luke 14:28–32](#); [Romans 15:24](#); etc.). Rather, what Jesus condemned was undue anxiety (compare [Matthew 13:22](#); [Luke 8:14](#); [21:34](#); [Philippians 4:6](#)).

What Do You Think?

How do you keep from using Jesus’ imperative as an excuse not to do sound planning?

Digging Deeper

How does [Luke 14:28–33](#) help you frame your answer to this question?

B. Worry and Ignorance (v. 32)

32. “For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

The word *pagans* refers to those not of the Jewish faith. A common trait among pagans was their worship of false gods (example: [Deuteronomy 7:1–6](#)). The pagans had God’s general revelation through nature ([Romans 1:18–20](#)), but had not received God’s special revelation of his inspired Word (compare [Acts 17:22–23](#)). Those who fret over life’s necessities are behaving as if they had not received God’s Word—like pagans do.

The *heavenly Father* is all-knowing (omniscient). He recognizes every human need (compare [Matthew 5:45](#)). He is ready and able to meet human needs. To fret is to indicate lack of faith regarding God’s character and power.

What Do You Think?

What are some right and wrong ways to counsel someone who seems overcome with worry?

Digging Deeper

What could be consequences of quoting today’s text and/or [Romans 8:28](#) in this process?

C. Replacing Worry with Faith (vv. 33–34)

33. “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

In contrast to the one who worries unduly is the person who seeks *first* the *kingdom* of God. Jesus' followers want above all for God's will to be done everywhere as he reigns ([Matthew 6:10](#)). We are to be focused not on providing for ourselves as did Demas ([2 Timothy 4:9](#)), but on serving, obeying, and sharing God. The parable in [Luke 12:15–21](#) stands as an additional warning in this regard.

To seek God's kingdom goes hand in hand with seeking *his righteousness*. The two cannot be separated (compare [Matthew 5:6, 10, 20](#); [Romans 14:17](#); [Hebrews 1:8](#)). What Jesus expresses here is the active pursuit of righteousness, which complements his earlier statements. For those in the kingdom of God, nothing matters as much as having God's righteousness—his right way—prevailing in the world.

To seek God's kingdom and righteousness before our basic needs appears to make us more vulnerable. But in fact, the opposite is true. Because God reigns in his kingdom, he is able to grant his people exactly what they need, when they need it.



Visual for Lesson 1. While discussing the question associated with verse [34b](#), ask how following this imperative could upend the learners' lives.

No less than Jesus himself promises that those who seek first the kingdom will receive *all these things*—namely the basic needs of life. God’s provision is more reliable than anything we could plan and accumulate for ourselves. By yielding first attention to matters of God’s kingdom, we as Christians acknowledge that we do not hold ultimate power over our survival. God does! And God promises that he provides for his people under his rule.

We cannot stress enough that this promise has to do with God’s meeting our needs, not our wants. Many have distorted this text and others like it to suggest that if people pursue God’s kingdom vigorously enough, then God will grant material abundance, whatever we ask for. That obviously ignores the emphasis of this passage (compare [James 4:3](#)).

Jesus speaks entirely of foundational needs. The whole emphasis of his teaching in this section is on trust in God and submission to his will. Those who do so realize that they are not in a position to specify the precise amount of material goods that they require. Rather, they trust God to give them what they need in the right amount. They express faith not by demanding more, but by believing that what God supplies is sufficient.

It is also important to note that Jesus’ teaching does not imply that people do nothing for their own support. We seek the kingdom first, but we continue to obey God’s purpose for humanity as expressed in creation: to do useful work in the world (example: [2 Thessalonians 3:12](#)).

The issue is not whether or not to work, but in how we approach our work (compare [2 Thessalonians 3:8](#); [1 Timothy 1:8](#); [2 Timothy 2:21](#); [4:5](#)). Pursuing God’s kingdom frees us from anxiety as we work because we trust God; we are not testing him (compare [Luke 4:12](#); etc.). We see our work not as the means of providing for ourselves, but as God’s provision for our needs. Further, we are to see our work as a way of serving God and pursuing God’s right way.

Jesus demonstrated personally what it means to seek God’s kingdom first. The kingdom came through Jesus’ willing death for the sake of those who deserved only death. Though like anyone he did not want to die, Jesus committed himself to the kingdom plan ([Matthew 26:42](#)). At first, his death appeared to be the most terrible end to his story. But just as Jesus had promised, he rose to life again ([16:21](#); [28:5–7](#)). Jesus now lives a triumphant, never-ending life for God’s triumphant, never-ending kingdom.

VISUALS FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (see example above) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the *Adult Resources* packet for the Summer Quarter. That packet also contains the very useful *Presentation Tools* CD for teacher use. Order No. 4629121 from your supplier.

THE PRIORITY PRINCIPLE

If you want to make your own soup from scratch, be careful when you add ingredients. As a novice soup-maker, I dumped all the ingredients into the pot at the same time. After an hour of simmering, some items remained undercooked, while others were limp and overdone.

Eventually I learned to start with the firmer items (potatoes, dried beans) and add the softer items (onions, celery, and seasoning) later in the process. A rule we could call “the priority principle” helped improve my soups: Decide what takes priority and add that before anything else.

This principle applies in the spiritual realm as well: God’s kingdom and his righteousness come first. If we try to get every little thing in our lives in order before pursuing God’s kingdom and righteousness, we will end up with a life that resembles my early soup. Are your priorities in order?

—D. F.

34a. “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.

Jesus’ closing remarks remind us again that God is in control of the future over which we have much less, if any, power. To *not worry* means to have no anxiety, to not fret. Jesus does not exclude prudent planning or saving (see again [Luke 14:28–32](#) and [Romans 15:24](#)). Rather, his words remind us that our planning and saving ought not be motivated by fear. Instead, it is directed by trust in God and for his will.

The expression *tomorrow will worry about itself* is ironic but clear: “The future,” an inanimate entity, obviously does not worry. People, however, are more than capable of worrying! We worry not only about tomorrow, but also about months and years into the future! The God who is sovereign over the future promises to care for his people. Even if the worst happens, God’s people can be confident that he will provide for us, both in this life and in the life to come.

What Do You Think?

Considering [Luke 11:24–26](#), what are some thoughts to you can use to help you push worry away permanently?

Digging Deeper

Get specific! Don’t answer the above with a vague generality such as “prayer” or “more faith.”

34b. “Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Why worry about tomorrow when there are *enough* problems today? For the follower of Jesus, the focus is not to be on the uncertain future, but on the concrete present. To worry about tomorrow could be classified as poor stewardship if it results in today’s problems going

unaddressed. Jesus calls his people to be obedient in “the now,” not anxious about “the later.”

Conclusion

A. With Us to the End

Few passages of the Bible challenge us relentlessly throughout life as much as does this one. Do you see all the ways it makes us think about our lives? Trusting God for the future, seeking his kingdom constantly as the first priority, makes us ponder how we use our time, where we place our efforts, how we relate to the people around us, and how we feel inside.

Jesus gives his followers a great responsibility in this passage. But we are missing the point if we feel burdened by that responsibility. When we listen carefully, we realize that Jesus is not making our lives harder with these words. Rather, he is making our lives easier. We are free from the burden of worry when we submit to God.

Clearly, worry does not keep us alive and well. Only God’s provision can sustain us through the trials of life. And certainly only God can give us a life that triumphs over death. God’s provision is powerful. He provides exactly what his people need. Trusting in God’s provision is the antidote to worry. Do you worry but rename it something like “concern” to pretend you are not violating Jesus’ command?

What Do You Think?

Which part of today’s lesson will you have the most problem applying to your life?

Digging Deeper

Who can and will you confide in to help you through this struggle?

B. Prayer

God our Father, give us confidence in your provision so that our worries are silenced! As you do, may we respond with trust so that our hearts will pursue your rule. Grant us strength in the Holy Spirit to pursue your righteousness as subjects in your kingdom. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen!

C. Thought to Remember

“Worry ... empties today of its strength.”

—Corrie ten Boom (1892–1983)

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with **NIV Bible Student** (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the **NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition**).

Into the Lesson

Write the following on the board for one minute of silent reflection:

The time I was most worried was ...

After calling time, ask learners to form pairs and to share responses and how worrying helped solve the problems. After two minutes reconvene for whole-class sharing of insights.

Alternative. Before learners arrive, place in chairs copies of the “Corrie on Worry” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Allow students in pairs to unscramble the sentence. (It is also found, in a shorter version, as the lesson’s Thought to Remember.)

Tell the class, “Today as we study some familiar advice from Jesus about worry, let’s contrast his teaching with our tendencies.”

Into the Word

Write this question on the board:

Why should we not worry?

Then ask a volunteer to read today’s text aloud while class members listen for answers to that question. Form pairs or triads to make lists of all reasons that Jesus gives in the lesson text for not worrying. After about five minutes, have each group share an item from its list that another group has not already mentioned. Write those discoveries on the board as the groups report. Expect the resulting list to look something like this:

- Life is more important than “stuff.”
- Since God takes care of the less valuable, then he will take care of the more valuable—us.
- Worry doesn’t add anything to life.
- Pagans pursue material things as their priority.
- God knows what we need.
- We’ll have everything we need if we seek first his kingdom and righteousness.

Before class, recruit several learners to bring pictures or objects that illustrate God’s care

of animals, trees, flowers, etc. (*Alternative.* Bring these yourself.) Pass them among class members so that everyone can see them up close. Ask how these serve to underscore what Jesus says in his sermon. Encourage open discussion.

Next, have a class member recruited ahead of time deliver a two-minute lecture on the topic, “Materialism Then and Now.” (*Alternative.* Prepare and deliver this mini lecture yourself.) Use information from the Lesson Context and commentary that follows it to open a discussion on what we call “disposable income.” Ask who had it and didn’t back in Bible times; follow by asking who has it and who doesn’t today. (*Option.* Turn the latter discussion into an in-class research activity using smartphones; challenge learners to find a calculator that computes where they stand with regard to wealth among the world’s population.)

Into Life

Form teams to debate the following resolution, one side affirming it, the other side denying it.

Resolved: *Today, Jesus’ teaching applies differently to those who worry about necessities to survive vs. those who worry about non-necessities.*

Research and use the best debate format, given the nature of your class. (*Option.* Recruit team leaders days ahead of time for advance preparation.)

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Worry and Health” exercise from the activity page to research groups of three to five learners. After teams reach conclusions, reconvene for whole-class discussion.

After either alternative, wrap up by brainstorming outcomes of taking [Matthew 6:33](#) seriously. Conclude with a minute of silence for learners to write a prayer that hands worries over to God.

Option. As learners depart, distribute copies of the “My Seeking Week” exercise from the activity page to be completed as a take-home. Promise to discuss results during next week’s class.