



Potomac Hills
Community Church, PCA
RELEVANT • RELATIONAL • REAL

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What Jesus said about Worry

“Revealed Grace” - a series from Luke
Luke 12:22-34

INTRODUCTION: “*Big Paws, Fierce Growl*”¹

Now I’m going to ask a dumb question.

It’s a question that I already know the answer to.

How many of you have seen the movie, “The Lion King”?

Of course, everybody.

Then you remember the scene when Simba was a little lion cub and often getting in trouble and he gets trapped by the hyenas. And so the little cub does what he has seen his father do. He tries to stand big and tall and growl fiercely, but the best he can manage is a frightened squeak.

The hyenas are not convinced.

And both the cubs and the hyenas know that Simba is about to die.

So Simba tries to growl again.

And this time, there is this **huge** roar.

And the hyenas go “huh?”

And what they don’t realize, until too late, is that Simba’s father has come to the rescue. And standing behind them is Mustafah, the great Lion King. His massive body is poised to save his son with a single swipe.

Big paws. Fierce growl.

The hyenas scatter.

Then we know.

Simba had nothing to **worry** about.

The Father had come, and the son was safe.

¹ The introduction and several parts of this message are adapted from Love Beyond Reason by John Ortberg, pages 166-183. Dallas Willard quote is from his book, The Divine Conspiracy, page 66.

The Father could be trusted, even when he seemed to be absent.

Could this be true for us as well?

That raises some hard questions for us ... what could life be like?

COULD WE BE FREE TO FEEL SAFE?

The writer of 2 Kings tells of a time when the King of Aram, an enemy of Israel, a fierce hyena, sent a great army to surround the city of Dothan and destroy the prophet Elisha.

2 Kings 6:13-23, *"The king commanded, "Go and find out where Elisha is, and we will send troops to seize him."*

And the report came back: "Elisha is at Dothan." [14] So one night the king of Aram sent a great army with many chariots and horses to surround the city. [15] When the servant of the man of God got up early the next morning and went outside, there were troops, horses, and chariots everywhere.

"Ah, my lord, what will we do now?" he cried out to Elisha.

Now Elisha responds with this remarkable statement ... he says ...

[16] "Don't be afraid!" Elisha told him. "For there are more on our side than on theirs!"

Now Elisha's servant is looking around, trying to figure out where those who **"are more on our side"** were hiding.

[17] Then Elisha prayed, "O Lord, open his eyes and let him see!" The Lord opened his servant's eyes, and when he looked up, he saw that the hillside around Elisha was filled with horses and chariots of fire.

Big paws. Fierce growl.

Elisha proceeded to ask for the Arameans to be blinded, which they were, and when they stopped to ask for directions, he was the one they consulted.

[18] As the Aramean army advanced toward them, Elisha prayed, "O Lord, please make them blind." And the Lord did as Elisha asked. [19] Then Elisha went out and told them, "You have come the wrong way! This isn't the right city! Follow me, and I will take you to the man you are looking for." And he led them to Samaria. [20] As soon as they had entered Samaria, Elisha prayed, "O Lord, now open their eyes and let them see." And the Lord did, and they discovered that they were in Samaria.

In a divine comedy of errors he hand-delivered them to the King of Israel.

[21] When the king of Israel saw them, he shouted to Elisha, "My father, should I kill them?"

[22] "Of course not!" Elisha told him. "Do we kill prisoners of war? Give them food and drink and send them home again to their master."

[23] So the king made a great feast for them and then sent them home to their

king. *After that, the Aramean raiders stayed away from the land of Israel.*”

And everybody ended up safe at home.

Elisha understood what his servant did not.

They were surrounded by a loving protection the servant little dreamed of.

His moment of greatest **worry** was really his time of greatest safety.

Each of us lives in the hand of God.

God’s heart is filled with tenderness and delight at the mere thought of you.

When you love someone and you think about him or her, it makes you smile.

That’s how it is for God ... when He thinks about you.

You will take risks in life, and you will face problems. This is part of life and growth and change, and I don’t think I would spare you from it even if I could. But I do want to spare you from one thing. Sometimes when you’re afraid you’re tempted to think you’re all alone. You think no one sees or cares and that you’re on your own. And so you **worry** about what you’re going to do.

And when that happens, I want you to remember the Lion. Remember that Someone is watching over you. You may not be able to see Him or hear Him. But you are never out of His sight. You are never out of His care.

Because you are the beloved of God.

Dallas Willard writes that Jesus lived a life of utter trust because He understood His Father to be unfailingly competent and wholly devoted. Here is the striking result: he writes, “With this magnificent God positioned among us, Jesus brings the assurance that our universe is **a perfectly safe place for us to be.**”

Oh really? Our universe?

It doesn’t appear that Mr. Willard has read the papers lately.

We talk much in our day about safe places, **precisely** because our world seems so **unsafe**. Catastrophes and violence and war and disease blanket the earth.

And yet this is the discovery that gets made over and over again in the Scriptures. Lions’ dens and fiery furnaces, Pharaoh’s prison and the floor of the Red Sea, a battered little boat in the midst of a violent storm – all these places seemed to be the most dangerous, but turned out to be the safest places of all.

It really is true – our universe is a perfectly safe place for us to be.

Not because bad things won’t happen in it, but because, as the Apostle Paul put it in **Romans 8:35-39**, “***Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean He no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or are hungry or cold or in danger or threatened with death? [36] (Even the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.") [37] No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. [38] And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from His love. Death can't, and life can't. The angels can't, and the***

*demons can't. Our fears for today, **our worries about tomorrow**, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away. [39] Whether we are high above the sky or in the deepest ocean, **nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.**"*

The worst weapons the world can unleash are powerless before that love.

Our little growls and snarls may not be much on their own, but behind us stands One whose watch is unceasing. We may not be able to see Him or hear Him, but the Father is there all the time.

And nothing can separate us from His love.

Not failure. Or cancer. Or bankruptcy. Or loneliness. Or **worry**.

Not even death itself.

Stronger than all these enemies, He stands behind and all around us. One day we'll see the hands that even now hold us. Till then we walk by faith. But it is still true: We never stand alone.

What would my life look like if I lived in the settled conviction that because of God's character and competence this world is **a perfectly safe place for me to be?**

- My anxiety level would go down. I would have the settled trust that my life is perfectly at rest in the hands of God. I would not be tormented by my own inadequacy.
- I would be an unhurried person. I might be busy, I might have lots of things to do, but I would have an inner calmness and poise that comes from being in the presence of God. I wouldn't say so many of the foolish things I say now because too often I speak without thinking first.
- I wouldn't be defeated by guilt. I would live in the confidence that comes from the assurance of God's love.
- I would trust God enough to risk obeying Him. I wouldn't have to hoard. **Worry** makes me focus on myself. It robs me of joy, energy, and compassion.

A person in whom the peace of Christ reigns would be an oasis of sanity in a world of pandemonium.

A church in which the peace of Christ reigns would make their community a very different place than the one they live in now.

But there's more involved than being safe.

We also have to ask the question ...

COULD WE BE FREE TO RISK?

Jesus doesn't offer us this assurance of safety so we can relax in a sense of comfort and ease. We want safety, but we want more than safety. We also need to feel fully alive. That's why we watch action-adventure movies and ride roller

coasters, because we know there has to be a little **risk** in our lives so we don't feel trapped in our safety.

And sometimes our need for risks sits in opposition to our need for safety.

We flee pain and fear death, but we know that life involves more than avoiding pain. So the Bible alternates between calls to hair-raising risks and assurances of impregnable security. And when we look at the lives of great followers of God, we see this combination of breath-taking risks with an almost brazen confidence of being safe in God's hands.

Assurances of God's protection generally come in Scripture as jolts to get frightened people to **risk** obeying God when if feels unsafe. Like a father who is coaxing his two-year-old to jump into his arms at the pool. It's a perfectly safe thing to do, his arms are strong, he hasn't dropped anybody yet, but the child won't learn that unless he jumps.

Take a leap of faith ... literally.

In much the same way, God coaxes His anxious "two-year-olds":

- You can defy Pharaoh.
- You can occupy the Promised Land.
- You can stand up to Goliath.
- You can give all you have to the poor and join My ragtag band of followers.
- You can sit in a Roman prison and face imminent execution.

All of these apparently high-risk ventures turn out to be perfectly safe places to be. And you too are in the watch-care of a great big God. His arms are very strong. He hasn't dropped anybody yet.

But you will have to trust Him.

You will have to jump.

You will have to take risks.

Take a leap of faith, so to speak.

And when you can trust God enough to take risks, you will know the peace that comes from having a God who's big enough to handle anything life can throw at you.

But don't think the peace to which we're called, the peace which Jesus promises you, the peace to which Paul exhorts you, is a search for comfortable circumstances.

What was the last parable Jesus told in a study of Luke so far?

(You had to know we'd get to Luke sooner or later.)

It was the parable of the rich fool. He worked until he had all the safety, all the security, all the comfort and ease right there in front of him. He worked until he had nothing left to **worry** about and nothing left to depend on God for.

But God stepped in.
 And safety and security wasn't enough.
 Because there's more involved than being safe.
 And there's more involved than taking risks.
 We also have to ask the question ...

COULD WE BE FREE TO TRUST?

Fundamental to Jesus' message was His insistence that right here in my world I am the object of God's unceasing vigilance.

Jesus **never** grew tired of teaching about this.

And so finally we get to the main passage for today ...

Luke 12:22-34, *"Then turning to His disciples, Jesus said, "So I tell you, **don't worry about everyday life**—whether you have enough food to eat or clothes to wear. [23] **For life consists of far more than food and clothing.** [24] Look at the ravens. They don't need to plant or harvest or put food in barns because God feeds them. And you are far more valuable to Him than any birds! [25] Can all your **worries** add a single moment to your life? Of course not! [26] And if **worry** can't do little things like that, what's the use of **worrying** over bigger things?*

*[27] "Look at the lilies and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. [28] And if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, won't he more surely care for you? You have so little faith! [29] And don't **worry** about food—what to eat and drink. Don't **worry** whether God will provide it for you. [30] **These things dominate the thoughts of most people, but your Father already knows your needs. [31] He will give you all you need from day to day if you make the Kingdom of God your primary concern.***

[32] "So don't be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom.

[33] "Sell what you have and give to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven! And the purses of heaven have no holes in them. Your treasure will be safe—no thief can steal it and no moth can destroy it. [34] Wherever your treasure is, there your heart and thoughts will also be."

Jesus is asking them, "Why do you **worry** about your life? Why do you **worry** about what you are going to eat or what you are going to wear?"

"Consider the lilies of the field. They neither toil nor spin. They form no floral unions. They operate without strategic plans. They never restructure. They attend no motivational seminars on how to release the redwood sleeping within them. Yet next to them Solomon looks like his clothes are fourth-generation hand-me-downs. If God showers such beauty on grass that is here today and gone tomorrow – will He not clothe and feed and take care of you so much more? You

are His beloved.”

He says, “Look at the Ravens. They’re not generally Type-A creatures. They don’t have ulcers or high blood pressure or colitis. But they are fed by the hand of God.”

John Ortberg tells the story of going to the park with his wife, Nancy. And while they were there, they saw a family of geese eat. One adult and nine little goslings were devouring grass, while the other adult stood guard duty.

“Look at that mother goose watch over her family,” Nancy said.

“How do you know it’s the mother?” John asked. “Maybe it’s the father goose.”

“No, it’s always the mother who sacrifices herself for the family, while the father **stuffs** his face right along with the children. It’s the same in **every** species.”

Just then, the two adults traded off. The eater started watching and the watcher started eating.

John says he was **never** more grateful to God than at **that** moment.

Jesus is saying that any time you see a bird eat some seed you are not just watching a random event, but you are watching the love of God at work. Watching a bird eat is such an ordinary event that we generally don’t even notice it. But it’s not an accident that the food is there.

Think about it, every time you wake up, think a thought, enjoy a meal ... these are not random events. They are the Post-It notes of the love of God that the Father keeps attaching to all of His creation.

And most likely, you’ve experienced this same care in your life.

There was a time when you were lonely ... and God sent you a friend.

There was a time when you needed wisdom and guidance ... and it came in the form of a book or a tape or a message or the right words at the right time from the right person.

There was a time when you were discouraged ... and God gave you a time of worship that gave you new hope and courage.

There was a time when you were tempted but you felt a tug restraining you, ... and you came to your senses and pulled back from doing something that could have been really destructive.

And all of that has been the love of God at work in your life.

And so Jesus says, *“**your Father already knows your needs. He will give you all you need from day to day if you make the Kingdom of God your primary concern. So don’t be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom.**”*

You can trust God that you have not been abandoned, even if you can’t touch Him or see Him. He is with you when – especially when – you are alone.

When **worry** about the everyday things of life rises up to attack you, you can turn to God. The Apostle Peter said, **1 Peter 5:7**, “Give all your *worries and cares* to God, for He cares about what happens to you.”

We need to internalize that verse and give our **worries** to God because we have so many of them. The world destroys spiritual life and growth by generating constant anxiety. Jesus said in one of His parables that the life of the Gospel is choked out by the “*cares of the world.*”

We know that’s true. And yet we are more tethered to the world than ever before. Many of us are connected to the world 24 hours a day. We have cable and satellite and Fed-Ex and cell phones and faxes and beepers and pagers and email and Blackberry’s. Nothing is wrong with the technology, but it can make us its slaves and dominate our lives.

Richard Swenson, who wrote the excellent book, Margin, says that the greatest Christmas gift he ever got was a “phoneless cord.”

Peter said, “give your **worries** to God.”

Paul said, **Philippians 4:6-7**, “*Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done. [7] If you do this, you will experience God’s peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.*”

Essentially the same thing – Take it to God.

The **worries** may subside. They may not. Don’t beat yourself up about that. Your job is not to make sure your feelings are “spiritually correct.”

Maybe you’re **worried** about a problem where you lack wisdom, maybe it’s guilt that plagues you, maybe it’s a task that’s overwhelming, a relationship that’s hurting, a loss or disappointment that seems too much to bear.

Part of the problem is that you’ve been carrying it yourself.

Jesus ... Peter ... Paul – they all say, “Give it to God.”

And once you can trust God.

And you feel safe.

And safe enough to take risks.

Then you can ask the question ...

COULD WE BE FREE TO BE LOVED?

I used to have a Pastor in South Carolina that when we talked, never asked me, “How’s your wife?” He always said, “How’s your bride?”

And I always thought that was a neat way of asking the question.

Because in every human heart there is the inextinguishable desire to be somebody’s bride, somebody’s groom, somebody’s Prince, somebody’s Princess.

We want to be loved.

And the Bible says we are.

The writers of Scripture use the most extravagant images available to convince us of this. God's love for us is the love of a friend who would sacrifice his life for the one he loves, the love of a father for a runaway son, the love of a mother that will not allow her to forget her child. God's love for us is more passionate than the heart of the most passionate groom for his bride.

You are the **beloved of God**.

The cry of our heart to be loved is only a faint echo of God's desire to love us. Before you were ever born, you were beloved in the mind of God.

Psalm 139:13-17 says, "*You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. [14] Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—and how well I know it. [15] You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. [16] You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed. [17] **How precious are your thoughts about me, O God! They are innumerable!***"

This is the deepest secret of your identity as a follower of Christ.

You have nothing to **worry** about ... You are the **beloved of God**.

Nothing you will ever do could make God love you any **more** than He does right now: not greater achievement, not greater beauty, not wider recognition, not even greater levels of spirituality and obedience.

Nothing you have ever done could make God love you any **less** than He does right now: not any sin, not any failure, not any guilt, not any regret.

When you know you are loved ...

When you know you are safe ...

When you can trust God ...

Then you can risk extending that love to others.

CONCLUSION: "The Family Dinner Thing."

There is a ministry in Chicago called the Emmaus ministry. It's a ministry trying to reach out to young men on the streets of Chicago in their teens and twenties who are trapped in drug abuse and end up surviving by becoming street hustlers – male prostitutes.

This is not a group most people are likely to extend love to.

So these people from Emmaus simply walk the streets of Chicago looking for the most ragged of people. They try to make friends. And every once in a while someone trapped in this lifestyle will blurt out, "Is there any way out of this?" And then they will offer shelter or training and try to help him find the way.

One of the Emmaus ministry member's is named John.

And one night, John brought home one of these young men who was trying to find his way. His name was Joseph. And John invited Joseph to dinner at his house.

As they entered the dining room, Joseph whispered to John, "I've never done this before."

John was confused. "Done what?"

"The family dinner thing around a table. I've never done that."

Joseph was typical of the young men in his world. He didn't know his father. His mother was a crack addict. He was taken from his home when he was four. He was shuttled from group home to group home in the child-care system. He was in a gang by eleven, and in prison by sixteen. Now he was in his mid-twenties and never once in his life had he sat down to eat a meal around a table with a real family. Never had he participated as a father and a mother and children passed the food around and looked each other in the eye and laughed and talked about their day.

He was embarrassed.

"I've never done this, but I've seen it on TV."

Who is going to tell him that he's not alone?

Who is going to tell Joseph that he, too, is **beloved of God**?

In Twelve-step groups, people often introduce themselves by saying, "My name is Dave. I'm an alcoholic." It's a way of breaking through denial and embracing the truth of brokenness.

It has been suggested that in the church we ought to greet each other by saying, "My name is Dave. I'm a sinner."

Probably not a bad idea. I know how much time and energy it takes trying to convince people I'm better than I am.

"My name is Dave. I'm a sinner." I need to say that.

Maybe you do too.

But there are other words I need to hear and say more.

Maybe you do too.

In some ways, they are even more embarrassing to say.

And even harder to believe.

They are these words, "My name is Dave. I am the beloved. I am loved by God."

You and I need those words.

Isaiah 43:1-4 says, "*But now, O Israel, the Lord who created you says: "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are Mine. [2] When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the*

*fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. [3] For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I gave Egypt, Ethiopia, and Seba as a ransom for your freedom. [4] **Others died that you might live. I traded their lives for yours because you are precious to Me. You are honored, and I love you.***

Perhaps you could write down that last phrase on a card and carry it with you, "***You are precious to Me. You are honored, and I love you.***"

Write those words down and carry them with you.

When you're tempted to despair because you've blown it ... again, take out the card and look at it.

When you get up in the morning and you're overwhelmed by all you have to do, take it out and look at it.

Take it out when you're tempted to sin, when you dishonor God, when you get angry, when you deceive someone, when you use someone, when you hurt someone, when you're afraid, when you're alone, when you **worry**.

Remember these words that give life.

"You are precious to Me. You are honored, and I love you."

Cheer up! You're worse than you ever thought, but God's Grace is greater than you ever imagined.

The God who loves you is greater than you can imagine.

You may not be able to see Him or hear Him, but He is here.

He is watching.

Big paws. Fierce growl.

And all the beloved said, "Amen."