

Have Anxiety? Consider the Chickadee.

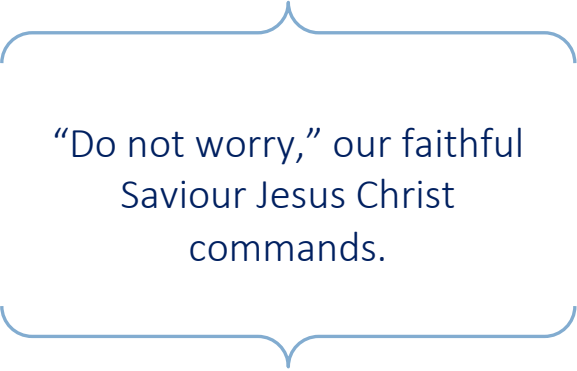
A Meditation on Matthew 6:25-26

By Jason Van Vliet

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 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?

Do not worry. Do not be anxious. These three or four simple words form one, straightforward command. They were spoken by our Saviour Jesus Christ. They are easy to say, but hard to do. Very hard to do. In fact, most days they seem totally impossible to do!

A few examples should suffice to prove the point. How do you tell a Grade 12 student not to worry about his final exams, especially when there is a university application riding on the results?



“Do not worry,” our faithful
Saviour Jesus Christ
commands.

How can you be a mother and not be anxious about your children? What if they fall ill? What if their tender hearts are crushed by some callous comment from an unkind classmate? Worst of all, what if they begin to stray from

the Lord, especially after they have moved out of the house?

If the economy is in recession, and companies everywhere are laying off workers, will you be able to look a father of five young children in the eye and tell him not to worry about his job security?

“Do not worry,” our faithful Saviour Jesus Christ commands. And yes we want to obey. But is there ever a day on which we manage to do it? Twenty-four hours without one, single, miniscule worry? As one brother in the Lord once said to me, “I worry like I breathe,” that is to say, regularly and frequently.

Is it *a sin* to worry, though? Clearly, to worship an idol is sinful. After all, there’s a commandment, the first commandment, against idolatry. But what about worrying? To be sure, it’s not good for your mood. It’s not good for your blood pressure either. But is worry a *sin*? Well, those three words, *do not worry*, are clearly a command. And the command comes from Christ, who is God. And when God gives us a command but we don’t obey, that’s usually called sin, right? But if worry is sin, then we sure do a lot of sinning, don’t we?

Let’s look at this more a little more closely. First of all, what is the difference between worrying about something and being concerned about something? Surely, it’s not wrong to be concerned about something, is it? Well, the challenge is this: in the original language of Scripture, one word covers both concepts. This word can have a negative connotation: to be

anxious, to worry. Or it can have a more neutral, or even positive connotation: to be concerned about something or to care for someone.

Here is an example of the positive connotation. In 1 Corinthians 7:32, the apostle Paul writes that the unmarried man “*is concerned* about the Lord’s affairs—how he can please the Lord.” That’s a good thing. Later in the same letter, in chapter 12, the apostle compares the members of the church to parts of the body, and in verse 25, he adds, “its parts *should have equal concern* for each other.” Again, that’s a good thing.

In what manner do we go
about our thinking, planning,
and hard work?

Clearly, in Scripture the Lord teaches us to be busy, involved, and engaged, paying careful and conscientious attention to the details of our daily responsibilities. That involves thinking and planning and a lot of hard work. And there’s certainly nothing wrong or sinful about that.

Yet here’s the crux of the matter. *In what manner* do we go about our thinking, planning, and hard working? Ask yourself the heart-probing question: “Am I simply taking care of responsibilities, or am I also starting to become anxious and worried about them?” In life, it’s often hard to draw a sharp clear line between the two.

Perhaps the “birds of the air” will help us out here, though. Our Lord Jesus immediately points to them. “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?” (Matt 6:26). By contrast, we like to store food away in cupboards and chest freezers. In this way we don’t have to run to the grocery store every day. Much less hassle. Besides, you never know what comes up, or who calls to come for a visit. It’s handy to have a little extra food ready and waiting.

Yet even today, in the twenty-first century, the birds of the air do not share in such modern conveniences. At least, I’ve never seen a chickadee with a chest freezer perched on the branch next to his nest! No cupboards, no freezer, not even a humble seed jar... and yet the chickadee lives worry-free! That doesn’t mean that little feathered friend doesn’t take care. Look, he is busy all day long. He hardly ever sits still for a minute. Flying here, flying there. Searching here, scrounging there. Always on the go, gathering food! If it comes to being concerned about food, the chickadee is busy with it all day long.

Still he’s not worried; he’s not anxious. “How do you know what the bird’s thinking?” you may ask. Well, just listen to him. Does he sound anxious and worried to you? He’s singing all day long. He’s as happy as a lark!

And our Father in heaven most certainly has his priorities straight! Did you notice that in speaking about the birds of the air, Jesus Christ refers to “*your* heavenly Father”? He is the Almighty Creator of the birds, but he is the Faithful Father of us, his children adopted by grace in Jesus Christ. And since he takes care of the chickadee, he’ll also take care of me. We can count on it. After all, the heavenly Father knows that his children are a higher priority than animals.



CANADIAN REFORMED
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY