

GET INTO THE STUDY



10 minutes

GUIDE: Direct the group to look at the picture (PSG, p. 46).

DISCUSS: Question #1 (PSG, p. 46): What were some of your biggest worries growing up?

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Bible Meets Life (PSG, p. 47)**. Note the author's reference to some things that tempt people to worry. Acknowledge in our senior years we leave some worries behind, but likely pick up some others.

Introduce **The Point (PSG, p. 47):** God is able to provide all I need.

SAY: "In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave us the solution to worry, and it's a call to trust fully in God's care and provision."

SESSION 4

TRANSFORMED IN MY PLANS



The Point

God is able to provide all I need.

The Bible Meets Life

Worry is never healthy, yet so many of us engage in it. Worry affects our appetites, relationships, sleep, and our ability to work. Regardless of the level worry plays in our lives, a pat response like "Don't worry; be happy" just doesn't cut it. Jesus gives us the solution to worry, and it's a call to trust fully in God's care and provision.

The Passage

Matthew 6:25-34

The Setting

Jesus gathered His disciples on a mountainside and taught them about the essentials for living like citizens of the kingdom of God. After He taught His disciples about the attitude toward possessions they needed to nourish in order to grow in Him, He moved on to give them careful instructions about worry. He urged them to turn their backs on fretting and to trust God completely to provide everything they would need.

Matthew 6:25-30

25 “This is why I tell you: Don’t worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn’t life more than food and the body more than clothing?”

26 Look at the birds of the sky: They don’t sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren’t you worth more than they?”

27 Can any of you add a single cubit to his height by worrying?”

28 And why do you worry about clothes? Learn how the wildflowers of the field grow: they don’t labor or spin thread.

29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these!

30 If that’s how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won’t He do much more for you—you of little faith?”

KEY WORD: **Cubit** (v. 27)—Length from the tip of the middle finger to the elbow, equivalent to about eighteen inches. But it could also suggest the idea of lengthening our lives.

Trust in God’s care.

Verse 25. Jesus had been urging His disciples to devote themselves to God alone and to see their possessions as resources for serving Him (vv. 19-24). In this portion of His instruction, Jesus further taught them how to live without worrying. He insisted they should refuse to give worry a place in their lives. He didn’t imply they could be lazy or irresponsible in taking care of themselves and their families. Rather, He was directing them to give up on fretting about what they needed.

In Jesus’ day, as in much of the world today, the bare essentials of food and clothing were a daily worry for many people. The unstable world in which they lived required them to keep food on hand, which at times would have

STUDY THE BIBLE

Matthew 6:25-30



10 minutes

GUIDE: Remind the group of what they have studied so far in this unit:

- ▶ “Transformed in My Worship” (The Point: Giving, praying, and fasting are disciplines of personal worship.)
- ▶ “Transformed in My Prayer” (The Point: Prayer is grounded in a desire to honor God.)
- ▶ “Transformed in My Possessions” (The Point: Possessions don’t last. Your relationship with God does.)

(LEADER PACK: Point to these titles on **Item 1:** “Transformed.”)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 6:25-30.

DISCUSS: Question #2 (PSG, p. 48): What is your initial reaction to these verses?

OPTION: IN ADVANCE, gather some flowers and perhaps a bird's nest, if available. Display these as a visual enhancement as you study this passage.

GUIDE: Note that most of us do not worry about where our next meal is coming from. And we have more than enough clothing in our closets.

When Jesus spoke these words, as in much of the world today, the bare essentials of food and clothing were a daily worry for most people. The constant quest for enough food and adequate clothing would have given them plenty of opportunities to be concerned.

Invite volunteers to name some common worries among members of your group. List these on a board or large sheet of paper. Remind the group that this passage is about God's provision for our needs, not our wants.

been in short supply. Also, they had to possess the right clothing to endure the sometimes harsh weather conditions in Israel. The constant quest for enough food and adequate clothing would have given them plenty of opportunities to be concerned.

Jesus brought up **life** and the **body**. In doing so, He helped His disciples take hold of a bedrock truth. God had created them. Their heavenly Father had given them bodies and had breathed life into them. Because He created them, they could trust Him to care about them. They would never be abandoned or forgotten. Therefore, they could depend on Him to provide what they needed.

Verse 26. Jesus' disciples could also gain a healthy perspective on His care for them simply by taking a look at the **birds of the sky** He created. Obviously, birds stayed busy. They didn't sit carelessly idle and expect God to deliver food to their nests. However, they didn't plant crops or store away food to make sure they would have enough for the future. Yet they appeared to be constantly fed. Each day would find them with something to eat.

By pointing to the little birds, Jesus encouraged believers to embrace the truth about God's care. God provides birds with food because He cares for them. By starting with the birds, Jesus went from something small and relatively insignificant to make a monumental point. If God cares for birds, we can rest assured He's interested in us too. We're worth much more to Him than the tiny birds He created. We're much more valuable to Him because He's invested much more in us. He created us in His image (Gen. 1:26-27). We alone have the singular privilege to be called His children. Therefore, we have a unique place in His heart. Because we're worth so much to Him, we can trust Him to give attention to us. Accordingly, He intends to provide us with what we need.

Verse 27. Like the first-century disciples, twenty-first century believers can take a sobering reality to heart when we find ourselves overcome with worry. Jesus underscored the reality that worrying won't do anything at all to enrich our lives. With His statement about **a single cubit**, Jesus may have had in mind one's height or He could have referred to one's lifespan. The word translated **height** can refer to either. A person doesn't get any taller because he or she frets. Worrying won't make any of us live one minute longer.

Whether Jesus was talking about taller bodies or longer lives, His statement underscores the truth that we waste our time when we worry. It brings to mind an old saying that has been passed down from one generation to another. Worrying is like sitting in a rocking chair. Rocking back and forth in the chair gives us something to do, but it doesn't get us anywhere. Being anxious cannot change anything. On the other hand, trusting God can make a difference in everything.

Verse 28. Jesus illustrated His statement about worry as a waste of time by pointing to **wildflowers**. He called the hearers to take the seat of a serious student and to pay careful attention to a critical observation about flowers in fields. If we learn what Jesus was teaching, we will stop worrying about the needs in our lives. Again, Jesus showed something tiny in order to get across a lesson about the way our great God cares for us. Wildflowers don't lift a finger to work in the field in which they grow. Neither do they spin thread and turn it into bolts of cloth that they can make clothes out of it.

Verse 29. But look at them in the field! God provides what they need so they will sprout and blossom. And the field displays the extravagant results of His care. **Solomon** is considered to be one of the richest kings in Israel's history. His reputation for being ornate is well known even today. Yet, Solomon's extravagance pales in comparison to a field that God adorns with wildflowers. Their rich color gushes from the ground in which God grows them.

Verse 30. If God takes excellent care of wildflowers and **grass of the field**, we can certainly count on Him to meet our needs. Look at the tremendous way God makes field grass sprout up in the early morning even though it withers away under the oppressive heat of the afternoon sun. Here today and gone tomorrow, wild grass still gets God's attention. We're around much longer than wild grass, so we can rest assured that He will take even greater care of us. Therefore, our worry doesn't come from God's lack of care. It comes solely from our lack of faith in Him.

GUIDE: If you set up the optional display, call attention to it as you reference Jesus' illustration about God's provision for the birds, flowers, and grass. Note the final phrase in verse 30: "won't He do much more for you—you of little faith?"

Stress that Jesus clearly affirmed in verse 27 that worry will not add anything to our lives, but it can take away. Worry can destroy us emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

DISCUSS: Question #3 (PSG, p. 49): How do we know when we've crossed the line from reasonable concern to harmful worry?

(Alternate: What are some consequences of being enslaved to worry?)

TRANSITION: "When we take our focus off the Provider and instead focus on the need, our faith wavers and we begin to worry. Let's trust in God's care, and also in His knowledge."

STUDY THE BIBLE

Matthew 6:31-32



10 minutes

READ: Invite a volunteer to read verses 31-32.

GUIDE: Call attention to **PSG page 50**, and lead the group to read aloud together Psalm 139:2-3.

You know when I sit down and when I stand up; You understand my thoughts from far away. You observe my travels and my rest; You are aware of all my ways (Ps. 139:2-3).

SAY: “God knows everything about us. He knows everything we need.”

GUIDE: Focus on verse 32. Help the group understand “idolaters eagerly seek after all these things.” (Summarize the **Bible commentary 1** on p. 57.)

Matthew 6:31-32

31 So don't worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?'

32 For the idolaters eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

Trust in God's knowledge.

Verse 31. Based on the connection between worry and lack of faith, Jesus issued a serious challenge to kingdom citizens. We have no better choice than to give up on worry. Being disciplined enough to turn our backs on worry requires us to take one step of discipleship after another. One of the first steps toward putting worry behind us involves making a change in what we allow to occupy our minds. When we worry, we stay focused only on what we need. When we don't have it or see it coming into view, we become anxious about whether it will ever come our way.

Jesus reminded His disciples of the kinds of questions they tended to ask when consumed by worry. Their daily lives would swirl around such questions, and they would show what made them fret. At the same time, their questions also showed their lack of faith in God to care for them. When they asked questions about what they would **eat** or **drink**, they exhibited lack of faith in God. They had lost sight of God's care of the birds flying around them. Likewise, when they fretted about what they would **wear**, they revealed they didn't trust Him. They doubted He would provide them with clothes. Even though they could see for themselves how He adorned wildflowers in the field, they continued to allow anxiety to paralyze them anyway.

What Jesus taught about giving up on worry may appear difficult, if not impossible, to grasp at first. Even so, He directed His disciples to take a critical step away from worry. It's a step He expects us to take in other times of difficulty in our lives. For example, He warned that persecution would come to those who belong to Him. In His warning, He assured us that our heavenly Father will give us the words we need as we face our persecutors. Therefore, we do not need to worry about finding the words. He will give them to us (Matt. 10:19).

1 ▶ Verse 32. Jesus asserted that disciples who allowed worry to get the best of them actually behaved more like idol worshipers than devoted followers of Christ. Back then, idol worshipers would give themselves to pagan deities, but not out of a sense of love or the assurance of divine care. They worshiped and served idols out of a belief they would be punished if they didn't show reverence. The fear their idols would punish them by hurting them or taking everything from them left them terrorized. They hoped their idols would reward them with plenty to eat and drink as well as adequate clothes to wear in exchange for faithful devotion. Equally heartbreaking, idol worshipers never believed their pagan deities would ever care enough for them to provide for them. They would have to provide for themselves. For these reasons, **idolaters** chased after material possessions at every opportunity. That endless quest always had them worried about their future. ◀

Christians who are maturing spiritually maintain a completely different view about the God we worship. We don't worry about what we need because we live in the assurance that He loves us and cares about us. We keep in mind that we don't have to prove anything to Him or earn His approval. In our walk with Him, terror never enters our hearts. We live in the certainty that He approves of us simply because we have received His gift of salvation. We're His children, not because we earned the right, but because He has given us the privilege through Christ.

In our relationship with the Lord, growing disciples learn a valuable lesson about Him. We learn we don't have to remind Him of our needs. Our Lord isn't an absent-minded, unreliable deity who can't be trusted to know what we need so we can serve Him faithfully. Neither is He remote, cold-hearted, or mean. Therefore, we love Him and trust Him to have a firm grasp of where we are and what we need. He's fully aware of us, and He's totally engaged in our lives.

Don't overlook Jesus' reference to our **heavenly Father**. That's an excellent title for our God. He's the perfect father figure, attentive to us and willing to help us because He cares for us. He's extremely sensitive to what we need. Like Jesus said earlier, our heavenly Father knows what we need even before we ask Him (Matt. 6:8). We can trust Him completely because we know He knows.

Emphasize that when we are full of worry or fear over something, we have given it a higher place than it should have in our lives.

DISCUSS: Question #4
(PSG, p. 49): What tends to keep you up at night?

(Alternate: When have you been successful at walking away from worry?)

TRANSITION: Explain that God isn't an absent-minded, unreliable deity who can't be trusted to know what we need. We can trust Him to have a firm grasp of where we are and what we need.

STUDY THE BIBLE

Matthew 6:33-34



10 minutes

READ: Invite a volunteer to read verses 33-34.

GUIDE: Use the **Bible commentary 2** to help the group understand *the kingdom of God*.

Emphasize the word *first* in verse 33. Stress that what we do first will affect every other thing in our lives. We must pursue God's kingdom and His righteousness before all other things. When we give Him first place in all things, we will experience the mystery of His provision.

+ Review the keys to seeking Christ first on **PSG page 53:**

1. Give him the first of your day in reading His Word.
2. Consider His ways first in all decisions.
3. Give Him the first of your resources.

Matthew 6:33-34

33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you.

34 Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Trust in God's provision.

2 ▶ **Verse 33.** Instead of chasing after possessions, growing believers **seek first the kingdom of God**. Their highest priority is not getting their hands on possessions considered important to their lives. The priority goal for them is to grow as citizens of God's kingdom. Living out that goal means not giving attention to building their own kingdoms to fill with possessions that make them happy. Instead, they give themselves to knowing the Lord, yielding daily to His control, and learning how to live according to His ways. They also trust Him to strengthen them with His power and to provide them with other resources needed to serve Him well. In these ways, they demonstrate that they put their energies into becoming useful kingdom citizens.

The kingdom of God cannot be found in a particular region, and it doesn't have a postal address. Neither is it ruled by a person who happens to be the emperor. Rather, it's a kingdom built by relationships among people who are children of God because we have given our lives to Christ. As citizens of the kingdom of God, we belong to Him and allow Him to have complete authority in our lives. As kingdom citizens, we live to serve Him, and our joy comes in our relationship with Him. ◀

Notice that Jesus brought up God's **righteousness** and a kingdom citizen's intention to seek it. By seeking righteousness, Jesus implied that growing disciples nourish an eagerness to allow the character traits of God to be reflected in them. Jesus didn't intend for us to believe we have to earn righteousness on our own. Instead, the more we grow in our walk with Him, the more we think and behave like Him. As we grow in Him, we become more like Him and reflect His righteousness in our relationships with others.

As we grow in Him so we can be productive citizens of God's kingdom, we trust Him to provide us with the resources necessary so we can serve Him well. These resources might come to us in miraculous ways that surprise us. Or they might be given to us through ordinary ways like a job that renders a salary. Perhaps the resources will be provided by spiritual siblings in Christ who want to help us. Because we factor eternity into our thinking as we serve the Lord, we rest in the assurance that our home is heaven.

Keep in mind something else about the way God provides. The resources He gives us come in different shapes and sizes. His resources may arrive in the shape of possessions we need so we can live out our devotion to Him. However, His resources may also come in the form of wisdom. He can make us wise so we can know how to live without resources we usually consider to be essential. In those times, God's wisdom to live within our means may become our greatest need.

Verse 34. Jesus brought His instruction about worrying to a close with a simple but compelling challenge. Kingdom citizens are to trust God to supply them with what they need. For that reason, they have no reason to worry. They can count on Him to provide. Instead of fretting about what they need, they should devote themselves fully to knowing Him better and following Him in complete trust.

Our determination to grow as kingdom citizens will be put to the test each day. As we face the challenges that our day brings our way, we may be tempted to peek around the corner and **worry about tomorrow**. Jesus stressed to resist such a temptation, and His reason makes sense. Nobody knows what tomorrow may bring. It could be worse than we anticipate, or it could be better. Even as the sun rises on a new day, we can't know for sure what will happen as it travels across the sky. We have to go through the day in order to know about the challenges ahead of us in it. Granted, we do well to plan for tomorrow the best way we can. However, we're not promised tomorrow. We only have today. For that reason, we make our lives count for Him right now and trust Him with all the tomorrows to come.

Jesus made an assertion about tomorrow that mature Christians can appreciate. Today's challenges keep us busy. Tomorrow will bring troubles of its own to our doorstep. The Greek word for **trouble** brings to mind evil things that will happen. Indeed, tomorrow's troubles will greet us, and the Lord will be there to help us through them. But today, we trust Him to give us what we need so we can endure the difficulties and rejoice in the victories it brings our way.

4. Place the advancement of His kingdom first over any other "kingdoms."

DISCUSS: Question #5 (PSG, p. 54): What are some ways we can seek God's kingdom first?

(Alternate: What steps can we take to increase our trust in God?)

GUIDE: Note that tomorrow's troubles will greet us, and the Lord will be there to help us through them. But today, we trust Him to give us what we need so we can endure the difficulties and rejoice in the victories it brings our way.

+ **DO:** Invite volunteers to share their responses to "**Put Christ First**" (PSG, p. 54).

LIVE IT OUT



5 minutes

GUIDE: Emphasize**The Point: God is able to provide all I need.**

Review **Live It Out (PSG, p. 55)**; see text to the right).

Invite group members to think about which application speaks most to their needs.

Wrap It Up

GUIDE: Challenge members to look back on God's faithfulness in their lives. Consider all the ways He has provided in the past.

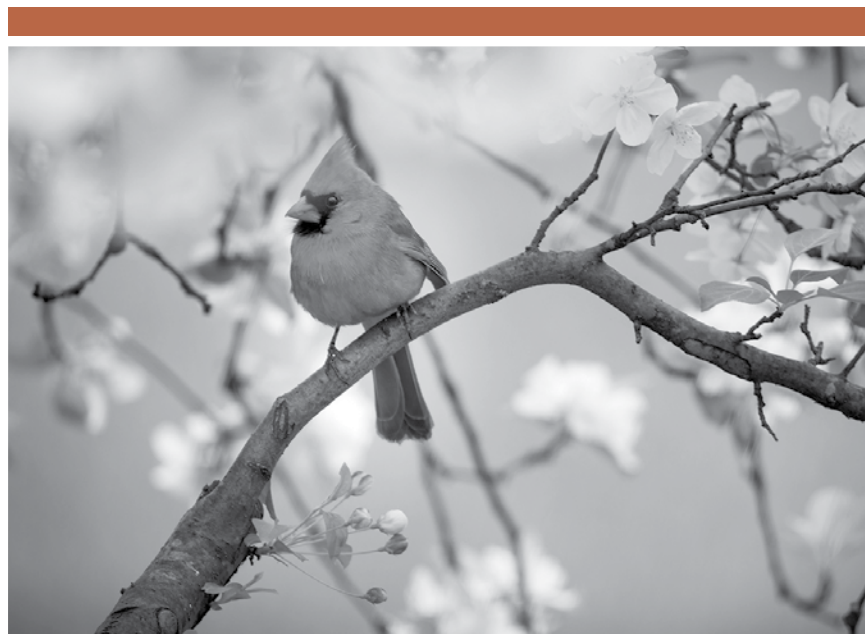
As they remember what He's done, encourage them to remember this: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8). Jesus, who has been faithful in the past, will be faithful in the future.

PRAY: "Father, thank you for being faithful to provide us with everything we need. Strengthen us day by day to walk in the joy of that reality. Amen."

LIVE IT OUT

Trusting God is a lifelong discipline that bears wonderful fruit. How will you express your trust this week that God is able to provide all you need?

- ▶ **Reflect.** Step outside early one morning and read Matthew 6:25-34. Observe and listen to nature around you, and consider how God provides for His creation. Reflect on how much more valuable you are to God and trust Him to take care of you.
- ▶ **Pray.** On a blank sheet of paper, write down your biggest worry. On the four corners of the paper list four different attributes or names of God. Thank the Father for His greatness by praying those four attributes over your greatest worry.
- ▶ **Support.** When you encounter someone this week who is overly stressed about something in his or her life, listen carefully, and ask how you might be able to help. As God leads, share your perspective on the situation based on Matthew 6 and how you are able to rest and trust in God.



BIBLICAL
ILLUSTRATOR



Field of newly planted vegetables, northern Galilee. Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a field in which a farmer planted good seed.

The following excerpt is from the article “The ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ in Matthew” (Fall 2007), which relates to this session and can be purchased at www.lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator.

“The Gospel writers used two terms interchangeably to speak of God’s kingdom. They called it ‘the kingdom of God’ and ‘the kingdom of heaven’ (or in some English translations, ‘the heavens’). These are variations of the same

idea. All four Gospels use ‘the kingdom of God,’ but Matthew favored ‘the kingdom of heaven.’ While he used the designation ‘kingdom of God’ only 5 times, he punctuated his Gospel with the phrase ‘kingdom of heaven’ 32 times. Since ‘kingdom of heaven’ was a typical Jewish way to ‘avoid the use of the name of God’ when referring to God’s rule, Matthew’s preference for this phrase demonstrated his concern to reach a Jewish audience with the gospel.”

Read “Lilies of the Field: Jesus’ Use of Plant Imagery” in the Summer 2016 issue. Previous articles “Solomon in All His Splendor” (Sum. 2007), and “Worry: A Word Study” (Win. 2002-03) relate to this session and can be purchased at www.lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator. Look for Biblical Illustrator for Bible Studies for Life.

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SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

The greatest way God has shown His care and provision is by giving us salvation through Jesus Christ. He alone gives us what we truly need: forgiveness from sin and a new, eternal life.

+ Each week, make yourself available either before or after the session to speak privately with anyone in your group who wants to know more about becoming a Christian. See the article, “Leading Someone to the Greatest Decision of All,” on page 2 for guidance in leading a person to Christ.

Remind group members that **page 2** in the **PSG** offers guidance in how to become a Christian. Encourage believers to consider using this article as they have opportunities to lead others to Christ.



- ▶ **Get expert insights** on weekly studies through the **Ministry Grid** (MinistryGrid.com/web/BibleStudiesForLife).
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