

[\(00:11\)](#):

[inaudible]. Hello,

[\(00:11\)](#):

welcome to this episode of the St Andrew's Enfield podcast with me, Steve Griffiths. And today I want to think about an issue that, well to be honest, impacts all of us to one degree or another and that's the issue of stress and anxiety and worry in life and how we can cope with that. Now I want to start off by saying that this is not a podcast that is going to give all the answers to that particular issue. Uh, it doesn't. It's a really complex topic and we need to give a lot of thought to it from many different angles. And actually it's such an important topic that we're going to be thinking about it in this podcast and also in next week's podcast as well. And this week and next week, we're going to be looking at the same passage from Matthew's Gospel. We're going to be looking at Matthew chapter 6 verses 24 to 34 in order to really get under the skin of what Jesus has to say about the issue and even then after two podcasts

[\(01:11\)](#):

we're going to revisit the topic again at a later date because there's so much to say about it. And over time we're going to begin to build up a more, holistic picture of how we respond to stress, worry and anxiety. So today I just want us to dip our toe into the water if you like, and think about a couple of principles from this passage from Matthew chapter 6, um, where Jesus talks about stress and anxiety in life and how we can get a better perspective on our life situations. As I say, it's not the whole answer, but I hope that it will be a starting point for us because this is such an important issue. It seems that whatever we do nowadays, we can't escape from stress. Life is very stressful; in our homes, in our work, in our leisure activities we're put under so much stress that causes worry and anxiety. And stress as we know is the greatest, uh, debilitating illness in modern society.

[\(02:20\)](#):

Uh, more days at work are lost through stress than any other sickness. And that's not to mention the amount of fatalities that happen through stress, through stress related illnesses. And all of that is rather ironic really given the technological advances of the last 50 or 60 years, all designed to reduce our stress levels. Uh, the dishwasher, the washing machine, the laptop, the mobile phone, the remote control, you name it, it was designed to reduce stress, but they all seem to have had the opposite effect psychologically. And we can't just be pious about it and pretend that as Christians, we are exempt from stress just because we believe in a God who provides and meets us in our need. We worry just the same as everybody else. And so we come to a passage like Matthew chapter 6 and I think it speaks into the very heart of where most of us, perhaps all of us, are at. So let's see what this passage has to say to us and how we can apply it to our lives.

[\(03:28\)](#):

[inaudible]

[\(03:28\)](#):

Well, to start with, I want to consider what this passage does not say about coping with stress and anxiety. Uh, this is an important point because before we think about what Jesus actually has to say, we need to be clear what he isn't saying. And there's two things that Jesus isn't saying here. And firstly, Jesus isn't saying that anxiety and worry is a sin. Anxiety in and of itself is not wrong. At no point in this

passage does Jesus simply say, "Do not worry". Twice he uses those words, but both times he qualifies them. Firstly, in verse 25, Jesus says, "Do not worry about the food and the drink you need in order to stay alive". And then secondly, in verse 34, he says, "Do not worry about tomorrow". It's not worry and anxiety that Jesus condemns. But he's saying that worry and anxiety needn't extend to some key and basic principles in life.

[\(04:32\):](#)

And as we read through the New Testament, we see that the people of God are no strangers to worry and anxiety. Paul was worried about the fate of the Galatian churches and how they were growing in the faith. And he was anxious too for the fate of Titus when he arrived at Troas. In Philippians, we're told that Epaphroditus was so anxious for the church there that he left Paul and went to visit them. The Christians in the church at Corinth showed real anxiety about how to best serve the Lord. And of course, one of the best known passages about Jesus himself is from the Garden of Gethsemane. Um, and there it paints a picture of a man under so much stress and anxiety that Luke tells us his sweat was like drops of blood. So all of this suggests that anxiety and worry in and of itself is not a sin.

[\(05:27\):](#)

It's not wrong. And when we come to realize that, some of the mental burden is lifted. We may still have anxiety and stress and worry in our lives, but we need not feel guilty about worrying. Worrying about things is not a lack of faith. It's just a sign that we care deeply about things and we want what is best. So Jesus is not saying that anxiety and worry is a sin. But the other side of the coin is that Jesus is not saying that in getting rid of our anxiety and worry, we can become so laid back that we become irresponsible. Having faith is never blind and it's not the same thing as being irresponsible. And Jesus stresses this point in the passage because he says in verse 26, "Look at the birds. They do not sow seeds, gather a harvest and put it in barns.

[\(06:21\):](#)

Yet your father in heaven looks after them". Now we may read that as saying, "Don't worry, God's got it all under control", but you don't need to be an ornithologist to know that birds actually work extremely hard. They make nests for themselves. They prepare for a hard winter. They get food in for their young, they don't leave anything to chance. Birds are not irresponsible. They get their lives in order, but there's nothing to suggest that they are acting out of anxiety for the future, but rather that they are just following their natural instincts for survival and a decent quality of life. And I think that's what Jesus expects us to do; not to be so anxious for ourselves that our lives become dictated by fear for our future security, but to behave like the birds, to be responsible in our behavior and to plan ahead in a responsible manner.

[\(07:20\):](#)

So then we can see first of all what Jesus isn't saying. He's not saying that worry and anxiety in and of themselves are sinful. So we don't need to feel guilty when we worry. And he's not saying that the Christian faith acts as an alternative for responsible behavior. We need to be sensible over the future and not leave ourselves wide open to the cruel waves of fate that often threaten to overwhelm us. So if that's what Jesus isn't saying, let's turn now to think about what Jesus actually is saying to us as we learn to cope with worry and stress and anxiety in our lives.

[\(08:07\):](#)

[inaudible]

[\(08:07\)](#):

As we think about what Jesus actually is saying, uh, we reflect on the fact that he teaches us two important principles. And the first of these is that we need to have honesty about our values in order to guard against false piety. We need to recognize the true importance of material things. And it's easy for us as Christians to say, "Well, food, clothing, place to live, these things aren't really important. What really matters is the kingdom of God". But you know, sometimes that can be a false piety arising out of the security of our situation. So when Jesus talks here about anxiety, he's not saying "Don't worry about food and clothing and the everyday things in life because these things are unimportant". Actually, verse 32 he says, "Your father in heaven knows that you need all these things". So these things, the basics of life are important.

[\(09:04\)](#):

And part of our battle against anxiety I think is to recognize the importance of these things and to recognize also that God knows they are important to us and that he will give us our daily bread. It's interesting, I think in this passage that in verse 30, Jesus calls the disciples "Men of little faith". And there's only a few times when Jesus speaks to people like that. Uh, once was when the disciples were afraid of drowning at sea. And once was when Peter, uh, was sinking in the water. And a third time when the disciples have forgotten, uh, what Christ provided for them in his miracle working power. So each time the disciples are called men of little faith, it's because they haven't taken to heart the presence and the promise and the power of the love of God. And I think more often than not, we become anxious when we forget the presence, the promise, and the power of God's love in our lives.

[\(10:08\)](#):

So whenever we do become anxious about things, the answer is never to resort to false piety and say, "Oh, well those things aren't important anyway". The answer is found I think in looking beyond ourselves and even beyond the situation itself, to remember the promise of power, the promise of God's presence and the love that is made available to us through Jesus Christ. Because God is our Father and he's faithful in every way and he knows how important the basic necessities of life are to us and as Jesus says elsewhere, "Which father, if a child asks for a fish, is going to give him a snake?" Our Father in heaven who is faithful in every way, will give good things to those who ask him. And there, perhaps, lies the second principle which Jesus shows us; that the battle against worry and anxiety in our lives has something to do with the perspective by which we view the events of life.

[\(11:16\)](#):

Perhaps the best known part of this passage is verse 33 where Jesus says, "Instead, be concerned above everything else with the kingdom of God and his righteousness and he will provide you with all those other things." To seek the kingdom of God is nothing less than accepting the kingship, the Lordship of Jesus Christ in our lives; to submit to him, to hand over every area of our lives, to him, our relationships, our job, our money, our church activities, our hobbies, our housing arrangements, everything. Because the kingdom of God is not a place. Uh, its boundaries can't be drawn on a map. The kingdom of God is evident whenever an individual or a group of individuals in fellowship together come under the Lordship of Christ. The kingdom of God is an attitude of heart. It's a pattern of behavior that is measured in humility and self-sacrifice, uh, not square kilometers.

[\(12:24\)](#):

And the realization of that in our own hearts is the coming of the kingdom of God. So there's a radical commitment then that God expects of us if we wish to, uh, wear the label 'Christian'; a commitment that doesn't come easily to us because we all want to retain some element of control over our own lives. But the truth is, uh, that as we learn over the period of our lives to truly hand all things over to God, to allow them to come within the scope of his kingdom, so we will be released from anxiety and worry about those things. Now, it's not easy. It's not easy to say, "I'm not anxious about my job. It's for the Lord to keep me employed or unemployed". It's not easy to say, "I'm not anxious about my mortgage payments. It's for the Lord to keep me this house or take it away".

[\(13:20\)](#):

Or even for us to get to the place where St Paul did, where he was able to say, "I'm no longer anxious about my life. It's for the Lord to decide whether I live or die". It's not easy to get to that place, and we mustn't say those types of things out of false piety. We're not saying that jobs or housing or even life itself are unimportant. All we're trying to do is get to the place where we surrender any right to self determination and that we can hand all these things over to God and bring them within his kingdom power. And it's only when we begin to get that perspective on our lives that anxiety and stress and worry ceases and the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God. Because God is faithful and his faithfulness endures forever and he will never let us down. So Jesus said, "Do not be anxious about your life. Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things, but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things shall be yours as well". God is faithful and his faithfulness endures forever and our stresses and our anxieties and our worries decrease the more we learn to rest in the faithfulness of God.

[\(15:06\)](#):

[inaudible]

[\(15:06\)](#):

Well, I hope that you have found this podcast useful and as I said at the beginning, we haven't tried to deal with this issue in its entirety and we are going to return to it again in the next episode. Next week we're going to be looking again at the same passage, and then we're going to come back to the issue of stress, worry, anxiety in future episodes, looking at other Bible passages about this topic. But at this stage, I hope that the principles we thought about will be useful for you; to, uh, not feel guilty about being stressed or anxious and to try to get a broader perspective on life and how you can live that under the sovereignty of God who has always been there for you, uh, who is there for you now and will never let you down. So whatever you are facing in life today, my prayer is that you will begin to know the transformative peace of God and that you will know him holding you in his arms for today and into the future. Bye.

[\(16:18\)](#):

[inaudible].