Weekly Reflection: Joyful and Generous Giving

The way Jesus teaches about giving, money, and possessions is by teaching us some truth that is meant to set our hearts free to be joyful and generous givers. Last week we looked at how Jesus taught that we can set our hearts free to joyful and generous giving by remembering the eternal reward. This week I want to look at how we can set our hearts free to joyful and generous giving by overcoming anxiety in our lives.

What I mean and what I believe Jesus means when He says, "don't be anxious," is don't allow all the "what ifs" and uncertainties of life control the decisions that you make and how you act. What is the barrier that may be keeping you from giving joyfully and generously or keeping you from giving more? I believe that for most of us the answer would be worry, anxiety, all the "what ifs." Worried about the future, worried about the lifestyle, worried about being comfortable, worried about keeping up with your neighbor, worried about what people think about you, worried about the government, worried about inflation, worried about retirement, worried about being able to fix and maintain all the stuff we have. This worry enslaves our heart.

Matthew 6:25-34 is meant to set our hearts free from worry and anxiety so we can be joyful and generous givers. What is the root of worry, doubt, and anxiety? The verse that makes the root of anxiety explicit is Matthew 6:30. ***"But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"*** In other words, Jesus says that the root of worry, doubt, and anxiousness is there's something we don't trust about our heavenly Father. We have little faith, unbelief, we don't trust God. As unbelief gets the upper hand in our hearts, one of the results is anxiety, doubt, and worry. This is true about any area of disobedience in our lives. We disobey because we don't believe something about God or something God has said. Every act of disobedience is saying my way is better than God's way, I know better than God does, I trust my way more than I trust God's way. Our battle for holiness is a battle to believe, to trust God. It's not a battle to perform or check some boxes. It's a battle against unbelief; a battle for belief.

Two possible responses.

You may think this is very discouraging to learn that what I thought was a simple struggle with an anxious disposition, or a struggle with a pet sin, is in fact, a far deeper struggle with whether I believe God or not. Now my response to this is to agree but then to disagree.

Suppose you have been having significant pain in your arm and its not going away. You go to the doctor, and they tell you your arm is broken and you will need to be in a cast for 4 weeks. Is that good news? No, your arm is broken and you won't be able to use it for at least a month. But let me ask the question another way. Are you glad that the doctor discovered the broken bone while it is still treatable, and that indeed it can be very successfully treated? You say, "Yes, I am very glad that the doctor found the real problem." Again, I agree. So, the news that you have a broken arm is not good news because having a broken bone is good. It is good news because knowing what is really wrong is good news, especially when it can be treated successfully.

That's what it's like to learn that the real problem behind anxiety and disobedience is unbelief in God and the promises of God. It's not good news because the broken bone of unbelief is good. It's good because knowing what is really wrong is good, especially because unbelief can be treated so successfully by our Great Physician. So, I want to stress that finding out the connection between our anxiety and our unbelief is in fact very good news, because it is the only way to begin the battle with the real cause of our anxiousness and to have our hearts set free for joyful obedience and to be joyful and generous givers.

There is another possible response to the truth that our anxiety is rooted in our unbelief in God's promises. It goes like this, "I have feelings of anxiety almost every day; and so, I feel like my belief in God must be totally inadequate. So, I wonder if I can have any assurance of being saved at all."

Let me use an analogy to address this possible concern. Suppose you are in a car race and your enemy who doesn't want you to finish the race throws mud on your windshield. The fact that you temporarily lose sight of your goal and start to swerve does not mean that you are going to quit the race. And it certainly doesn't mean that you are on the wrong racetrack. Otherwise, the enemy wouldn't bother you at all. What it means is that you should squirt your windshield washer fluid and turn on your windshield wipers. When anxiety and worry and doubt strike and blur our vision of God and all of His promises, this does not mean that we are faithless, or that we will not make it to heaven. It means our faith is being attacked. When that mud hits the window we may worry, doubt, and start to swerve. But whether we stay on track and make it to the finish line depends on whether we fight back against anxiety. Will we squirt the windshield washer fluid and turn on the windshield wipers?

"When I am afraid, I put my trust in you." (Psalm 56:3 ESV) Notice it does not say, "I never struggle with fear." Fear strikes and the battle begins. So, the Bible does not assume that true believers will have no anxieties. Instead, the Bible tells us how to fight when they strike. ***"Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7 ESV)*** It does not say that you will never feel any anxieties to cast onto God. It says when the mud splatters your windshield and you lose temporary sight of the road and start to swerve in anxiety, squirt your windshield washer fluid, and turn on your wipers.

So, my response to the person who has to deal with feelings of anxiety every day is to say, "That's more or less normal." The issue is how you deal with them. And the answer is you deal with anxieties by battling unbelief. And you battle unbelief by meditating on God's Word and asking for the help of His Spirit. The windshield wipers are the promises of God that clear away the mud of unbelief. And the windshield washer fluid is the help of the Holy Spirit. Both are necessary, the Spirit and the Word. We read the promises of God, and we pray for the help of His Spirit. And as the windshield clears so we can see the character of God and the promises of God, our belief grows strong and the swerving of anxiety smoothes out.

Jesus's Eight Reasons Not to Be Anxious

Three times in verses 25–34 Jesus says, "Do not be anxious." Jesus wants His disciples to be free from enslaving anxiety. That's why He gives at least eight reasons to help us fight the fight of faith. He knows this is a battle. He knows you are going to wake up from time to time with irrational anxiety attacks.

"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?" Matthew 6:25 ESV

- Argument: Food and clothing represent our physical-earthly life; Jesus is saying your life is more than this physical-earthly life, so even if you lose your physical life, you don't lose your real-eternal life.

Jesus means life and body (literally "soul" and body) are more than the physical life that is sustained by food and covered by clothing. In other words, don't be anxious about your soul and your body because anyone or anything that might cause your death, cannot take your real life, or rob you of your resurrection body. The bottom-line defense against anxiety is in Christ you are immortal, and to die is gain. That's why Jesus says in ***Luke 12:4, "I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and***

after that have nothing more that they can do." In other words, there is something far worse than death, and it can never happen to you in Christ. So don't be anxious.

"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?" Matthew 6:26 ESV

- Argument: God provides and cares for birds and God values people, created in His image, more than the birds.

Here the argument not to be anxious has two massive premises leading to the conclusion. Premise one: God is so completely in control of the natural universe that He feeds the birds of the air. Every berry eaten or insect snatched from the air or worm pulled from the ground is provided by God. He does that for birds. Premise two: You are of more value to God than the birds. God values more and is more committed to His people who glorify Him with their minds and wills than He is to animals who have no ability to consciously glorify God. As Peter says in 1 Peter 5:7, ***"Cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you."*** Vastly more than for the birds whom he feeds. So don't be anxious.

"And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?" Matthew 6:27 ESV

- Argument: Anxiety does no good. It accomplishes nothing. It doesn't help. So don't be anxious.

Preach this to yourself, "I am accomplishing nothing helpful by this anxiety. It is only making a hard situation harder. I will listen to Jesus and say no to this useless emotion. I refuse to be mastered by a useless emotion."

"And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" Matthew 6:28-30 ESV

- Argument: You are eternal, and the grass and the lilies last for a day. If God clothes them more beautifully than Solomon, of course He will clothe you. So don't be anxious.

The amazing truth for us is the truth that God's sovereign rule over the world of nature extends to the seemingly insignificant color of a flower. These are not mere natural laws that God put in motion and set loose to do good or bad things with no control over them. These are His doing. And the inference for our souls is if God is so intimately and lavishly involved with grass and flowers which are like a vapor, then of course He will care for His children who are eternal.

"Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things..." Matthew 6:31-32a ESV

- Argument: If you are anxious, you are like the world. This is what people do who don't know God. So don't be anxious

Jesus is reminding us who we are and whose we are. We are children of God, and we should act like it. This is a reminder not to get caught up in the craziness of how the world acts.

"…and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all." Matthew 6:32b ESV

- Argument: You have a Father; He is "heavenly" not earthly; and He knows exactly what you need. So don't be anxious.

"Father" means He loves you and you are on His heart as a child. "Heavenly" means He is sovereign over all the earth, and nothing can stop Him from doing good to you. "He knows that you need them" means that He is never at a loss to know what is good for you and He has all the wisdom it takes to meet your need. Your heavenly Father knows what you need.

"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Matthew 6:33 ESV

- Argument: God will supply everything you need to do His will and His righteousness.

There is no guaranteed physical comfort in this world, no guaranteed life on earth. But no matter the trial He will give you all you need to endure to the end and be saved. He promised we will have all the clothing and food and drink that we need to do the will of God, including His time when His will is for us to die.

"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." Matthew 6:34 ESV

- Argument: God does not overload any day with trouble. Each day has its appointed amount. So don't reach into tomorrow and bring its troubles into today.

The comforting point is unsaid, but obvious, ***"But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:21-23 ESV)*** Each day has its own appointed troubles, and there are new mercies appointed for us every day so that you can bear the troubles. Trust Him they will be there.

Freed from Anxiety to Be a Generous Giver

- These eight arguments are a gift to you from the Lord Jesus to free you from anxiety and to make you a generous giver.