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*Isaiah 49:8-16a*  
*1 Corinthians 4:1-5*  
*Matthew 6:24-34*

Grace and peace to you, from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Worry. Our culture seems to breed it. We worry about how we are paying the bills – both our own, and the church's. We worry that we'll be able to afford the long-desired things that we were hoping for. We worry about how our hard-earned retirement is disappearing with every fall of the market. We worry about our kids, and how they are being raised. We worry, worry, worry. There are some among us who have the gift of not being worriers. But those people are few and far between.

I come from a family with worry warts that appear in each generation. I know how we can whip ourselves into frenzies. So much of the time, it is inconceivable to imagine a life without worry. Jesus' words seem so tailored to our society right now. But people in his time must have been struggling with similar issues. His questions sting us like a slap. "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" (6:25) "[C]an any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?" (6:27) Jesus' words may elicit feelings of shame – or defensiveness – or confusion.



I don't think making us feel bad was Jesus' point, though I'm sure that happened at times. He was teaching his listeners about how their lives could be more fully transformed, rooted in the faith that they had received. Their worship of God had all sorts of implications for other parts of their lives.

Jesus basically said that if we worship God – if we submit our lives to God's kingdom and will – then worrying about money doesn't make much sense at all. He asked the philosophical question about what life is really about. Of course we know that life is more than food or clothing. He observed how the world works; and we concede that God does provide everything that a world of plants and animals need on earth. He ended with a practical question. We all know that worrying doesn't help the problem at all.

For Jesus, our struggles with worry go deeper than just thinking about our hopes and plans. We are facing an ultimate question. Do we worship God or something else?

When the rubber hits the road, only one can rule our decisions and how we look at our world. "No one can serve two masters." (6:24) The two may figure into our choices to some degree. We might consider our faith in light of what is demanded by our money priorities. Or we look at handling our money in light of our understanding of God, and our lives in God. Eventually, it boils down to one determining focus or priority.

As people who live here and now, this difficulty won't go away any time soon. We will continue to be tempted, and worried, time and time again. We live in a world with a mixture of different value systems and priorities. The mixture stands alongside the Christian focus on God, and God's kingdom.

The contrast is particularly notable when it comes to money. Christian teachings about our money – beginning with what it is to begin with (ours or God's) – clash with our culture's "teachings" on the biggest points.

- In the world, we work hard, earn our own money, and try to pay our bills.
- But as Christians, we also seek to be good stewards of everything, which we understand as gifts from God, including our money.
- In the world, driven and measured by the economy, we see and hear ads, telling us about many, many things that we want.
- At the same time, Christians hope to stay focused on God's kingdom, and not be distracted along the way.
- Our world's teachers encourage us to wisely plan and save for our future. Some times we are sucked into debt, often for less than noble reasons.
- Yet we hear scripture say not to pile up treasures to save for later. We are to pray to God for our daily needs, and to trust that God will provide what we need most. Instead of going into debt, because we don't have enough, we give, and then give more out of our abundance. We tithe in thanksgiving to God, and give generously to those in need.

Listening to all those contrasts makes me worry more! They are such different approaches to what money is, and how to deal with it. It's clear that God calls us to a distinctive way of considering our money.



So how do we do it? How do we find the right balance? Is it possible for us to focus on God and God's kingdom first, as we also try to survive and live in our world? We hear and see and experience many other things. We want so much in our lives, and the choices are difficult. Worry is just one step away.

This great challenge of ours underlines the importance of God's grace. And the gift of Christian community. It seems impossible for us to be sustained in our faith all alone. We need to gather in worship, to hear the Word – including the parts that challenge us. We need to touch and taste and smell signs of God's grace in our lives. We need to hear Christ speaking through other people, many of whom would not otherwise be our closest friends. We need the church to say the creed, especially when we have questions or doubts. We need to pray, and to give thanks, and to confess and seek forgiveness. We need to be reminded of Christ's peace, that surpasses all understanding.

When we gather as Christians, we are blessed by these touch points of grace. God reminds us of who God was, and is, and ever shall be. God reminds us of who we are in Christ.

Yet God's presence with us, and blessing of peace, both extend far beyond the church's walls and relationships. I hope that there are other places in life, when you are reminded of God's powerful gift of peace, which alone can calm our worries. Perhaps it's watching the news, beholding political change won by peaceful means in Egypt. Or praying as individuals or as families. Being blessed by God in encouraging, spiritual friendships. Participating in a hard-won moment of reconciliation with a neighbor. Beholding God's gracious gift of healing in someone's life. The reminder of God-with-us brings such beautiful joy and peace.



Worry about things like money threatens at times to overtake our lives and our faith. Yet God continues to offer us peace through the faith we receive in Jesus Christ. Gracious God, prepare us to receive all your gifts with open hearts. Amen.