

# The Sermon on the Mount, Teacher's Guide

## Lesson 11: Trading Anxiety for Trust

Matthew 6:25-34

### Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this passage teaches that freedom from anxiety is grounded in the fatherly character of God and in the right ordering of our priorities. Jesus does not offer techniques for managing stress; he offers a vision of a Father who feeds the birds, clothes the lilies, knows our needs, and values us far above the rest of creation. Worry, in this light, is exposed as a practical failure of faith, a forgetting of whose hands hold our lives. The climactic command, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, reorders the whole of life around God's reign and promises that a faithful Father can be trusted with the rest.

You must teach this with pastoral care and precision, guarding two boundaries. First, distinguish sinful, faithless anxiety from legitimate concern, responsible planning, and the genuine weight of hardship; Jesus is not shaming people for feeling the pressures of life, nor dismissing the real struggles of those in poverty, illness, or grief. Second, and this is essential, guard rigorously against any prosperity-gospel reading of verse 33. The promise that all these things will be added is not a guarantee of wealth, comfort, or material reward for faith. The Father promises faithful provision of what we truly need, as our Father, not riches as a payout for believing. Jesus himself, and most of his faithful followers, were not wealthy, and many lacked much; the promise is the Father's care, not a prosperous life.

The formational aim is to lead anxious people, which is nearly everyone, to trade worry for trust by coming to know the Father's heart, and to undertake the great reorientation of seeking first the kingdom. Help students name their specific worries, see the futility of anxiety, and rest in a Father who already knows their needs. Ground the whole lesson in the gospel, for the God who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all can be trusted to give us all we truly need (Romans 8:32). Keep the tone tender and reassuring; this passage is meant to comfort the fearful, not to add guilt to their burdens.

### Question 1

#### Student Question:

*Jesus commands, "Do not be anxious about your life" (v. 25), and repeats it through the passage. What is the difference between sinful, faithless anxiety and legitimate concern or responsible planning, and why does Jesus treat persistent worry as a serious matter and not just an unfortunate habit?*

### Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by drawing the important distinction between the faithless anxiety Jesus forbids and legitimate concern or responsible planning, because if you blur them you will wound conscientious people unnecessarily. Scripture commends foresight and diligence; the ant stores in summer (Proverbs 6:6–8), and Paul says one who fails to provide for his household has denied the faith (1 Timothy 5:8). Jesus is not condemning planning, working, or caring about real needs.

Define the anxiety he does forbid: the gnawing, faithless worry that springs from forgetting the Father, the fretful rehearsing of fears that corrodes trust and treats God as absent or indifferent. This anxiety is not the same as feeling the weight of a hard situation; it is the settled habit of carrying that weight as though there were no Father to carry it for us. It is, at root, practical unbelief.

Explain why Jesus treats this as serious rather than as a harmless quirk. Persistent worry is a failure to trust the God who has proven himself trustworthy; it quietly accuses him of not caring or not being able. It also steals joy, distorts judgment, and crowds out the kingdom. To be commanded not to worry is not a trivial nicety; it is a call to honor God by trusting him, which is at the very heart of faith.

Offer pastoral nuance for those prone to anxiety by temperament or affected by genuine mental health struggles. The command to trust is not a rebuke for ever feeling afraid, nor a denial that some wrestle with anxiety in ways that may need real care and support. It is an invitation, repeated gently, to keep bringing our fears to the Father. Help your class hear Jesus' words as the patient reassurance of a loving Lord, not as one more thing to feel guilty about.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The distinction between faithless anxiety and legitimate concern or planning (Proverbs 6:6–8; 1 Timothy 5:8)
- Forbidden anxiety as fretful worry that forgets the Father, a practical unbelief
- Worry as a quiet accusation against God's care and ability
- Why persistent anxiety is a serious matter of faith, not a harmless quirk
- Pastoral care for those who struggle with anxiety by temperament or affliction

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What is the difference between faithless worry and responsible concern?
- Why does Jesus treat persistent anxiety as a serious matter of faith?
- How can we hear 'do not be anxious' as reassurance rather than rebuke?

### **Question 2**

**Student Question:**

*Think about how worry actually functions in your life. What does the amount of energy you give to anxious thoughts reveal about where you are placing your trust, and where you may be forgetting the Father's care?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question invites students to read their worry as a diagnostic of where they are placing their trust. The amount of energy we pour into anxious thought reveals what we are actually relying on, and where we have quietly stopped relying on God. Worry is, in a sense, faith pointed in the wrong direction, trusting our fears more than our Father.

Help students trace their anxiety to its root rather than just managing its symptoms. Behind most worry is a specific area where we feel we must control outcomes ourselves, where we have not really entrusted the matter to God. Naming that area is more useful than simply resolving to worry less.

Move toward the practice of transferring trust. Encourage students to take the specific worry their anxiety reveals and deliberately, prayerfully hand it to the Father, casting it on him because he cares (1 Peter 5:7). The point is not to suppress the feeling but to redirect the trust, again and again, toward the One who holds their lives.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Worry as a diagnostic of where we place our trust
- Anxiety as faith pointed in the wrong direction
- Tracing worry to the area where we are trying to control outcomes
- The practice of transferring trust to the Father (1 Peter 5:7)

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What does the energy you give to worry reveal about where you trust?
- What specific area are you trying to control rather than entrust to God?
- What would it look like to deliberately hand that worry to the Father?

### **Question 3**

#### **Student Question:**

*Jesus points to the birds and the lilies as evidence that the Father provides for his creation, then asks, "Are you not of more value than they?" (v. 26-30). How does this argument from God's care for creation expose the real root of our worry as a failure to know the Father's heart toward us?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Walk through Jesus' argument from creation carefully, because it is the heart of his remedy. He points to the birds, who are fed though they do not store in barns, and the lilies, who are clothed in glory beyond Solomon's though they neither toil nor spin. The point is the Father's active, attentive care for even the small and short-lived parts of his creation. The God who runs the world is not distant; he feeds and clothes it.

Then note the crucial leap: are you not of more value than they? Jesus argues from the lesser to the greater. If the Father cares so faithfully for birds and wildflowers, how much more for his own children, whom he values incomparably more. The argument only works if we grasp how precious we are to God, which Jesus assumes and the gospel confirms.

Teach that this exposes the real root of worry. Our anxiety is not finally an information problem or a planning problem; it is a knowing-the-Father problem. We worry because, in the moment, we have forgotten or doubted that God is a good Father who is attentive to us and counts us precious. The cure is not to think harder about our problems but to know better the heart of our Father toward us.

Apply this devotionally. Jesus directs us to look, to consider, to observe the birds and the flowers, which is to say, to let the created world preach to us of the Father's care. There is wisdom here for the anxious: deliberately turning our attention to the evidences of God's faithful provision, in nature, in Scripture, in our own past, to feed our trust and starve our fear.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The Father's active, attentive care for all his creation (v. 26–30)
- Jesus' argument from the lesser to the greater: how much more for his children
- Worry exposed as a failure to know the Father's heart toward us
- Our preciousness to God as the hinge of the argument
- Letting creation and Scripture preach the Father's care to anxious hearts

### **Discussion Prompts**

- How does the Father's care for birds and lilies speak to our worry?
- Why does the whole argument depend on how valuable we are to God?
- How is worry finally a failure to know the Father rather than a planning problem?

### **Question 4**

#### **Student Question:**

*Where do you most struggle to believe that you are precious to God and that he will faithfully care for you? What experiences or fears have made it hard to rest in the Father's love and provision?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question gently probes where students struggle to believe they are precious to God and that he will care for them. For many, this is the deepest issue beneath their anxiety. They may affirm God's love in theory while doubting it in the small hours, especially if life has handed them hardship, loss, or disappointment.

Help students name what has made trust hard. Sometimes it is a painful experience that felt like abandonment, a prayer that seemed unanswered, a season of genuine need. Sometimes it is a distorted image of God inherited from a harsh or absent earthly father. Bringing these honestly into the light is part of healing them.

Move toward re-anchoring their sense of worth in the gospel rather than in circumstances. Our preciousness to God is most surely proven not by smooth circumstances but by the cross, where God demonstrated our value at the cost of his Son. Encourage students to ground their assurance there, where it cannot be shaken by the ups and downs of life.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Probing where we struggle to believe we are precious to God
- Hardship and disappointment as obstacles to trust
- Distorted images of God inherited from earthly relationships
- Re-anchoring our worth in the cross rather than in circumstances

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Where do you most struggle to believe you are precious to God?
- What experiences have made it hard to rest in his care?
- How does the cross prove your value to God more surely than your circumstances?

### **Question 5**

#### **Student Question:**

*Jesus asks, "Which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?" (v. 27). What does this reveal about the actual usefulness of worry, and how does anxiety promise control while delivering the opposite?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Focus on Jesus' pointed question: which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? The answer is obvious, and that is the point. Worry is not merely sinful; it is useless. For all its exhausting effort, it changes nothing about the future it frets over. It is energy spent for no return.

Teach the deception at the heart of anxiety. Worry feels productive; it masquerades as a form of taking the problem seriously, of staying on top of things, even of love and responsibility. But it is a counterfeit. It promises a measure of control over the uncontrollable and delivers only

exhaustion, distraction, and a heart less able to act wisely. The anxious mind mistakes spinning for moving.

Contrast worry with its proper alternative, which is not passivity but prayerful trust and faithful action. Where worry rehearses fears in a loop, prayer hands them to God; where worry paralyzes, trust frees us to take the next responsible step and leave outcomes to the Father. Paul names the exchange directly: be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer let your requests be made known to God (Philippians 4:6).

Help students see the freedom in admitting worry's futility. If anxiety accomplished something, giving it up would be a sacrifice. But since it accomplishes nothing except harm, letting it go is pure gain. Jesus is not asking us to surrender a useful tool; he is inviting us to lay down a heavy burden that was never doing us any good.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The uselessness of worry, which changes nothing it frets over (v. 27)
- Anxiety's deception in masquerading as productive or responsible
- Worry promising control over the uncontrollable and delivering exhaustion
- Prayerful trust and faithful action as the true alternative (Philippians 4:6)
- The freedom in recognizing that letting worry go is pure gain

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What does Jesus' question reveal about the actual usefulness of worry?
- How does anxiety promise control while delivering the opposite?
- What would it look like to replace worry with prayer and the next faithful step?

### **Question 6**

#### **Student Question:**

*Consider a situation you have been worrying about lately. Honestly, what has the worry accomplished, and what would it look like to replace that anxious rehearsing with prayer and trust this week?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question asks students to examine a specific recent worry and honestly assess what it accomplished. The exercise is clarifying, because in the abstract we defend our worry as necessary, but when we look at a concrete instance, we usually find that the worrying itself changed nothing for the better and often made things worse.

Help students distinguish the worry from any genuine action they took. Often the helpful steps came from clear thinking and responsible effort, not from the anxious rehearsing, which merely added suffering on top of the situation. Seeing this clearly weakens worry's claim to be useful.

Move toward a concrete substitution this week. The goal is not merely to stop worrying, which is hard to do by sheer effort, but to replace the anxious rehearsing with a definite alternative: bringing the matter to God in prayer, taking the next responsible step, and deliberately entrusting the outcome to the Father. Encourage one specific worry to be handled this new way.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Honestly assessing what a specific worry actually accomplished
- Distinguishing anxious rehearsing from genuine helpful action
- Weakening worry's claim to usefulness by concrete examination
- Substituting prayer and trust for anxious rehearsing

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What has a recent worry actually accomplished for you?
- What genuine action came from clear thinking rather than anxious rehearsing?
- How could you handle that worry through prayer and trust instead this week?

### **Question 7**

#### **Student Question:**

*Jesus says the Gentiles, those who do not know God, "seek after all these things," but "your heavenly Father knows that you need them all" (v. 31–32). How should knowing that the Father already knows our needs change the way we approach our daily concerns and our praying?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Center on the contrast Jesus draws between the Gentiles, who do not know God, anxiously seeking after these things, and the disciples, whose heavenly Father already knows that they need them all. The pagan worldview has no loving Father behind the universe, so anxious striving makes sense there; there is no one to trust. But the disciple lives in a different reality, under the care of a Father who already knows every need.

Teach the comfort packed into the phrase your Father knows. Before we ask, before we even fully understand our own needs, the Father knows them completely. We are not informing a distant deity of problems he has overlooked; we are bringing our needs to a Father who has known them all along and already cares. This transforms the posture of prayer from anxious lobbying to trustful conversation with one who already understands.

Show how this should reshape both our concerns and our praying. Knowing the Father already knows frees us from the frantic, pagan striving that assumes everything depends on us. And it shapes our prayers, which become not desperate attempts to get God's attention but the unburdening of our hearts to a Father who is already attentive, already caring, already at work on our behalf.

Guard against a misunderstanding. That the Father knows our needs does not make prayer pointless; Jesus, who says this, has just taught us to pray for daily bread. Rather, it changes the spirit of prayer. We pray not to inform or persuade an unwilling God but to express our trust, align our hearts with his, and receive what he delights to give to children who ask (Matthew 7:11). Knowing he already knows makes prayer more restful, not unnecessary.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The contrast between godless anxious striving and the disciple's trust (v. 31–32)
- The Father knowing our needs completely before we ask
- Prayer transformed from anxious lobbying to trustful conversation
- Freedom from frantic striving that assumes everything depends on us
- Why God's knowing does not make prayer pointless but more restful (Matthew 7:11)

### **Discussion Prompts**

- How should knowing that the Father already knows your needs change your praying?
- What is the difference between the Gentiles' anxious striving and the disciple's trust?
- If God already knows, why do we still pray, and how does it change the spirit of prayer?

### **Question 8**

#### **Student Question:**

*Where have you been carrying a need as though it were unknown to God or up to you alone to solve? What would change in your heart if you truly believed the Father already knows exactly what you need?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question asks students to identify a need they have been carrying as though it were unknown to God or entirely up to them to solve. Many of us functionally believe, in our anxious moments, that we are on our own, that if we do not solve this no one will. The question exposes that quiet practical atheism.

Help students name the specific need and the false belief underneath it. The lie takes various forms: God is too busy for this, this one is mine to handle, I cannot bother him with something so small or so tangled. Bringing the actual need into the light, alongside the truth that the Father already knows it, begins to dissolve the isolation.

Move toward the relief of handing it over. Encourage students to take that very need and consciously entrust it to the Father this week, naming it in prayer, asking for his provision and wisdom, and choosing to believe that he knows and cares. The aim is to trade the lonely weight of carrying it alone for the rest of sharing it with a Father who already knows.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**



- Identifying a need we carry as though God did not know it
- The practical atheism of believing we are on our own
- Naming the false beliefs that keep us from entrusting needs to God
- The relief of consciously handing a need to the Father

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What need have you been carrying as though it were unknown to God?
- What false belief underneath it makes you carry it alone?
- What would change if you truly believed the Father already knows it?

### **Question 9**

#### **Student Question:**

*Jesus gives the great reorientation: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (v. 33). What does it mean to seek first the kingdom, and how is the Father's promise of provision different from a prosperity-gospel promise that faith will make us wealthy or that God will give us whatever we want? Connect this to the kind of trust and the kind of treasure God is actually offering.*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This is the doctrinal climax of the lesson, built on the great command of verse 33: seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Teach first what it means to seek first the kingdom. It is to make God's reign and God's righteousness the organizing center of life, the first priority around which everything else is ordered. The anxious heart has made food, clothing, and security first, putting created things where the Creator belongs. Jesus calls for a wholesale reordering, with God's kingdom restored to first place.

Show how this reordering is itself the cure for anxiety. When the kingdom is first, our security no longer rests on the fragile things we worry about but on God and his unshakable reign. We are freed to pursue what matters most and to trust the Father with the rest. Worry loosens its grip not when we try harder to relax but when we genuinely put first things first and let God be God over our lives.

Now guard with great care against the prosperity-gospel distortion of the promise, for this is the most likely place your class could go wrong. Jesus is not teaching that seeking the kingdom is a technique for getting rich, nor that faith guarantees wealth, health, and comfort. That teaching twists the verse into its opposite, making the kingdom a means and material things the end, the very inversion Jesus condemns. It also collapses under the weight of Scripture and history: Jesus himself had nowhere to lay his head, the apostles often went hungry and cold (2 Corinthians 11:27), and faithful believers across the ages have suffered want. The promise cannot mean that faith yields prosperity.

Teach what the promise actually means. All these things, the food, drink, and clothing Jesus has named, our true and basic needs, will be added by a faithful Father to those who seek his kingdom first. It is the promise of a Father's reliable provision of what we genuinely need, not a guarantee of wealth or of every want satisfied. And even this provision is given on the Father's wise terms and timing, sometimes through plenty, sometimes through enough, sometimes through the sustaining grace to endure want with contentment (Philippians 4:11–13). The promise is the Father's faithful care, not a prosperous life as a reward for faith.

Bring it home in the gospel, where the promise finds its deepest assurance. The God who calls us to seek his kingdom first is the God who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all; will he not also, with him, graciously give us all things (Romans 8:32)? The cross is the proof that the Father can be trusted with our needs, for he has already given us the greatest gift at the greatest cost. We seek first the kingdom not as anxious bargainers hoping for a payout, but as beloved children resting in a Father whose provision is as sure as Calvary. Send your students home freed from both worry and the false promise of prosperity, trusting a Father who gives them himself and, with himself, all they truly need.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Seeking first the kingdom as the wholesale reordering of life around God's reign (v. 33)
- The reordering of priorities as itself the cure for anxiety
- Rigorous guarding against the prosperity-gospel inversion of the promise (2 Corinthians 11:27)
- The promise as a Father's faithful provision of true needs, not wealth as a reward (Philippians 4:11–13)
- The cross as the proof that the Father can be trusted with all our needs (Romans 8:32)

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What does it mean to seek first the kingdom of God?
- How is the Father's promise of provision different from a prosperity-gospel promise of wealth?
- How does the cross assure us that the Father can be trusted with our needs?

### **Question 10**

#### **Student Question:**

*Look back over the whole passage. Jesus has invited you to trade anxiety for trust in a faithful Father and to reorder your life around his kingdom. Where is he putting his finger on your worry most directly, and what is one specific way you will seek first his kingdom and entrust your fears to him this week?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

The capstone asks students to name where Jesus is putting his finger on their worry most directly and one specific way they will seek first the kingdom and entrust their fears to him this week. After a lesson rich in comfort, this grounds the comfort in a concrete response.

Help students choose a step in both directions the passage moves: a definite act of entrusting a specific worry to the Father (through prayer, through casting it on him, through choosing trust), and a definite step of seeking first the kingdom (reordering a priority, giving God genuine first place in some area where security has crowded him out). The two belong together.

Close on the tenderness of the passage. Send students home not with one more burden but with a lighter one, resting in a Father who feeds the birds, clothes the lilies, knows their needs, and gave his Son for them. Remind them that trading anxiety for trust is not a single victory but a daily practice, and that the faithful Father will meet them in it again and again.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Naming where worry presses most directly
- A concrete act of entrusting a specific worry to the Father
- A concrete step of seeking first the kingdom
- Trading anxiety for trust as a daily practice, not a single victory

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Where is Jesus putting his finger on your worry most directly?
- What specific worry will you entrust to the Father this week?
- What is one way you will seek first his kingdom this week?