

WEEK 9: REPLACING GREED AND ANXIETY WITH GENEROSITY AND FAITH

Matthew 6:19–34



The Place of the Passage

After pronouncing the Beatitudes and issuing the call to live out the light of the gospel of the kingdom (Matt. 5:1–16), Jesus announced his Scripture-fulfilling call to a wholehearted and whole-life righteousness (5:17–20), which he then illustrated with ethical (5:21–48) and devotional examples (6:1–18). In the previous section we heard Jesus' call to give, pray, and fast for the reward from God rather than the praise of people. Jesus now continues in a similar vein by calling us to store up treasures in heaven rather than on earth (vv. 19–21). The common theme throughout this section is wealth: storing up treasures in heaven (vv. 19–21), living with generosity (vv. 22–23), serving God rather than money (v. 24), and learning to trust God and seek his kingdom rather than the things of life (vv. 25–34). In all this Jesus shows us how to relate to money as we pursue the true life of flourishing in his kingdom.

The Big Picture

Jesus calls us to resist greediness, stinginess, and anxiety about wealth and instead to serve God and trust in his provision.

Reflection and Discussion

Carefully and thoughtfully read this section of Jesus' teaching, Matthew 6:19–34. Then use the provided questions to help you think more deeply about the text. (See *ESV Study Bible* notes on pages 1832–1833; online at www.esv.org.)

Laying Up Treasures in Heaven (Matt. 6:19–21)

Jesus masterfully transitions from one topic to the next in the Sermon on the Mount. Very often what he says at these transitional moments wraps up the previous topic while also introducing the next one. What common words and themes do you see in Matthew 6:19–21 that relate to what came before, in verses 1–18? What words and themes relate to what comes next, in verses 22–34?

What does Jesus mean by “treasures in heaven,” and why is storing them up wiser than storing up treasures on earth (Matt. 6:20)? What are a few practical ways to store up treasure in heaven?

Jesus recognizes that “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:21). When have you seen your own heart become too wrapped up in something you invested in or purchased? What is Jesus saying to do instead?

Generosity and Worship (Matt. 6:22–24)

Jesus says our eyes are like lamps for our body, and whether our eyes are “good” or “bad” will determine whether the rest of our body becomes full of light or of darkness (Matt. 6:21–23). This Hebrew idiom is seen in wisdom literature such as Proverbs, in which someone with a “good” or a “healthy eye” is generous, whereas someone with a “bad eye” is stingy (see Prov. 22:9, where the Hebrew for “good eye” is translated “bountiful eye”; and 23:6, where “bad eye” is translated “stingy”). Note also the surrounding context in Matthew 6 and how Jesus focuses on our heart's orientation toward wealth (Matt. 6:19–20, 24). How would you summarize Jesus' point in verses 22–24 in light of these facts?

How can money function as a master that we serve and worship? How is it true that serving money and serving God are incompatible?

Anxiety and Trust (Matt. 6:25–34)

Anxiety is a complex topic, addressed in numerous ways throughout the Bible. Here Jesus addresses our tendency to be anxious about a few particular mat-

ters (Matt. 6:25, 31). What are they? What matters have you been anxious about recently?

Jesus does not merely command people not to be anxious about their needs; he gently reasons with us, appealing to how the Father values us and cares for us. What are the specific reasons for and examples of God’s love for us that Jesus gives in Matthew 6:25–34 to help us not to be anxious? Which one is most significant to you?

Jesus calls the disciples “you of little faith” (Matt. 6:30). What does this indicate about the nature of faith? What does it also teach us about the nature of anxiety?

Summarize what you have already learned in the Sermon on the Mount about the two topics Jesus mentions in Matthew 6:33: God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness.

What does Matthew 6:25–34 teach us about God? How do these truths and this vision of God help us to trust him?

What similarities do you see between Matthew 6:25–34 and 1 Peter 5:6–7? What are a few matters you want to bring to the Lord in prayer in light of these encouragements?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections have for you.

Gospel Glimpses

SERVING A BETTER MASTER. Jesus says plainly, “You cannot serve God and money” (Matt. 6:24). It is not that we are able to serve both but should not—his point is that we cannot do so even if we tried. God and money are incompatible. Whatever we trust as our highest good, whatever we trust as our source of provision and security, that will be the god we serve. We will look either to the fleeting and unstable master of money to provide everything we need or to the Father who owns everything and loves us through Christ as his dear children. More than that, when we come to Christ in faith, not only do we have God as our Father, but he promises to give us all things in Christ (6:32–33; see 1 Cor. 3:21–23). In light of this, it is clear that we cannot serve God and money—and why would we even want to try?

YOU ARE VALUABLE. Jesus wants us to know how valuable we are to the Father. As we fret about the necessities of life, Jesus calls us to watch how God the Father

takes care of the birds. He feeds them because he values them. And Jesus asks, “Are you not of more value than they?” (Matt. 6:26). Of course we are! God made and cares for his creation, but humanity is the pinnacle of his creation, uniquely made in his image, set over the birds and all the animals (Gen. 1:26–27). It is true that our sin is appalling and that we deserve eternal death for it, yet God still loves us. He says of sinful Israel in Isaiah 43:4, “You are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you.” And he has proven this by giving his own Son for us on the cross. As the Puritan pastor Thomas Goodwin put it, God values us above the world, “and he gave real testimony of this in giving his Son, which was more than a thousand worlds.” Surely we can trust this kind of God, with this kind of love, to care for us.

Whole-Bible Connections

TREASURE IN HEAVEN. Jesus calls us to lay up for ourselves treasures not on earth but in heaven (Matt. 6:19–20). Jesus invites us to set our eyes not merely above, in heaven, but on our eternal future. When we lay up treasures in heaven, we acknowledge that we are willing to wait. And for what are we waiting? We are waiting for the coming of Christ and the glory of the new creation.¹ The apostle Paul writes similarly, “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:2–4).

SERVICE IN IDOLATRY. Jesus calls us to forsake money as our master and to serve God alone (Matt. 6:24). The need to forsake idols such as money began as soon as sin entered the world. God created humanity to serve and worship him, but man has served and worshiped the creation instead of the Creator (Gen. 2:15; Rom. 1:21–22). When God rescued Israel through the exodus,² he called them to reject idolatry and to worship him alone (Ex. 20:2–6, 17). And when Jesus came and brought the kingdom of God into the world, he invited all to serve God alone rather than money or what it can buy. All who trust in Jesus will battle with the heart-lure of the false gods of money, comfort, pleasure, and so forth, but we look ahead to the new creation, where our hearts will be happily and eternally set on the triune God as our good master (Rev. 21:3).

Theological Soundings

GROWING IN FAITH. When Jesus calls his disciples to trust the Father rather than to be anxious for necessities, he calls them “you of little faith” (Matt. 6:30). Jesus often draws attention to their “little faith” (8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20). These are not unbelievers; they are disciples of Jesus who do trust the Father. Yet at

times their trust is not much but little, not strong but weak. This shows us that, while our conversion³ is the decisive moment at which we move from unbelief to belief, it is also true that the Christian life involves growing from little belief to more belief. Once we enter into the realm of trusting Christ, this trust grows in degrees. It rises and falls in various circumstances. We may often feel like the man who cried out, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24). This is why the Christian life is a life of learning to trust Christ more truly and deeply in every area of life.

GOD’S PROVIDENCE. Jesus teaches that God the Father feeds the birds of the air, beautifies the grass of the field, and provides our necessities for life (Matt. 6:25–33). This assumes the doctrine of God’s providence, which refers to God’s thorough and wise care for his creation. The Westminster Catechism summarizes the biblical doctrine of God’s providence in this way: “God’s works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.” God governs all things and cares for his creation according to his wisdom and for his glory.

Personal Implications

Reflect on how to apply what you have learned in this text to your everyday life. Make notes below on personal implications of (1) the *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) the *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) the *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole. Also write down what you have learned that can lead you to praise God, repent of sin, trust his gracious promises, and live in obedience to him.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. Matthew 6:19–34

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment to pray and ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of Matthew 6:19–34. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight and underline these things to review again in the future.

Definitions

¹ **New creation** – The world to come (Heb. 2:5) that stands in contrast with this “present evil age” (see Gal. 1:4; 6:15). From the moment humanity alienated itself from God, this present world in all its facets has been corrupted by sin. Christ's resurrection marks the dawn of a new world, a new creation, in which everything is as it was created to be. Through union with Christ by the Spirit, believers are a first part of this new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), and, when Christ returns to judge and complete his redeeming work, the entire world will experience its transformation into this new creation.

² **The exodus** – The departure of the people of Israel from Egypt and their journey to Mount Sinai under Moses' leadership (Exodus 1–19; Numbers 33). The exodus demonstrated God's power and providence for his people, who had been enslaved by the Egyptians. The annual festival of Passover commemorates God's final plague upon the Egyptians, resulting in Israel's release from Egypt.

³ **Conversion** – The result of turning away from sin, accepting the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and submitting to him. Conversion is the human activity mirroring the divine activity of regeneration (granting of new birth).