

THE RIGHT FEAR

Fear drives most human activities.

Eve ate the forbidden fruit because she was afraid of not being like God, of not knowing good and evil on her own. The Bible tells us that Eve was deceived ([First Timothy 2:14](#)), but Adam was not deceived; Adam no doubt ate the forbidden fruit because he was afraid of being without Eve.

The Israelites in the wilderness insisted that Aaron make them gods to worship because they were afraid that Moses had died on Mount Sinai, and perhaps because they needed a god to lead them back to Egypt and defend them before Pharaoh.

Peter denied Jesus because he was afraid of being identified with Jesus.

The fear of God.

In recent years it's become popular to say that we shouldn't be afraid of God, but that's not a biblical idea. In David's last Psalm, which is not found in the book of Psalms, but in [Second Samuel 23](#), David says,

2 Samuel 23:2-4 2016 ESV

“The Spirit of the LORD speaks by me; his word is on my tongue. The God of Israel has spoken; the Rock of Israel has said to me: When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth.

Oh, but that's Old Testament thinking, someone might say. Well, Paul writes the Corinthians,

2 Corinthians 7:1 2016 ESV

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

And Luke writes in [Acts 9](#),

Acts 9:31 2016 ESV

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

The fear of the Lord means having a devoted, deep-seated reverence for God as Creator and Lord. Not only is the fear of the Lord desirable, it's necessary.

Deuteronomy 10:12-13 2016 ESV

“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,

and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?

We are to both fear and love our God. The truth is that if we don't fear Him, we will not rightly love Him, because loving God does not mean having loving feelings about Him, but walking in His ways, serving Him with all our heart and all our soul, keeping His commandments.

In the final verses of [Matthew 6](#) Jesus commands us to have the right fear. Let's look at what our Lord says:

[Matthew 6:25-34](#) (2016 ESV) — **25** “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? **26** 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? **27** And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? **28** And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, **29** yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. **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? **31** Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ **32** For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. **33** But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. **34** “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Let’s pray!

THE HIGHEST PRIORITY

What is to be our highest priority? We don’t need to figure it out for ourselves; Jesus tells us plainly in [Matthew 6:33](#):

[Matthew 6:33](#) (2016 ESV) — **33** But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

We’re going to talk about “all these things” in just a moment, but let’s first get our highest priority straight. What is it? It is the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. This is a **positive** command.

What is the Kingdom of God? It is the rule of God over His creatures. It is internal, external, present, and future.

It is an internal Kingdom, as we are personally subject ourselves to Jesus Christ as Lord.

It is an external Kingdom, as He brings all of creation into alignment with the perfect will of God.

It is a present Kingdom, as we personally trust and follow Christ moment by moment.

And it is a future Kingdom, as we look to the day when Jesus brings all things to a close, separates His elect from the wicked, confines the wicked to hell, and creates a new heavens and new earth as a place where He will dwell with His people for eternity.

We are to actively seek God's Kingdom. We are also to actively seek God's righteousness. The righteousness of God is a hard concept to imagine. Let's remember three things about it.

First, the righteousness of God was perfectly achieved by Jesus Christ on earth.

Hebrews 4:15 2016 ESV

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

The reason that we aren't righteousness is not that we are **human beings**, but that we are **sinners**. Sin makes us look at the righteousness of God as a prison cell, but the opposite is true: sin imprisons us, and righteousness is genuine freedom. *So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed* ([John 8:36](#)).

Second, the righteousness of God is perfect. Righteousness is not being good enough to get by. Mankind was made in the image of God; righteousness means living according to that image alone, and not according to any other standard. This is what Jesus did: He lived His entire human life in the image of God, and fulfilled all righteousness.

1 John 3:5 2016 ESV

You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.

And third, we are completely dependent upon God to make us righteousness, and He does this by justification and sanctification.

We see justification described in [Second Corinthians 5:21](#),

2 Corinthians 5:21 2016 ESV

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

We see sanctification described in [Second Corinthians 3:18](#),

2 Corinthians 3:18 2016 ESV

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

When Paul writes in [Philippians 2](#) that we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, because it is God who is at work in us, so that we will and work for His good pleasure ([Philippians 3:12-13](#)), he is speaking of the inseparable relationship between justification and sanctification.

When Jesus says that our highest priority is to seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, He is not saying that we have to figure out how to do this, or that we are on our own in the process, or even that success depends on us. He is calling us to live in faith, cooperating with the work of God in our lives.

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TRANSITION: Good definitions don't just state the positive; they state the negative as well. For instance, we **affirm** that Jesus Christ lived His entire life in holiness and righteousness – that's the positive – and we **deny** that Jesus ever sinned, even once – that's the negative.

ONE NEGATIVE COMMAND

So, Jesus gives us a positive command – **seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness** – followed by a negative command – **do not be anxious**. To make sure that we really understand, He repeats the command three times.

[Matthew 6:25](#) (2016 ESV) – 25 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.

[Matthew 6:31](#) (2016 ESV) – 31 Therefore **do not be anxious**, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

[Matthew 6:34](#) (2016 ESV) – 34 Therefore **do not be anxious** about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

We could unfold these three commands a little bit by saying that we are not to BE anxious in our hearts and minds, nor SPEAK our anxieties out loud, nor BORROW anxiety from tomorrow.

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TRANSITION: Jesus could have simply given these commands and been done with it – DO this, DON'T do that. But He came to make the Father fully known ([John 1:18](#)), and so He tells us WHY we are to seek God's Kingdom and righteousness, and WHY we are not to be anxious.

WHY?

Why make the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, rather than our earthly needs, our priority?

Because, [Matthew 6:25b](#) says, **life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing.**

If you have a secular worldview, you believe that the only life is physical life, and death puts a permanent end to it. But if you have a biblical worldview, you know that life is more than food, because life is also spiritual.

It's true that physical life requires food and water and shelter. But physical life is not the only life we have. We are also spiritual creatures. These physical bodies will one day die and be buried, and wait the resurrection.

But our spirits will not die; in fact, when our physical bodies die, Christians will immediately be brought into the presence of God ([Second Corinthians 5:1, 8](#)), and unbelievers will immediately be in a spiritual prison, awaiting judgment. Life IS more than food and water and clothing.

Why make the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, rather than our earthly needs, our priority?

Because of the love of God for all of His creation, and especially His elect.

[Matthew 6:26](#) (2016 ESV) — **26** 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?**

The Father takes care of every creature on earth. His love for His creation is clear and obvious. He makes provision for every creature. He loves human beings more than any other creatures, because only human beings are made in His image.

Why make the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, rather than our earthly needs, our priority?

Because fearing the wrong thing cannot help us.

[**Matthew 6:27**](#) (2016 ESV) — **27** And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?

The answer is “no one.” The opposite is true; someone who is in a constant state of anxiety will shorten their lives, from a human point of view. Our Creator-God has determined the number of days each one will live; no one will die one second before or after He has determined. But Jesus speaks from a human point of view, blind to the decrees of God, seeing only the effects of wise or foolish living. Can anyone lengthen their life by worry? No.

Why make the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, rather than our earthly needs, our priority?

Because, God cares for us in our earthly needs; anxiety is not only pointless, but faithless as well.

[**Matthew 6:28-30**](#) (2016 ESV) — **28** And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, **29** yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. **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?

Fuel was scarce in that region, and so people would gather up grasses and other plants, let them dry for a day in the desert heat, and then burn them to cook their food. God loves His creation, not just the creatures, but everything that He has made. God created flowers for beauty and for His pleasure, and even to provide for our needs. God clothes those flowers; won't He provide for us? Jesus presses the point, calling His disciples "O you of little faith?" Their own history showed them that the Father provided for His people in the wilderness; those people were also filled with anxiety about food and water, but God proved His love for them day in and day out.

Why make the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, rather than our earthly needs, our priority?

Because, our heavenly Father knows our needs; He created us to have these needs, and He has promised to meet them for His people.

[**Matthew 6:32 \(2016 ESV\)**](#) — **32** For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

Jesus takes us back to the Lord's prayer here, just a few verses earlier in Matthew 6:

[**Matthew 6:7-8 \(2016 ESV\)**](#) — **7** "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as **the Gentiles** do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. **8** Do not be like them, for **your Father knows what you need before you ask Him** [and then Jesus instructs us to simply ask] **give us this day our daily bread**

Clearly, the needs the Father knows about are not just spiritual or theoretical needs, but needs for actual, practical things, like food and water and clothing and shelter. The human race spends the bulk of its time working for food, water, clothing, and shelter. These needs are common to all. The very moment that Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden, those needs become their priority.

But our Father knows that we need these things. Even before we pray, He knows what we need. He cares for all of His creation, us included. When the people of Israel were in the wilderness, He met their needs by miracles. When they entered the promised land, He stopped raining bread from heaven and bringing water out of rocks, and met their needs by providence. He brought them into a land that would feed them, a land with plenty of water, a land where their flocks would provide clothing, a land where shelter was abundant.

So, why should we not be anxious about food and clothing and all the rest? Because life is more than food and clothing. Because God loves what He has created. Because the wrong fear cannot help us, it can only hurt us. Because God cares for our needs, making anxiety pointless and faithless. Because our Father knows that we need these things.

Life is not merely physical; it is spiritual.

Our spiritual need for the Kingdom of God and the righteousness of God is far more important than our needs for physical things.

Our need for food ends when our physical life ends.

Our need for the Kingdom of God and His righteousness will go on for all eternity.

BRINGING IT HOME

Let's bring this home to our lives today.

Jesus commands us to prioritize first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, seeking them first and foremost in our lives. That's our application. Life on earth is only a tiny part of life itself, and we must live for ALL of life, not just the physical part.

For all those who are afraid that giving God that kind of priority will cost them elsewhere, Jesus reassures us of the Father's love. He knows what we need before we ask. He knows what we need for life. He promises that God's care for us will be far greater than His care for creatures and flowers, since we are of far greater value.

What Jesus does not say is that we can stop being productive, and simply sit around waiting to be fed. Even in the wilderness, when manna from heaven was given to the people, they had to go out and gather it. Even when water was supplied from a rock, they had to come with their jars and pitchers and water bags to collect it. Even when Jesus multiplied fish and bread, the food had to be handed out.

God made us physical beings, and knows that we need food and water and clothing and shelter.

God made us spiritual beings, and knows that we need His Kingdom and His righteousness.

Here's the thing to consider: our need for the Kingdom of God and His righteousness is even greater than our need for the necessities of physical life.

Each of us is moving steadily toward our physical death. Each day gone by is one day less to live, one day closer to the grave.

But each one in Christ is also steadily moving toward the perfection of spiritual life. The days that go by do not reduce the days of eternal life in God's Kingdom. Remember the last stanza of *Amazing Grace* that we sang just a little while ago?

*When we've been there ten thousand years,
bright shining as the sun,
**we've no less days to sing God's praise
than when we'd first begun.***

Our Lord Jesus calls us to make eternal life our priority now, and not wait until our physical days are almost through.

Let's pray.