



For the last few weeks, in an attempt to put a little summer sunshine into your lives, I have been looking at passages from scripture that give some insights from nature. This morning, I want to continue along this path by using a very familiar passage from Matthew 6 but first, let me begin with a hike.

It was the summer after grade 11. I was living in Grande Cache (NE of Jasper) and working in a grocery store. It had been one of those stressful weeks and on one particular night, one of the other guys said, "I have had enough. I need a break; let's climb a mountain. So we grabbed our pack sacks and sleeping bags, drove as close as we could and then hiked the 6 kilometers to the mountain's base and began climbing around 8 o'clock at night. We hiked through the trees, climbing up the mountain trails as long as we could see to keep on going then we stopped, built a lean-to out of spruce branches in the dark and climbed into our sleeping bags. About 2 o'clock in the morning, it started to rain and it poured all night.

The next morning after a quick breakfast, we began to climb again; however, due to the rain, the trail was soaking wet and it wasn't long until we were sopping wet ourselves. (I am sure my down sleeping bag weighted 100 pounds!) Then, to make things worse, a deep fog rolled in and we were cold and miserable. Instead of the climb helping us forget our worries, we began to worry if we would see anything due to the thick fog. But we climbed on and on, hoping for a magnificent view from the top of the mountain. By the time we began scrambling up the last rock face we were soaked, the wind had picked up and we were chilled to the bone. And to make things even worse, the fog was so thick you couldn't see 20 feet in front of us. And then, as we broke over the ridge the wind shifted and the fog seemed to disappear. The sun came out. As we stood on the mountain top, we could see at least 60 kilometers in any direction; we could even see Mount Robson over 65 kilometers away! While we sat in the sun catching our breath, I saw these little blue flowers that were the most exquisite colors I had ever seen and there were little small Tiger Lilly shaped flowers that were growing between the cracks in the rock face that were breath-taking. It struck me that probably no one but God and us would see their beauty, smell their fragrance and be touched by their wonder. And as I sat on the ledge of the mountain, I was reminded of what Jesus had said on another mountain about some flowers He saw there.

You see, Jesus had traveled to the hilly area around the Sea of Galilee to get alone with His disciples, only to be followed by a huge crowd. So He sat down on the hillside and began to teach them about life, faith and God. In the middle of His talk, I believe a flock of sparrows flew over His head as He said, *"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these."* Matthew 6:25 – 29.

The issue Jesus was chasing is one we all know far too well; it is the issue of worry. Isn't it amazing, that as you come back from a relaxing holiday, once you get back home and/or back to the job how short a time it takes to wire up and feel the stress come back? Or you, as a student start getting your mind around hitting the books again

or as parents start thinking about how you will pay for the books, school fees and clothes - the worry seems to grow within you. Worry messes with our mind the way a computer virus or computer worm affects our computer. It seems to have the ability to not only mess up your mind (hard drive) but it seems to multiply and worm its way into the other areas of our life (system) and if allowed, to roam freely so it can paralyze us (shut down.) The Old English word for worry comes from the old German word Wurgen, which means to strangle. Worry is the self strangulation of the mind. The crazy thing about worry is that we do it to ourselves. No one else can cause us to be strangled or paralyzed by worry but we do it to ourselves.

Some of us here are world class, Hall of Fame Worriers. And while being concerned over many issues is not only understandable, it is at times necessary. Where concern looks for solutions, often worry gets stuck and only sees the problem. But to be honest, all of us worry. The ignorant worry because they don't know enough. The knowledgeable worry because they know too much. The Rich worry because they are worrying about losing what they have. The poor worry because they don't have enough. The old worry because they are afraid of facing death. And the young worry because they are afraid of facing life. We do it despite the fact that we know that worry doesn't change tomorrow. President Calvin Coolidge said, *"When you see trouble coming down the road, 9 times out of 10 it will run into the ditch before it reaches you."* However, if we are honest we know that worry is often the opposite of faith. And for many, worry saps our strength, pulls us away from God and can overtake us and take the joy out of our lives.

But it is one thing to tell me not to worry; it is something, all together, to tell me how to not worry. When it comes to working on winning over, worry I think is the way to look at it in a similar way to how an extreme skier needs to function. Extreme skiing is when you ski as fast as you can down hill through the trees. Tim Etchell, one of the best in the world at this, wrote, *"What you focus your eyes on becomes critic in the woods. Look at the spaces between the trees – the exits where you hope to be traveling. The secret is not to stare at what you don't want to hit. The issue is Focus. With practice and a little luck you'll soon be ripping through the tight trees without getting a mouth full of bark."* Let's go back to Jesus' view from the mountain because I think you will see that He is saying the very same thing. The way to win over worry has everything to do with FOCUS.

I. Focus on the fact that God will see you through not on the on the things that might happen. (The Father Factor)

Let's go back up the mountain again. I get this picture of Jesus as He speaks to the crowd about worry, mid-sentence having to duck as a flock of sparrows swoops over His head, Jesus begins to giggle and the crowd can't help but follow the sparrows flight up the mountain. And He adds, *'Look at those birds. Did you ever think that they never plant a crop, they never harvest a crop, put it in storage in case they will need it later and yet, who feeds them and takes care of them? God the Father does! And they are just sparrows, worth nothing compared to how your Father God views you. If God will care for little sparrows, don't you think you can trust Him to care for you?'* Then He throws in a little comment for them to think about, "Who of you by worrying can, at a single hour in your life, answer, "No one can!" (Someone once said that the only place worry will get you to faster, is the cemetery.)

With that fresh in their minds, Jesus bends over and picks up a mountain lily, holds it up and says Matthew 6:28 – 30, *“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?”* You see, the mountain lilies were pure white, shaped much like a poppy. When they bloomed they would cover the Palestine hillside with this beautiful carpet of white. However, often as the wind currents changed a hot desert wind would blow in from the other side of the Jordon River and within hours, all the lilies would wither away. Often, because of these desert winds, the life span of these beautiful lilies would only be one day long. Then their only use would be to be gathered up and used as kindling in the brick bake ovens because they would raise the temperature in the ovens very quickly.

The people who were listening to Jesus speak, knew these flowers were one day wonders but had a beauty which was beyond mankind’s ability to reproduce. For as Jesus noted, even King Solomon who was in Mr. Black’s list of best dressed in Israel for 40 years in a row, never wore anything more beautiful than the tiny flowers you find on the top of the mountain on your hike. With that knowledge in their minds and the lilies in His fingers, Jesus asked in verse 30, *“If God will clothe a flower with a one-day life expectancy like this, why would you not trust Him to take care of your clothing needs? (We could add one more little note. If God loves you enough to send His son to die for you, why would you think He would suffer and die for the same children He planned to neglect? - Of course He wouldn’t!)* It just doesn’t make sense that He would do all that and not continue to care for you. Then why do we struggle with the fact that He is interested in our lives personally?

i) It could be because we have a fairly low view of value and worth. I think that is why Jesus chose the lily, a one day blooming wonder, as His example. Who, if they could talk, would say, *“I wish I could be an oak sprout instead, so I could live for over 100 years, tower above the world and provide a home for bird and wood for houses, instead of being a one day wonder.”* I am not sure about you but some days I feel like a one day bloomer and I wish God had made me different, given me different gifts and talents, an easier job or a different responsibility. And then I come back to this passage and it hits me again that as wonderful as an oak tree is, it can’t hold a candle to what I experience when I crest the mountain and see before me the meadow filled with lilies or smell their fragrance and it somehow changes me in a way the oak tree never could. I am reminded that God sees me for who I am and if HE can celebrate with pride the fact that I am His child, so should I. I need to focus on my Father’s view and care for me. I need to see my value in my Father’s eyes and as I do that, I can trust Him more to carry me through those times when worry finds its foothold in my soul because I have forgot how special I am in His eyes.

A number of years ago I sat with a friend, who does therapy by using what he would describe as gentle hypnosis. I watched as he took a young lady, who suffered from self doubt and a lack of self esteem, in her mind down a hallway and introduced her to her heavenly Father and she sat on her Heavenly Father’s knee and told Him the story of his abuse and I watched as the tears came. I watched as the therapist (on behalf of God) said she was beautiful, loved her and that He was proud to call her His own. And when she left this session she was a new person as she had experienced the love of her Father. If you are feeling overwhelmed by worry because you feel like a one

day wonder or someone of suspect value, don't miss the Father Factor; look into His eyes and you will see a love and pride that will help you see that He loves you so much that you can trust your life to Him.

ii) Sometimes the reason we don't believe in God's care, is that while we may not question that we are more valuable to God than a one day flower or another sparrow, we see ourselves, as not being valuable as others who He needs to spend His time with. We may say that the Lord is our Shepherd. He leads me beside still water and makes me lie down in green pastures. But let's be honest, He has more important things and people to look after than ME and my life. We almost have built our own Cast System in our minds. For while God may be involved in a real way in Billy and Franklin Graham's lives and for sure in Joel Osteen and Kenneth Copland's life and work but we struggle with the fact that God would be that interested in our life, our struggle in calculus or our business situation. What this passage is saying is that God is completely interested in the details of our lives (the fact he uses food and clothes as examples tells us that!). He is interested in being the Visible Silent Partner in your business and being the one who walks with you as you struggle with calculus, finances, raising your kids or figuring out the complexities of living, love in your marriage and in your relationships, in all those things that make up your life. The thought is taught throughout the Bible.

Proverbs 3:5 – 6, *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”*

Matthew 10:29 – 31 - He cares so much about you that He is even interested in the intimate details of your life.

1 Peter 5:7, *“Cast all your anxieties upon Him for He cares for you.”*

Don't miss the fact that He is interested in you as a person and an individual but it is more than that - you are His child.

The other day we were playing a video I took of my son Mark's latest competition as part of the Calgary Stampede Marching Band. I realized as we watched the video that I hardly ever got a picture of the whole band as the focus of the camera was always zoomed in on one section - the drum line (the key component of the band, the heart of the band and the only part of the band that really mattered) because my eyes were first and foremost on my son, my child. The first thing we need to do to navigate through the trees of the situations of our lives is to focus on the fact that the Father sees you as having value, as much value as any one else around you. You are His child and He loves the fact that He is your Father. Focus first on the fact that God will see you through not on the things that 'might happen.' It is the Father Factor.

II. Focus on what you believe, rather than the 'what if.' (Focus Factor)

When it comes to worry, how many of you play movies in your mind, of all the bad things that could happen and you keep on looping the movie over and over? Be it worry about our health, our aging parents, our finances or our kids futures, it is easy to focus on the trees we may run into instead of the space between the trees that will help us find a safe passage through the obstacles in front of us. That is why Jesus says in verse 33, 34, *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”* He was saying as you focus on

what you believe, as you stay close to God and as you check in for orders from Him first thing in the morning - if you keep trying to get God's view on the situation, you will find it will save you from being strangled by worry. That is how David faced his Goliath in I Samuel 17:43 – 45. Where others saw a giant who could kill them, David saw a man dwarfed by the power of God. As David sought to 'seek for God's kingdom,' he saw his situation in a new light. He saw he had Goliath outnumbered two to one and power-wise, poor Goliath didn't stand a chance.

Do you know who was the only person in the New Testament that Jesus told not to worry? It was Martha in Luke 10:41, 42. Here was Martha, (the Martha Stewart of her day,) trying to make sure that everything that would be just perfect for Jesus and the disciples when they came for a visit to her house. So she was worrying that the house would be a mess, the roast would be sliced poorly, the gravy would be burnt and the table not set properly. She was like the man who tries to keep 20 plates all spinning at the right time and as she was doing that. The worry over took her and she never had a chance to sit and look into the face of Jesus. Jesus said to Martha, "You have taken your eyes off what is really important and the result is that worry has overtaken you and you have lost your hope and your joy. We often miss what happens when we allow worry to over take us. For if we are honest, when we get our focus on our worry, it is like when the fog rolls in and we lose sight of the love of our Heavenly Father. Did you know while fog can be scary and obscure our visions, there really isn't much water in it? In a seven-block radius with fog running 100 feet deep there is only 8 ounces of water (one cup full). Worry is like that; it can shut us down, hamper our future movement and often, there isn't really that much to it. The trick is to keep seeking first (looking first) at the one we trust.

There was a man working on a barge on the Mississippi who was carrying something under each arm when he slipped and fell off the ship. He cried for help, went under, back up yelling again and under he went under and came back up a third time and cried again, *"If someone doesn't help me, I am going to have to drop one of these heavy anvils."*

So here we are with a load of care under each arm, more than God ever wanted us to carry and we wonder why we keep going under. I found that happening to me again on Wednesday; it seemed that at every turn there was something else I was pushing through fog on and I started to worry about the sermon on worry. I even went to catch my breath in the foyer and someone else came my way with another situation. And I found myself having to say Lord just like when I was on the mountain, fogged in with no way to see the view around me, *"Let me place these issues back in your hands and please, as I seek you make a way clean for me to walk in. For I know you are God and as I seek you and what you want, it will be fine."* Jesus says remember to focus on what you believe rather than on what you can't see.

III. Focus on the fact that God is in control, not on what you can't control. (The Future Factor)

Isn't it amazing that despite the fact that God created us in such a way that we can only live in the present; we try to live either in the past or the future all the time? The way we can stay in the present is to claim the promises found in Matthew 6:32 – 34, *"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about*

itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” The promise is tomorrow will always take care of itself and God will always take care of you. And as I polled people from the first service which contains many people who have gone through so many different experiences, struggles, wars and transitions, with resounding assurance they collectively said, “He has been present, sufficient, present and caring one day at a time throughout my life. The weight of their testimony helps me trust my future to my Jesus. Someone said even if the cost of bread goes up to \$100 my God still has the recipe for manna.

Let me take you back to the mountain; don't miss the picture that it paints for you which is back in Matthew 6. Look over at that mountain outcrop that is covered with beautiful lilies and alpine flowers which has been gently cared for by the gracious hand of God. Remember the God who cares for the lilies cares even more for you. He loves you and desires to walk with you even through those things which cause you to worry. So Focus on the fact that God will see you through, not on the things that might happen. (Father Factor) Remember that as the fog of worry seems to be rising in your life, you need to, on purpose, seek first God and His kingdom for as you focus on what you believe, rather than the 'what if,' you, just like David, will gain a proper view of the real strengths of the giants you are facing. The result will be that as those who have known Jesus longer than you, will tell you to focus on the fact that God is in control, not on what you can't control. Jesus will be enough - one day at a time.

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