

All In: #8 “No Worries” – Luke 12:22-34

Jeremiah Ebeling – 10/23/2011

I am Jeremiah, pastor of the Student Ministries here at Grace. I know what you are thinking. I'm kind of bummed that Matt is not preaching today, too. So it is okay. But you know what? He will be here next week; I promise, Lord willing. This past week Matt has been preparing and studying for next year's sermon series. So, it is fun for me to be able to preach during this All In series. Hopefully, we will have a bit of fun together, too.

If you didn't hear last week's sermon on Luke 12, the first part of Luke 12, the parable, you really need to go back and listen to that sermon. In it, Jesus warns us about greed.

Then the passage we are going to be studying today is the very next passage in Luke 12 which is about worrying. What he is going to tell us about worry is that anxiety about life is going to keep you from being generous people. It is a reflection, an expression of a misunderstanding of the true character of your God. The thing about worry is that it is so easy to do, isn't it? There are so many different sources of anxiety in our lives.

People regularly remind us that we need to be worried and thinking and concerned about five, ten, fifteen years down the road. So if you are a freshman in high school, adults will come to you and ask: *So what are you going to do with the rest of your life?*

You are like: *I am trying to figure out whether to take regular or honors science; I don't know. I have no idea. Maybe I should know that. Oh boy. I have no idea what I am going to do with the rest of my life. What do I do now?*

Or you have a three-month old at home. People will literally ask you: *So you guys, are you going to home school or use private school or use public school? Have you thought about that yet?*

I'm going: *Gosh, I was just trying to figure out whether or not I should change her diaper now or wait an hour. But now that you mention it, I guess I need to figure this schooling issue out, right? Honey, we better sell the house because we have to move to a better neighborhood with a better school district – just in case. -- You start getting worried and freaked out.*

But it is not just about the future. You can get worried about finances, about safety, about all these things. They came out with this video baby monitor because it wasn't enough to lie awake at night listening to every sound that your child made over the sound monitor. Now you get a video and you can watch all night long, every move that your little one makes. – *Oh no, honey, I think he just twitched his nose. I better run in there and see how he is doing. I'll be right back.*

They have home security systems for our houses now with video surveillance trained on your front door, your back door and throughout your house, wherever you want it. They have this video that will stream live to your smart phone, real time, so that when you are not at home, you can be checking up on your house, making sure your house is okay, making sure your house is all safe and sound too – because we don't have enough worries in our lives, right. I have to see what is happening in my house every minute when I am not there.

These worries, these anxieties – yeah, they are easy to come by. But if you want to break free from them, if you want to live an anxiety-free life, this passage today that we are going to be studying is going to be key to that – to know how to have appropriate worry and fear in our lives and not inappropriate fear and worry. What you are going to find is that throughout the Bible, every time worry and anxiety are brought up, the solution to those problems, to those sins in our lives is a true understanding of the character of God, right belief about who God is. What Scripture is going to tell us is that the deeper our theology, the better we know who God really is, the less we are going to worry. The deeper your trust that God is strong and that God is kind, the less you are going to be freaked out about things 5, 10 or 15 years down the road and about the safety of your kids and even your home.

Let's look in Luke 12:22 and see what Jesus tells us about worry.

Luke 12:22 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear, for life is more than food and the body more than clothes....”

So Jesus is saying – Look, here is the truth. When you worry about food and clothing and provisions, these things that you even need in your life, when you get anxious and freaked out about these things, it is evidence of a heart that is in the wrong place. He says: Don't be concerned about these things because life is more than food and the body is more than clothing.

If you have ever seen a one-year old open a gift, it is a little how that one-year old would treat t his gift. They will rip this paper off but once they have the wrapping paper off, they are not concerned about what is in this box. They don't care what present is in here. They get the wrapping paper off and this is all they want to play with. They will spend 30 minutes or an hour just goofing off with some wrapping paper. You have this great outfit that you have made for them or bought just for them. They could not care less. So you pull it out and say: But look at this outfit I got for you. Happy Birthday. The kid is like: Okay, great – playing with the wrapping paper again. --- They don't care about that outfit.

Jesus says: Hey look, don't be like a one-year old. Don't be concerned about the wrapping paper of life: What you are going to eat, what you are going to wear. Don't worry about those things. These

provision – the Father knows what you need. There is this gift inside that you are missing because this is what you are playing with, all you care about, what you think about. It is what keeps you worried and up at night. So just settle down. Don't get so distracted by wrapping paper.

This one-year old, maybe she grows up to be a 24-year old young lady and she has had a boyfriend for about 3 years. He gets down on one knee and says: *I love you. I want to spend the rest of my life with you.* – Then he holds out this small gift for her. She takes that gift and this huge smile is on her face as she starts unwrapping it. She opens up the box and takes the ring out and hands the ring back to you and says: *Wow, look at this wrapping paper! It is beautiful. And this box is such a cute little box that you put that ring in. Thanks. You know what? This wrapping paper, I know where I am going to put it. I am going to put it on my wall. Remember that picture of us at the beach that we like so much? I am going to hang it right there next to that picture. Thanks so much for this wrapping paper. Oh sure, yeah, I will marry you but, man, this wrapping paper, this box – thanks so much!*

This is not a funny moment for you. This is not entertaining. You are not amused by this. This is highly concerning behavior because she has missed the fact that there is a diamond ring in this wrapping paper, in this little box. She is consumed by this wrapping paper.

You think: this is not a Kodak moment. I am not going to be getting a picture of this moment.

My wife – no one has ever come up to her and when looking at her engagement ring or wedding ring said: So, what kind of wrapping paper did this come in? What did the box look like that your now-husband gave this ring to you in? – No one has ever asked that because no one cares. It is not that important. It is not what matters.

Jesus says: Hey look. Don't do that with your life. Don't get all worried and anxious about wrapping paper, the stuff you are going to eat, the clothes you are going to wear, the things that you need. God knows you need those things. So you don't have to get stressed and worried or spend your time thinking and even praying about the wrapping paper of life. Don't get caught up there. Life is much bigger than that. Stop worrying about where you live, the size of your house, or the size of your bank account. Just stop being concerned with those things. Let's focus on what matters. Your God is strong and He is kind and He knows you need those things. He is going to provide them.

Jesus is going to move on next to talk to us about expressions of God's strength and His benevolence in the animal kingdom.

Luke 12:24 "Consider the ravens; they don't sow or reap. They have no storeroom or barn. Yet God feeds them. How much more valuable you are than birds."

He is being humorous with us here. He is saying: Look, you want to know what a worry-free life looks like? Do this. Go spend a little bit of time at your kitchen window and just watch the birds. Watch this raven that is not frantically flying around looking for his next meal. He is not freaked out about some tragedy happening as if he has to store up food for next month. God provides for that bird, for that raven. God cares about you more than He does about birds, of course. So He will provide for you too.

It is interesting that Jesus chose the raven to talk about because for the Jews, ravens were unclean birds. They were a disgusting bird to these people that Jesus is talking to. Even now, when you drive home today from church, you keep an eye out. There are some houses out there that for some strange reason for Halloween, they are going to decorate their front yards like cemeteries with creepy tombstones and you will see on one of those lawns something like this – a raven.

Jesus says: Look at that raven. Just watch him. That unclean bird that symbolizes death, God cares for that bird. He cares for you a lot more than He cares for that bird. So why are you so worked up, so freaked out. Just settle down.

For us, it may be more like Jesus says: You want to know that your God is strong? You want to trust that He is kind and that He will take care of the needs in your life? If you want to trust that, just take a look at a vulture. That is an ugly bird, a disgusting creature. I have never met somebody who said: Hey, you want to meet my pet vulture? People don't keep vultures for pets because they are dirty, nasty, ugly, smelly birds. But God takes care of vultures, those ugly animals. And He will take care of you too.

So if you are all worked up or freaking out about the wrapping paper in your life, if that is what is consuming you, then do this. Next time you see a vulture circling over some road kill, you just think: God just provided lunch for a vulture and He will take care of me too.

If you have medical bills that are piling up and you are thinking – I have no idea, God, how I am ever going to be able to afford this. – And you are getting worked up and stressed out about it and find yourself worried and anxious – do you know what God wants you to do? Walk outside, find a vulture circling in the sky over lunch and you remember that your God who is strong, and who is kind knows what you need. He is going to provide for you. He just provided lunch for a vulture. Of course, He is going to take care of you.

Maybe He has a raise coming that you don't know about, or one of His really generous children is going to offer to help you out with some of those bills, or the hospital is going to forgive some of them. God is going to do something, if not now, then eventually. He will because God takes care of birds and He loves you a lot more than He does birds. So just settle down and stop worrying so much.

In this next verse, Jesus is going to give us a hard time. He is messing with us a little. This is what He says:

Luke 12:25 “Who have you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?”

He is saying this tongue-in-cheek. *Let me ask you a question, okay? All this worrying about life that you are doing – how is that working for you? Is that helping anything? Has it fixed any problems? No, of course not. So stop doing that. Let’s cut that out.*

Being a guy who finds it easy to worry, I know that worry just makes me irritable. It does not make me a fun person to be around. I don’t even like being around myself when I am worrying.

Jesus says: You can’t add a single hour to your life by worrying. In fact, you are probably losing hours on your life by worrying. So cut it out. Stop being so anxious.

Then He moves from the animal to the plant kingdom – again to say, your God is strong and He is kind. He is going to take care of you.

Luke 12:27 “Look at the flowers. Consider how the wildflowers grow. They don’t 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, how much will He clothe you, you of little faith?”

He says: Look, just watch some flowers. They are not laboring or spinning. They are not worried about what they are going to be wearing the next day. They are not concerned if they will have enough clothes to make it to next month. But that flower that pops up in the spring is dead by winter. God cares for that flower though. It is prettier than Solomon ever was on his wedding days. God cares for that flower and makes sure that flower is beautiful. He will take care of you. You don’t need to be anxious.

If you have been single for a few years longer than you thought you would be, and you are growing concerned and anxious: God, are You ever going to bring somebody into my life that loves You? I want that kind of person. Why wouldn’t You give that kind of person to me – someone who is going to love me for the rest of my life? --- If you find yourself growing more and more worried about that, do you know what God would say to you? He would say: Just walk outside. I want you to spend some time with some flowers.

If you are a guy, I wouldn’t consider doing this in public necessarily. But that is what Jesus is telling us to do. Hang out with some flowers and you watch those flowers. They are not going to be stressed or worried but they are better dressed than anybody you have ever seen. God cares and takes care of flowers and He is going to take care of you too. You don’t need to worry.

Do you know what worrying does? Worrying is just going to encourage you to say desperate, crazy things on first dates like: *Do you think this is going to work? Are we going to get married here or what is going to happen?* Jesus says: Trust God. He takes care of flowers and He is going to take care of you. He loves you a lot more than He loves flowers so just settle down.

He moves from animals and plants and then starts talking about pagans.

Luke 12:29 “And don’t set your heart on what you eat and drink. Don’t worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things. And your Father knows that you need them.”

So, it is like: Guys, all this worrying, all this anxiety you are experiencing is just like the pagan world. They worry a lot, about whether they are going to be provided for. Do you know why? Because they don’t think that God is strong or kind. They don’t even think about God. They are living consistent with their worldview but what about you? You know He is strong and kind. You know that He knows what you need. So let’s stop praying like pagans. Come on, guys, are you listening?

Then He answers the question: Okay, if I am not supposed to be concerned with wrapping paper, or anxious and praying about spending all my time on these kinds of things in my life, this wrapping paper and box, but I am supposed to be concerned about the gift that is inside of that wrapping paper. Then what am I supposed to be praying about? What am I supposed to be concerned about? What is this gift?

He answers that question next in verse 31.

Luke 12:31 “But seek His kingdom and these things will be given to you as well. But don’t be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.”

You see, when we stop focusing on the wrapping paper of life, then we can care about what matters most, about what God cares about – about the diamond ring that came in that wrapping paper. We can seek God’s kingdom.

So in our prayer life even, what that might look like is we are not spending all this time concerned and worried about what we are going to eat. We are going to be concerned about the tenderness of our soul, asking God: Heal my soul. Instead of being worried about what we are going to be wearing, and this fabric that clothes our bodies, we will be asking God to keep our spirits close to Him and connected to Him. These are the kinds of things we will be praying for. We are seeking God’s kingdom. We are not getting distracted by wrapping paper and so we are able to seek what matters most. We are able to seek God’s kingdom in our lives and in the lives of the people around us.

So this is maybe what it would look like. Do you remember our friend from last week’s passage? He finds his audience with Jesus. He has one shot with Jesus and what does he say to Him? He says:

Teacher, would you tell my brother to give me my share of the inheritance? – Do you know what? I don't know that request was sinful. This guy was owed that inheritance and I bet he has old bills he could pay off if he got his share of the inheritance. It wasn't a bad request but it wasn't a request about what matters most. It just wasn't all that important.

Here is maybe a prayer that is seeking God's kingdom for this guy. He would be going to this teacher, to Jesus, asking: Teacher, look. Would You please help? I am really concerned for my brother because his greed is growing; it is getting worse. Now he has gotten to the point where he is willing to split our whole family so that he can pad his savings account. I am concerned for his soul, that greed is taking over. Would You help him, Jesus?

You see, that is a kingdom type of prayer. That is seeking God's kingdom in the life of his brother.

So, if you have a daughter who is lonely and she has not had a date for a very long time and she is wondering why guys don't ask her out. Don't spend all your concern and all your prayers that God would bring her a really nice boyfriend. Don't do that. Like Jesus would say, that is wrapping paper.

Here is what you need to be praying for you daughter. Pray that during this time of loneliness that she will fall in love with Jesus Christ. Pray that God will use this difficult experience in her life to bond her with Jesus in such a way that it will last for the rest of her life. That is praying these kingdom prayers for your daughter.

If you have health problems and you find your thoughts and your prayer requests all have to do and are centered around what is going on with your body, Jesus says: Hey look, spend less time thinking about it and asking people to be praying for those health issues and do this. Start asking people if they would pray that God would use this experience, this time to be healing what is wrong in your soul, to be growing you into somebody who is more Christ like, to give you a soul that is courageous and that is joy-filled and that is sensitive to God's Spirit. See, don't be concerned about wrapping paper. Don't spend all your time there. Yeah, it isn't that it is not important at all but it just doesn't matter all that much.

Pray these kingdom prayers for yourself. – He says: Don't get distracted by all these temporal things so that you miss the eternal, what is really happening, miss what I really care about.

I think we could learn a lot from how a lion is tamed. If you have ever been to a circus, you have seen that a lion tamer carries three things with him. He carries a gun; he carries a whip; he carries a stool. We know what the gun and whip are for – that is if things are not going as smoothly as planned. But how about that stool? Why does he carry that stool? Well, what he will use that stool for is to hold that stool up and those four legs are going to be facing that lion. What happens is that the lion will try to concentrate on

all four of those legs at the same time and he can't do it. So he gets paralyzed because he cannot decide which of those legs to attack first. So he just freezes and stands there. This lion gets distracted from the essential thing that lions do, namely eating the soft, chewy object right in front of him. He loses that because he is distracted by the four legs on this stool – and it works. This lion gets tamed. Then all this lion tamer has to do is just crack a whip and this lion is doing these goofy little useless tricks and he is not doing what lions are made to do.

I think that is how Satan works with you and I, oftentimes. I think what Satan and even our culture does is hold this stool up – these four legs that get us distracted, get us worried and anxious about wrapping paper, about the stuff that is not all that important. What that does is consume us and distracts us from what we need to be caring about. So Satan will whisper things to us like: Hey, how much money did you say you have in your savings account? Are you sure that's enough? You might want to think about that a little bit more. Or, how about your kids? Are you sure they are really safe at that school because it is a dangerous world out there. You may want to consider that a little bit more, too. Or, your neighbor who just drove home in that brand new car, are you sure you are content with that car you bought ten years ago? --- He gets us worried, anxious, distracted by the legs of this stool. What happens is just like that lion, we become tame and we miss out on the essential thing that God made us to do – to seek His kingdom -- because we are distracted.

So your friends will say to you: what happened to you? You used to roar like a lion. You used to pray about eternal things, that really mattered. You talked about those things. But you are all tied up, wrapped up in worries and anxieties and you are tame. What happened to you?

Jesus says: Don't let that happen. Don't become that tame lion. You are just stuck like sitting up on a chair with your paws in the air – or balancing a beach ball on your nose. You are this big kitten instead of what God made you to be – a lion. Don't get distracted by that stool. You focus and seek God's kingdom.

Jesus says: If you will remember that your God is strong, that He is kind and that He has you covered, He knows what you need and He will provide for what you need because He does that for birds and for flowers. If you will remember that, then do you know what that will do for you? It won't just free you from worry. It is going to free you to be a generous person. It is going to free you to take the stuff that God has given you and spread it out and give it to people who need it.

That is what He says in verse 33.

Luke 12:33 “Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

So it is fun how this works out. This is what happens. When we take the wrapping paper in our lives, when we take this stuff and realize it is just not all that important, it is not what matters, it is the gift that came in the wrapping paper that matters. When we realize that, we will take that wrapping paper and we will give it away. We will give it to people who need it. We will give it to the poor because we realize what it is – just wrapping paper. We don't have to be consumed by that. What then happens is that God uses that wrapping paper to feed people who need food, to clothe people who don't have clothes, to provide for people's needs. These people who He has also promised – You don't need to worry about life. You don't need to worry about these things you need because your Father knows. He is strong and kind and He knows what you need and He will provide for you. What He does is use our wrapping paper to provide for people who need it. – He says: I have a family down there at Grace Covenant Church right now and I am working on their hearts. They are about to realize that this stuff they are so concerned about and worried about oftentimes that it is just wrapping paper. They are going to be giving it to you. I am going to use them to feed you and to clothe you and to help you out where you need it. God uses us. When we live generously, He uses us to show other people His strength and His goodness. That is fun, isn't it?

So, look, at Grace Covenant Church, let's not be consumed by wrapping paper. Let's not be focused on this kind of stuff in our lives, the stuff we are going to eat, what we are going to wear. Let's not worry about that. Let's be concerned about God's kingdom. Let's be a church that pursues being All In with Jesus, that seeks what God desires in our souls, in the souls of people around us. Wouldn't that be fun to be that kind of church?

I want to ask you to do this one last thing. I want you to think about the last two weeks of prayers that you have prayed. If you can, think about every single one of those prayers that you prayed over the last two weeks. Let me ask you this. In fifty years, how many of those prayers that you have prayed in the last two weeks, how many of them will matter. If they are prayers about wrapping paper, if they are prayers about getting that promotion or being able to take that trip or avoiding that sickness, they are not going to matter in 50 years. But if those are prayers about being All In with God, if those prayers are kingdom-type prayers for us, for our families, for our church family, for each other – if they are those kinds of prayers, if they are prayers that God's will would be done in our souls and in our lives, that His

kingdom would come and that would be realized in our presence – those prayers won't just last for fifty more years. They will last forever, for eternity. So let's pray those kingdom prayers here at Grace.

Let's pray one of those kingdom prayers right now. What don't you bow your heads and say to God whatever He has put on your heart. If you have something you would like to share with Him then do that now. If you would like to ask Him to help you in some way, do that now. But pray one of those kingdom prayers based on what He is doing in your life right now. Say that to Him and then I will close us.

Heavenly Father: We ask that You would bring these kinds of concerns, Lord, the desire, the searching for your kingdom, into our hearts and mind, that they would pervade us so that we are not consumed and distracted by these other things you know about. You have told us You will provide for us because You are a strong God and You are a kind God.

Lord, I pray we would not live shallow and anxious lives but that we would know that You love us more than flowers. You care for us more than You do birds. I pray we would know that and trust that and that we would rest in that, Lord. We pray You would free us from worry that seems to hang us up like a piñata and just beat us. Don't let that happen to us, please.

Then I pray that You would give us generous hearts. I pray we would use the things that You have entrusted to us and the wrapping paper in our lives, that we would use that to bless other people and give to the poor and to people in need so that You can show them your strength and your kindness and your provision as well. We pray You would use us in that way, Lord – in Jesus' name. Amen