



The Sermon on the Mount Study
Bible Study Session 20
Matthew 6:25-34

Study By
Lorin L. Cranford
cranfordville.com

Greek NT

25 Διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν· μημεριμᾶτε τῆ ψυχῇ ὑμῶν τί φάγητε, μηδὲ τῷ σώματι ὑμῶν τί ἐνδύσθησθε· οὐχὶ ἡ ψυχὴ πλεῖον ἐστὶ τῆς τροφῆς καὶ τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ἐνδύματος; 26 ἐμβλέψατε εἰς τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὅτι οὐ σπεύρουσιν οὐδὲ θερίζουσιν οὐδὲ συνάγουσιν εἰς ἀποθήκας, καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος τρέφει αὐτά· οὐχ ὑμεῖς μᾶλλον διαφέρετε αὐτῶν; 27 τίς δὲ ἐξ ὑμῶν μεριμνῶν δύναται προσθεῖναι ἐπὶ τὴν ἡλικίαν αὐτοῦ πῆχυν ἓνα; 28 καὶ περὶ ἐνδύματος τί μεριμνᾶτε; καταμάθετε τὰ κρίνα τοῦ ἀγροῦ πῶς αὐξάνουσιν· οὐ κοπιῶσιν οὐδὲ νήθουσιν· 29 λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐδὲ Σολομῶν ἐν πάσῃ τῇ δόξῃ αὐτοῦ περιεβάλετο ὡς ἓν τούτων. 30 εἰ δὲ τὸν χόρτον τοῦ ἀγροῦ σήμερον ὄντα καὶ αὔριον εἰς κλίβανον βαλλόμενον ὁ θεὸς οὕτως ἀμφιένυσσιν, οὐ πολλῶ μᾶλλον ὑμᾶς, ὀλιγόπιστοι; 31 μὴ οὖν μεριμνήσητε λέγοντες· Τί φάγωμεν; ἢ· Τί πίωμεν; ἢ· Τί περιβαλώμεθα; 32 πάντα γὰρ ταῦτα τὰ ἔθνη ἐπιζητοῦσιν· οἶδεν γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος ὅτι χρῆζετε τούτων ἀπάντων. 33 ζητεῖτε δὲ πρῶτον τὴν βασιλείαν καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ, καὶ ταῦτα πάντα προστεθήσεται ὑμῖν. 34 μὴ οὖν μεριμνήσητε εἰς τὴν αὔριον, ἢ γὰρ αὔριον μεριμνήσει αὐτῆς· ἀρκετὸν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἡ κακία αὐτῆς.

**La Biblia
de las Américas**

25 Por eso os digo, no os preocupéis por vuestra vida, qué comeréis o qué beberéis; ni por vuestro cuerpo, qué vestiréis. ¿No es la vida más que el alimento y el cuerpo más que la ropa? 26 Mirad las aves del cielo, que no siembran, ni siegan, ni recogen en graneros, y sin embargo, vuestro Padre celestial las alimenta. ¿No sois vosotros de mucho más valor que ellas? 27 ¿Y quién de vosotros, por ansioso que esté, puede añadir una hora al curso de su vida? 28 Y por la ropa, ¿por qué os preocupáis? Observad cómo crecen los lirios del campo; no trabajan, ni hilan; 29 pero os digo que ni Salomón en toda su gloria se vistió como uno de éstos. 30 Y si Dios viste así la hierba del campo, que hoy es y mañana es echada al horno, ¿no hará mucho más por vosotros, hombres de poca fe? 31 Por tanto, no os preocupéis, diciendo: “¿Qué comeremos?” o “¿qué beberemos?” o “¿con qué nos vestiremos?” 32 Porque los gentiles buscan ansiosamente todas estas cosas; que vuestro Padre celestial sabe que necesitáis todas estas cosas. 33 Pero buscad primero su reino y su justicia, y todas estas cosas os serán añadidas. 34 Por tanto, no os preocupéis por el día de mañana; porque el día de mañana se cuidará de sí mismo. Bástele a cada día sus propios problemas.

NRSV

25 Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. 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 can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? 28 And why do you worry 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 clothed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not worry, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” 32 For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

NLT

25 So I tell you, don’t worry about everyday life -- whether you have enough food, drink, and clothes. Doesn’t life consist of more than food and clothing? 26 Look at the birds. They don’t need to plant or harvest or put food in barns because your heavenly Father feeds them. And you are far more valuable to him than they are. 27 Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? Of course not. 28 And why worry about your clothes? Look at the lilies and how they grow. They don’t work or make their clothing, 29 yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. 30 And if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, won’t he more surely care for you? You have so little faith! 31 So don’t worry about having enough food or drink or clothing. 32 Why be like the pagans who are so deeply concerned about these things? Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs, 33 and he will give you all you need from day to day if you live for him and make the Kingdom of God your primary concern. 34 So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

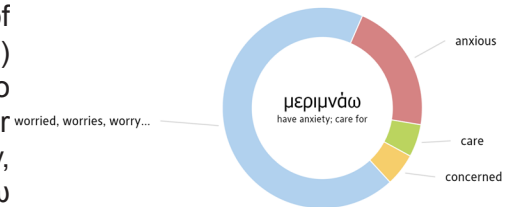
The Outline of the Text:¹

One of the scourges of modern western society is worry! Westerners worry about almost everything. My home is not nice enough. My car is not new enough. My kids are not smart enough. My job is not secure enough. I don't earn enough money. I don't have enough friends with the right connections to my career. With the recent global financial crisis we worry about economic collapse in our country. With crime and violence running seemingly unchecked on the streets we worry about the safety of our family. Seemingly the more we possess the more we worry.

What's the answer? Most Westerners look to things and other people beyond themselves for the solution to worry. If the government would come down harder on the criminals my family would be safer. If I could just get that promotion at work I would have enough money. Typically in this materialistic age of ours, the answer to worry is seen in gaining more. This is the only way to satisfy the 'not enough' cravings!

But Jesus had an entirely different answer that genuinely addresses the dangers of worry. Matthew 6:25-34 speaks to this concern as His elaboration on the fourth petition of the model prayer (Mt. 6:11): "Give us this day our daily bread." When we ask God to take care of the basic needs of daily living, we have an obligation to not worry or fret over gaining them. Rather, we reach out to God in unconditional confidence that He will take care of our needs.

What is worry? The English word 'worry' carries several shades of meaning.² But meanings 4 (to afflict with mental distress or agitation: make anxious) and 3 (to feel or experience concern or anxiety: fret) in the list are appropriate to our study of worry. To worry is to experience mental distress, concern or anxiety. The question arises, as one should always ask it in Bible study, about how close is the English word 'worry' to the biblical word μεριμνάω used by Matthew in our passage?³ The BAGD lexicon listing suggests the Greek word gets close to the English word 'worry' here. The one difference is that μεριμνάω inherently intensifies the worrying experience more than the English word 'worry' usually suggests. What Jesus talks about here can be labeled 'undue worry.' Repeatedly He forbids His followers from engaging in such.



The close parallel in Luke 12:22-31 augments our study of Matthew's text:

22 He said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. 23 For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. 24 Consider the ravens: they neither

¹Serious study of the biblical text must look at the 'then' meaning, i.e., the historical meaning, and the 'now' meaning, i.e., the contemporary application, of the scripture text. In considering the historical meaning, both elements of literary design and historical aspects must be considered. In each study we will attempt a summary overview of these procedures in the interpretation of the scripture text.

²*Merriam-Webster online dictionary: transitive verb*: 1. dialect British: choke, strangle; 2. a: to harass by tearing, biting, or snapping especially at the throat, b: to shake or pull at with the teeth <a terrier worrying a rat>, c: to touch or disturb something repeatedly, d: to change the position of or adjust by repeated pushing or hauling; 3. a: to assail with rough or aggressive attack or treatment: torment, b: to subject to persistent or nagging attention or effort; 4. to afflict with mental distress or agitation: make anxious.

intransitive verb: 1. dialect British: strangle, choke; 2. to move, proceed, or progress by unceasing or difficult effort: struggle; 3. to feel or experience concern or anxiety: fret <worrying about his health>.

— wor-ried-ly adverb; — wor-ri-er noun; — wor-ry-ing-ly adverb

Even more helpful is the *M-W Learner's Dictionary* definition: "to think about problems or fears; to feel or show fear and concern because you think that something bad has happened or could happen."

³μεριμνάω fut. μεριμνήσω; 1 aor. ἐμερίμνησα (μέριμνα; since Soph., Oed. Rex 1124; X., Pla. et al.; pap, LXX; ParJer 6:15; EpArist 296; SibOr 3, 222; 234; Just., A I, 25, 2).

1. to be apprehensive, have anxiety, be anxious, be (unduly) concerned (PTebt 315, 9 [II A.D.] γράφω ὅπως μὴ μεριμνήῃς; Ps 37:19) μηδὲν have no anxiety Phil 4:6 (WWeeda, Philipp. 4:6 en 7: TSt 34, 1916, 326–35). περί τινος Mt 6:28; Lk 12:26; Dg 9:6. W. indir. question foll.: πῶς ἢ τί λαλήσητε about how you are to speak or what you are to say Mt 10:19; cp. Lk 12:11 (cp. ParJer 6:15 τὸ πῶς ἀποστειλῆς πρὸς Ἰερεμίαν). W. dat. and a question foll. μὴ μεριμνᾶτε τῇ ψυχῇ (dat. of advantage: for your life, B-D-F §188, 1; Rob. 539) ὑμῶν τί φάγητε Mt 6:25; Lk 12:22. Abs. Mt 6:31; in ptc. (s. Mt. 230) Mt 6:27; Lk 12:25. Beside θορυβάζεσθαι περί πολλά of the distracting cares of housekeeping 10:41 (the text is uncertain; s. Zahn and EKlostermann, also FStrahl, Krit. u. exeget. Beleuchtung von Lk 10:41f. SchTZ 4, 1887, 116–23). εἰς τὴν αὔριον do not worry about tomorrow Mt 6:34a.

2. to attend to, care for, be concerned about τὶ someth. (Soph., loc. cit.; cp. Bar 3:18) τὰ τοῦ κυρίου the Lord's work 1 Cor 7:32; 34a. τὰ τοῦ κόσμου vss. 33, 34b. τὰ περί τινος someone's welfare Phil 2:20. ἢ αὔριον μεριμνήσει ἑαυτῆς will look after itself (Itala 'sibi'.—B-D-F §176, 2; Rob. 509) Mt 6:34b (v.l. τὰ ἑαυτῆς care about its own concerns). τί ὑπὲρ τινος: ἵνα τὸ αὐτὸ ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων μεριμνῶσιν τὰ μέλη that the parts may have the same concern for one another 1 Cor 12:25.—DELG s.v. μέριμνα. M-M. TW.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 632.]

sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! 25 And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? 26 If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? 27 Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. 28 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you — you of little faith! 29 And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. 30 For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31 Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

22 Εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ· Διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν, μὴ μεριμνᾶτε τῇ ψυχῇ τί φάγητε, μηδὲ τῷ σώματι τί ἐνδύσθησθε. 23 ἡ γὰρ ψυχὴ πλεῖον ἐστὶν τῆς τροφῆς καὶ τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ἐνδύματος. 24 κατανοήσατε τοὺς κόρακας ὅτι οὐ σπεύρουσιν οὐδὲ θερίζουσιν, οἷς οὐκ ἔστιν ταμεῖον οὐδὲ ἀποθήκη, καὶ ὁ θεὸς τρέφει αὐτούς· πόσω μᾶλλον ὑμεῖς διαφέρετε τῶν πετεινῶν. 25 τίς δὲ ἐξ ὑμῶν μεριμνῶν δύναται ἐπὶ τὴν ἡλικίαν αὐτοῦ προσθεῖναι πῆχυν; 26 εἰ οὖν οὐδὲ ἐλάχιστον δύνασθε, τί περὶ τῶν λοιπῶν μεριμνᾶτε; 27 κατανοήσατε τὰ κρίνα πῶς αὐξάνει· οὐ κοπιᾷ οὐδὲ νήθει· λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν, οὐδὲ Σολομῶν ἐν πάσῃ τῇ δόξῃ αὐτοῦ περιεβάλετο ὡς ἐν τούτων. 28 εἰ δὲ ἐν ἀγρῷ τὸν χόρτον ὄντα σήμερον καὶ αὔριον εἰς κλίβανον βαλλόμενον ὁ θεὸς οὕτως ἀμφιέζει, πόσω μᾶλλον ὑμᾶς, ὀλιγόπιστοι. 29 καὶ ὑμεῖς μὴ ζητεῖτε τί φάγητε καὶ τί πίητε, καὶ μὴ μετεωρίζεσθε, 30 ταῦτα γὰρ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τοῦ κόσμου ἐπιζητοῦσιν, ὑμῶν δὲ ὁ πατὴρ οἶδεν ὅτι χρήζετε τούτων. 31 πλὴν ζητεῖτε τὴν βασιλείαν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ταῦτα προστεθήσεται ὑμῖν.

Luke follows a similar organizing pattern to that found in Matthew, but with occasional variation of wording, e.g., ‘birds of the air’ becomes ‘ravens.’ As can be frequently noticed, Luke places these sayings of Jesus in a different context more appropriate to his targeted readership. Yet, the basic meaning remains pretty much the same.

Following the threefold natural division of the text from Matthew, our study will focus on three aspects of worrying. If we take these to heart and put them into practice, the problem of worry will be permanently solved in our life. Plus our prayer life will be greatly strengthened.

I. Don't worry; look at nature, vv. 25-30.

25 Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. 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 can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? 28 And why do you worry 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 clothed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?

25 Διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν· **μὴ μεριμνᾶτε** τῇ ψυχῇ ὑμῶν τί φάγητε, μηδὲ τῷ σώματι ὑμῶν τί ἐνδύσθησθε· οὐχὶ ἡ ψυχὴ πλεῖον ἐστὶ τῆς τροφῆς καὶ τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ἐνδύματος; 26 ἐμβλέψατε εἰς τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὅτι οὐ σπεύρουσιν οὐδὲ θερίζουσιν οὐδὲ συνάγουσιν εἰς ἀποθήκας, καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος τρέφει αὐτά· οὐχ ὑμεῖς μᾶλλον διαφέρετε αὐτῶν; 27 τίς δὲ ἐξ ὑμῶν **μεριμνῶν** δύναται προσθεῖναι ἐπὶ τὴν ἡλικίαν αὐτοῦ πῆχυν ἓνα; 28 καὶ περὶ ἐνδύματος **τί μεριμνᾶτε**; καταμάθετε τὰ κρίνα τοῦ ἀγροῦ πῶς αὐξάνουσιν· οὐ κοπιῶσιν οὐδὲ νήθουσιν· 29 λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐδὲ Σολομῶν ἐν πάσῃ τῇ δόξῃ αὐτοῦ περιεβάλετο ὡς ἐν τούτων. 30 εἰ δὲ τὸν χόρτον τοῦ ἀγροῦ σήμερον ὄντα καὶ αὔριον εἰς κλίβανον βαλλόμενον ὁ θεὸς οὕτως ἀμφιένυσσιν, οὐ πολλῶ μᾶλλον ὑμᾶς, ὀλιγόπιστοι;

Just as the fourth petition of the model prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread,” grows out of the focus on God in the first three petitions, this elaboration on that petition grows out of the three previous elaborations in 6:19-24.⁴ This is highlighted by the solemn declaration introducing this material, Διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν. It is after we get

⁴Again, this is the best way to avoid the mistake of many, many commentators who see 6:19-24 as built around an anti-materialism theme. Jesus railing against things is not the organizing topic of these verses. By taking this stance, commentators fail to note adequately the controlling theme of devotion to God. And thus the discussion in affluent western society circles degenerates into just how bad materialism is. Somehow well dressed commentators sitting at beautiful mahogany wood desks writing such words has a very hallow ring! In less affluent western society, this mistaken assessment of these verses opens the door for liberation theology’s castigation of western capitalistic economic policy. Jesus is seen as condemning western capitalism philosophy in favor of liberation theology. Jesus wasn’t a professor of economics! Neither was He interested in economic theory. Rather, He was focused solely on commitment to God as the exclusive devotion of His disciples, knowing that when this was properly in place the secondary physical needs would take care of themselves in a way that nourished spiritual growth, rather than destroyed it. He was calling His followers to the same commitment to God that Moses had done with the children of Israel in the Sinai desert centuries before (cf. Exod. 20:1-6, “1 Then God spoke all these words: 2 I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; 3 you shall have no other gods before me. 4 You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, 6 but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

our attention properly focused on God that we can turn to needs in our life as a request to be lifted up to God. If we reverse this pattern our praying become egocentric and treats God as someone to give us what we want -- a sure fire recipe for non-answered prayer.

Jesus issues the command **μὴ μεριμνᾶτε τῇ ψυχῇ ὑμῶν**. This is the first of three uses (see bold print above) of this verb in this section. All three instances are in the Greek present tense form, which has distinctive meaning: 1) don't be worrying; 2) by worrying; 3) why are you worrying? Jesus begins by disallowing worry as an ongoing trait of living. All of us have known 'worriers,' that is people, for whom worrying is a dominating characteristic of how they live. This kind of approach to life has absolutely no place in the life of the disciple of Christ.

Jesus specifies the focus of our worrying as **τῇ ψυχῇ ὑμῶν**, i.e., your life down to its inner core. Worry permeates our existence. From this inner core then comes anxiety about the basics, food and clothing, that Jesus expands on in vv. 25b-26, 28-30. Verse 27 stands as a transition from food (vv. 25b-26) to clothing (vv. 28-30).⁵ From the language of Jesus we can clearly sense how deeply worrying has permeated one's existence, and thus why it concerns Christ to speak out against it.

The pattern of argumentation used by Jesus here was commonly employed by ancient Jewish scribes of that time, and was labeled 'more to less.' That is, the clear certainty of the lesser things argues for the certainty of the greater things. Also in this section Jesus appealed to the natural world and God's care of it as His creation as the 'lesser thing' to people as the 'greater thing.'⁶

First He appeals to the 'birds of the air' who are able to find food to eat in God's creation. As God takes care of them in providing food, why should we not think that God would not take care of us, who stand at the pinnacle of His created order? The fact that some birds do starve to death doesn't nullify the general point being made by Jesus. The signal here is that the birds do nothing to produce or harvest food; they just find it and eat it. God has given people the skill to produce and harvest food as a critical means of His provision. The transition saying in verse 27 makes the basic point that worrying adds absolutely nothing to our life, whether taken as added height or increased longevity to life. Second He then appeals to the clothing of the body.⁷ The body is more valuable than any clothes hanging on it. Again the appeal to God's creation is made. God has endowed the 'lilies of the field'⁸ with a beauty that -- in Jesus' words -- far surpasses the beauty of Solomon's wardrobe.⁹ Thus God's provision for the 'lesser' becomes encouragement of provision for the 'greater.'

⁵This seeming 'interruption' to the larger pericope contains unclear designations. The point is that worrying can't add something to something in one's life. But it is unclear what that something is. The Greek word *ἤχον ἕνα* can mean either 'one single measurement of time' or 'one unit of height.' The related *ἐπὶ τὴν ἡλικίαν αὐτοῦ* is equally unclear. Are we adding to 'the span of our life' or to 'our height.' More likely the time reference is the point, but not without some question. But the essential point remains the same which ever meaning we assume: worry doesn't add a thing to our life.

⁶Few Gospel texts have evoked such harsh criticism. It is said that every 'starving sparrow' contradicts Jesus,²⁰ not to mention every famine and every war; that the text gives the appearance of being extremely simpleminded; that it acts as if there were no economic problems, only ethical ones,²¹ and that it is a good symbol of the economic naiveté²² that has characterized Christianity in the course of its history; that it is applicable only in the special situation of the unmarried Jesus living with friends in sunny Galilee;²³ that it is also ethically problematic, since it speaks of work 'in the most disdainful terms'²⁴ and appears to encourage laziness.²⁵ The admonition not to be anxious about tomorrow appears to be naïve not only in the age of global nuclear threats and global unemployment; in the opinion of many interpreters Joseph's preparations for the lean years in Egypt show that there are more reflective statements in the Bible on the theme of 'concern' than Matt 6:25-34. Correspondingly, for long stretches of its history the interpretation of this text reads like an attempt to defend it against attacks." [Ulrich Luz and Helmut Koester, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary on Matthew 1-7*, Rev. ed., Hermeneia--a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 341.]

⁷The abbreviated focus is on clothes with the rhetorical question: "And why do you worry about clothing?" (*καὶ περὶ ἐνδύματος τί μεριμνᾶτε;*). In the Lukan parallel of 12:26, a slightly different question is posed: "If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest?" But then both gospel writers narrate Jesus' comparison to the beauty of the lilies:

Matt. 6:28b-30 (NRSV): "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you — you of little faith?"

Luke 12:27-28 (NRSV): "Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you — you of little faith!"

⁸"The expression 'the lilies of the field' (τὰ κρίνα τοῦ ἀγροῦ) has been and still is the subject of controversy, mainly because of attempts to determine their precise species. But the SM is not interested in classifying flowers. The reference is meant to be general. Although vs. 29 seems to point to a particular species, what is said about the flowers is true of all of them. Studied closely, every flower reveals its own unsurpassed beauty." [Hans Dieter Betz and Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)*, Hermeneia -- a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 476.]

⁹"The glory of Solomon with all of his wealth had of course become proverbial because of such OT passages as 1 Kgs 3:13; 10:14-27 (= 2 Chr 9:13-28)." [Donald A. Hagner, vol. 33A, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas:

Thus our Lord calls us to trust God for the basic provisions of life. In that confidence of God's care, we then reach out to Him with the request, "Give us this day our daily bread." Making this request without unqualified confidence in both God's ability and His willingness to meet those needs makes our prayer either hypocritical or an empty demand with more concern for me than for God. In no way can these words of Jesus be twisted into a legitimation of laziness, just as the apostle Paul admonished the Thessalonians in 2 Thess. 3:10-12:

10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. 11 For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. 12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

II. Don't worry, or you'll be like a pagan, vv. 31-33

31 Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" 32 For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

31 μὴ οὖν μεριμνήσητε λέγοντες· Τί φάγωμεν; ἢ· Τί πίωμεν; ἢ· Τί περιβαλώμεθα; 32 πάντα γὰρ ταῦτα τὰ ἔθνη ἐπιζητοῦσιν· οἶδεν γὰρ ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος ὅτι χρῆζετε τούτων ἀπάντων. 33 ζητεῖτε δὲ πρῶτον τὴν βασιλείαν καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ, καὶ ταῦτα πάντα προστεθήσεται ὑμῖν.

In this second set of emphasis against worrying, the Aorist imperative verb **μὴ μεριμνήσητε** is used. The impact of this form of the verb is to raise the intensity of the admonition to a demand. In light of what Jesus had just said (οὖν), He now stresses that to fall prey to worrying reflects the attitude of pagans who have no knowledge of God. This is the second time Gentiles have been brought into the picture. In 6:7-8, they had no understanding of prayer and used it for their own gratification in complete ignorance of the true God. Now their striving for materialistic gain again highlights their egocentric approach to life: everyone including deity exists to serve my wants. For us to fret and fume over food and clothing pushes us into a Gentile mode of living.

Just as Jesus said in 6:8 (Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him), He repeats again here: "and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things." We are challenged to reach out to God in request of 'daily bread' on the basis that God already knows what He need and thus is fully prepared to meet those needs appropriately. Thus our stance in asking for 'daily bread' should be an ongoing quest (Present imperative of **ζητεῖτε**) for the rule of God in our life and a commitment to doing those things that are right before Him (τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ). This is our responsibility. When we meet it, the divine promise is simply: "and all these things will be given to you as well."¹⁰

Thus this second motivation to get our priorities in order before we ask God for 'daily bread' reminds us graphically that we are not pagans living a self gratifying life and trying to used deity for our own purposes. Rather our focus is on God; our commitment is to God; and thus our trust is that He will meet our needs according to His will.

III. Don't worry about tomorrow, v. 34

34 So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

34 μὴ οὖν μεριμνήσητε εἰς τὴν αὔριον, ἢ γὰρ αὔριον μεριμνήσει αὐτῆς· ἀρκετὸν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἡ κακία αὐτῆς.

The third emphasis against worrying continues the high intensity demand of Jesus with the Aorist imperative verb **μὴ μεριμνήσητε**. But the shift here is not about today and basic needs for this day. Instead it moves to tomorrow.¹¹ The two reasons to not worry about what may happen tomorrow have to do with the nature of tomorrow. First, it will contain its own temptations to worry. Then, if we add those to what we experience today the level of temptation to worry becomes overwhelming.

We must not lose sight of the first listeners of Jesus on that hillside. Most of them were Jewish peasants living a 'hand to mouth' daily existence. True to the Hebrew Bible, Jesus reminded them of the Heavenly Father's abiding care and willingness to take care of them. Hunger is an attention demanding dynamic. But to focus on it is to take one's eyes off God and then to lose hope of solving the pains of hunger. Jesus calls all His followers to never ever take our attention off God, but to confidently ask for 'daily bread' knowing He cares for us.

Word, Incorporated, 2002), 165.]

¹⁰The wording of Matthew καὶ ταῦτα πάντα προστεθήσεται ὑμῖν is very similar to that in Luke: καὶ ταῦτα προστεθήσεται ὑμῖν.

¹¹At this point Luke goes a different direction in 12:33-34: "32 Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." This evidently was more relevant to the needs of his first readers than what Matthew included.

Diagram of the Sermon on the Mount
Mt. 5:21-26

The diagram of an English translation of the original Greek text highlights the flow of thought in this longer passage.

6:25 Because of this
107 **I tell you,**
Don't worry
about your life,
what you eat,
or
what you drink,
neither about your body,
what you wear.

Your life certainly isn't about food, is it,
and
your body certainly isn't about clothes, is it?

108 6:26 **Look closely**
at the birds of the sky,
that they do not sow
neither
do they harvest,
nor
do they gather
into barns.

and
109 **your Heavenly Father feeds them;**
110 **are you not worth more than they?**

6:27 and
111 **who among you can add one inch to his height¹²**
by worrying?

6:28 And
about clothes
112 **why do you worry?**

113 **Consider the lilies of the field,**
how they grow;
114 **they don't work hard,**
nor
115 **do they spin,**
6:29 but
116 **I tell you,**

in all his glory
that not even Solomon...was so clothed.
like one of these

6:30 But
if God so clothes the grass of the field,
which exists today
and
which is thrown...tomorrow,
into the oven

117 **how much more will He not clothe you,**
o you of little faith?

¹²Or, who among you can add one hour to his life, by worrying?

6:31 Therefore
 118 **don't worry,**
 by saying,
 What shall we eat?
 or
 What shall we drink?
 or
 What shall we wear?

6:32 For
 119 **all these things do the pagans seek after;**
 for
 120 **your Heavenly Father knows**
 that you need all these things.

6:33 But
 121 **seek first the Kingdom of God**
 and
 His righteousness,
 and
 122 **all these things will be given to you.**

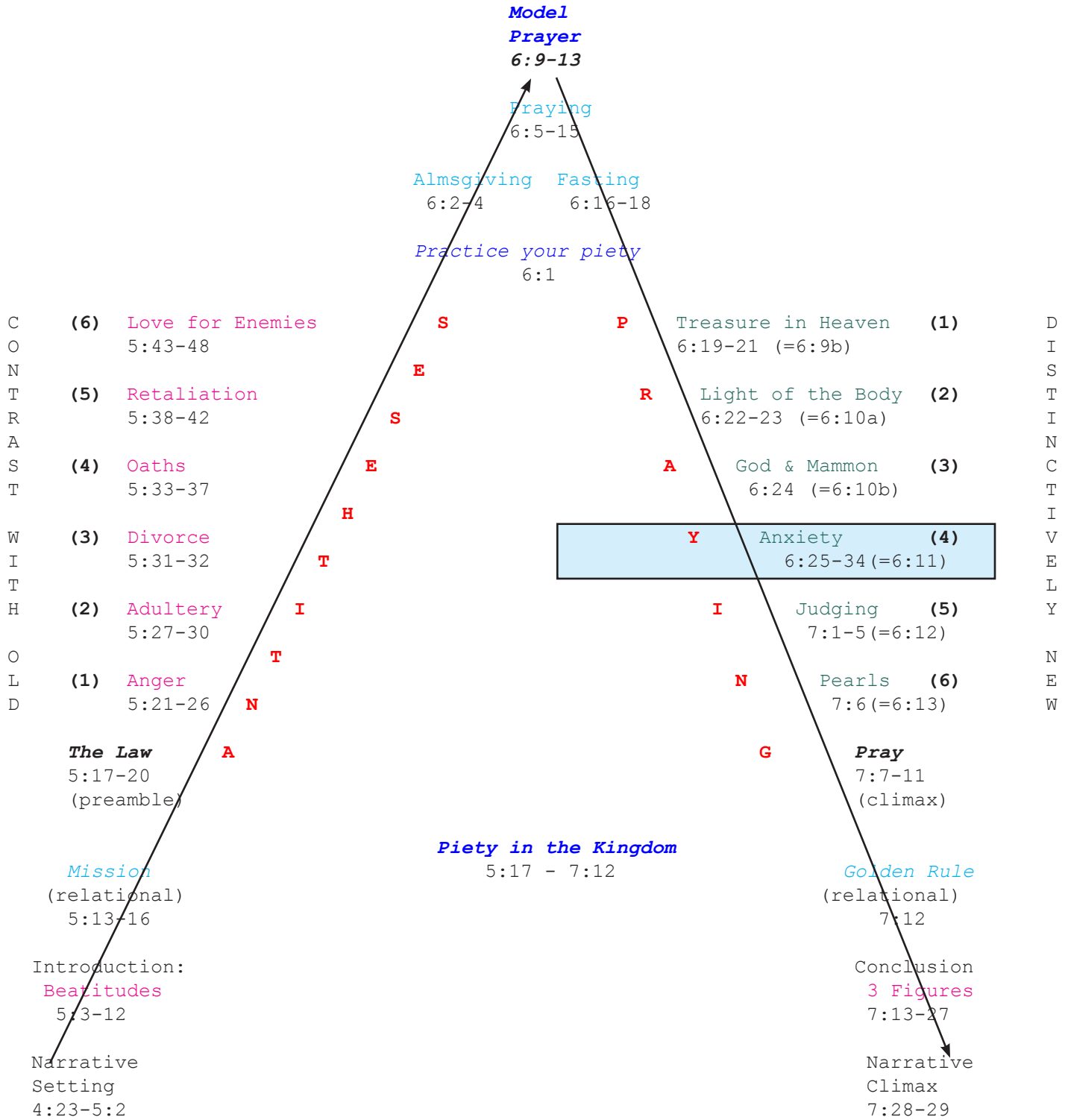
6:34 Therefore
 123 **don't worry,**
 about tomorrow,
 for
 124 **tomorrow will worry about itself;**
 125 **sufficient for the day is its evil.**

Clearly the central theme of the text is concerning worry, as defined by the fivefold use of the Greek verb *μεριμνάω*. This verb serves as the organizing stack pole around which the passage is built. Couched in either intensive admonitions (3x) or in a rhetorical question (1x), the verb intensely raises the issue of individual worrying about the basics of physical existence.

The core organizational structure of the passage is built around the threefold use of the admonition, 'Don't worry,' (*μη μεριμνάτε & μη οὖν μεριμνήσητε*) that is found in statements 107, 118, and 123. The three sections are inner connected through the use of the inferential conjunction *οὖν* ("therefore") in the second and third admonitions. The movement goes from "don't worry about your life" (v. 25) to "don't worry by saying..." (v. 31) to "don't worry about tomorrow" (v. 34). The second admonition is contextually worrying about your life, but the comparison is to Gentiles rather than to birds and flowers as is found in the first one. The third admonition extends the concept of worrying about the future in regard to these basic needs in life. Some commentators see it as a postscript to the passage, since this is not present in the Lukan parallel text. Perhaps so, but the extension from today to tomorrow, especially in regard to basic human needs, seems rather natural and logical.

The Literary Structure of the Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 4:23-7:29



Source: Lorin L. Cranford, *Study Manual of the Sermon on the Mount: Greek Text* (Fort Worth: Scripta Publishing Inc., 1988), 320. Adapted from Gunter Bornkamm, "Der Aufbau der Bergpredigt," *New Testament Studies* 24 (1977-78): 419-432.