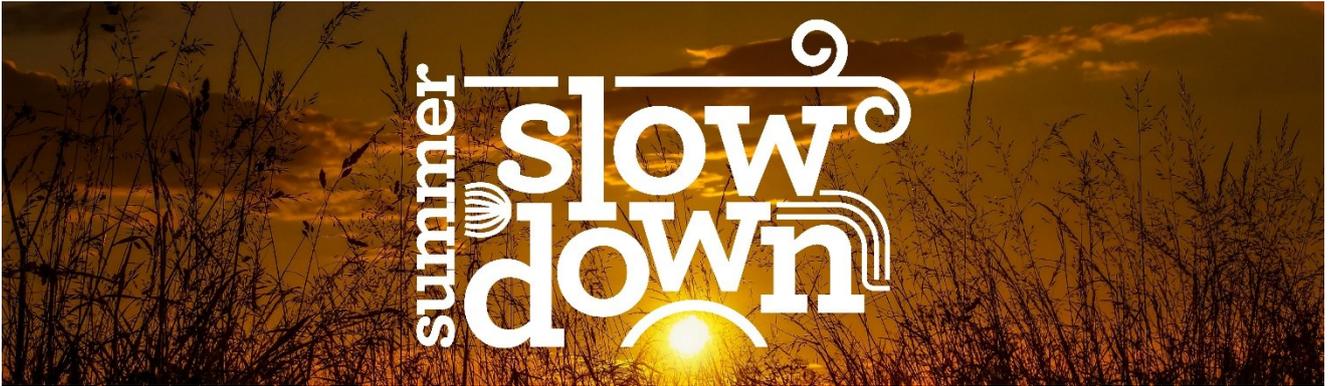


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The 20% Swing That Can Transform Your Year: Matthew 6:25–34

It's entirely possible to close our laptops, put away our jobs, turn off our phones and physically rest, and still wear ourselves out on the inside. Perhaps this is why Jesus continually tells us not to worry, because worry keeps us from slowing down internally, from entering the deeper rest his Spirit longs to bring. Jesus encourages us to seek God's presence and let him handle the rest.

Introduction: Don't Worry

Over the summer break I did a bit of reflecting, as you do. I'm in my 56th year now, and one of the things you learn as you get older is that worry doesn't disappear, it just changes shape. When you're young, you worry about exams and whether anyone will ask you to hang out at New Years. In your twenties and thirties, it's jobs and mortgages and whether you're measuring up. In your fifties, it's still mortgages, plus aging parents, adult children, and wondering if your KiwiSaver will ever be enough for retirement. Those of you younger than me will discover these worries in time; those of you older than me are probably quietly laughing at my young worries.

And that's why today's passage is uncomfortable for me. Because sometimes, I preach convincingly about the truth of the Scripture I'm working through, but sometimes I also acknowledge that I'm still very much a work-in-progress when it comes to living the Scriptures out. Today is one of those days.

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Summer Slowdown

We're in Week 2 of our series, **Summer Slowdown**. Last week, Aidan invited us to slow down our *outer lives*, to slow our pace, our activity, the productivity that everyone can see. Today, I want to talk about slowing down our *inner lives*, that hidden life that only God sees. And if I'm honest, I reckon that's the harder one to slow down because today's text begins with some beautiful, but confronting, words that Jesus spoke: ***"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life."*** For many of us, that sounds like a Tui billboard moment, *"Yeah right."*

And yet ... what if Jesus knows exactly how our lives feel? What if this isn't impossible to achieve, but it's an invitation into a different way of living? That's what I want us to explore today.

Let me read the longer passage. Matthew 6:25-34, ***"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 than food, and the body more 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? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour 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 - you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 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."***

Context: The Kingdom vs. The Treasure

Like all passages of Scripture, Jesus doesn't just drop this teaching out of nowhere. If you back up just a few verses, we can see exactly what he's really addressing.

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In Matthew 6:19-24, Jesus has just finished talking about treasure and money. He says, **"You cannot serve both God and money."** That word **"money"** in Greek is *"mammon"*, and it's more than just cash. Mammon is the security system we build to protect ourselves from an uncertain future. It's the god of enough-ness. The deity of safety. The idol that promises, *"If you just accumulate enough, plan enough, control enough, you'll finally be okay."*

And then Jesus says, **"Therefore..."** That word matters. **"Therefore"** because you cannot serve two masters, because you will love one and hate the other, because trying to hedge your bets between God and mammon will tear you in two, **"Therefore, do not worry about your life."**

You see, Jesus isn't just giving stress management tips. He's exposing what worry is: **it's a symptom of divided loyalties.** Worry is what happens when we've theoretically chosen God but we functionally still trust mammon - we say we believe in a good Father, but we live like we're on our own.

This passage sits at the heart of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' most concentrated teaching on what life looks like under the reign of God. In Matthew **Chapter 5**, Jesus redefined righteousness from *external* rule-keeping to *internal* heart transformation. Anger matters as much as murder; lust matters as much as adultery; love extends even to enemies. In Matthew 6, he turns to the hidden motivations of the heart. He contrasts living for human approval with living before God. He exposes how easily our devotion gets crowded out by money, status, and security.

And now, in verses 25-34, he brings it down to the daily grind: What will we eat? What will we wear? What if there isn't enough? He invites us into a different way of being in the world, not denying the reality of need, but reframing it in light of a good Father who knows and cares. At the centre of this passage is the rallying call: **"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness."** This is the antidote to the anxiety economy we live in.

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If we could summarise this passage in one sentence, Jesus is saying: **Stop serving mammon through worry. Trust your Father. Slow your inner world so you can live freely in God's kingdom.**

What Worry Reveals About Us

Let's be honest, "***Do not worry about your life***" is a wonderful verse ... for everyone else. We read it and think, "*Sure, Jesus, but do you really know my life?*"

But here's where Jesus' physical setting matters. He's preaching this message outdoors, on a hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee. And as he speaks, "***Look at the birds of the air,***" he points toward them. "***See how the flowers of the field grow,***" he says, looking at the wildflowers carpeting the hills.

It would be like sitting with Jesus at Long Bay Regional Park, down the road from where Jo and I live, and he'd be saying, "***Look at the tūi flying around. Listen to their song. Look at the pōhutukawa tree. See how the tree blazes red in December without striving. If God cares for them ... how much more does he care for you?***"

Jesus uses nature not because it's poetic, but because creation is preaching a sermon every single day:

- God is generous.
- God is attentive.
- God is not stressed.
- And He hasn't forgotten you.

Now, before we get too romantic about birds and flowers, we need to be honest about what Jesus is saying, and what he's not saying.

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When Jesus asks the question in Verse 26, "*Are you not much more valuable than they?*" it's a rhetorical question - no answer needed. If God feeds sparrows, small, common, utterly unremarkable birds, how much more will he care for us, people who are made in his image? In a world that measures worth by productivity, Instagram followers, salary brackets, or how well our kids are doing, Jesus grounds our worth in our identity. We don't earn God's love by performing well, we receive it because we are His. That alone should slow the frantic pace inside us.

But here's the thing: Jesus isn't saying we're more valuable than birds because we're smarter or more important in some cosmic hierarchy. He's saying we're valuable because we're *known*. The Father knows us. He sees us. We're not just another sparrow in the flock, we're His beloved children.

When Jesus asks the question in Verse 27, "*Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?*" we, again, all know the answer. And yet we worry because we think it helps. We think worry is vigilance. We think it's responsible planning. We think it's love, "*If I don't worry about my kids, who will?*" Some of us would say that worry is a spiritual gift, because we're so good at it! But Jesus says worry doesn't work. You can worry yourself into exhaustion, and many of us do, but you can't worry yourself into peace. He's not being dismissive. He's being brutally honest: **worry is unproductive, but trust is transformative.**

When Jesus states in Verse 32 that, "*Your heavenly Father knows that you need them,*" this is where it gets a little difficult for me, because I live in Auckland in 2026 where people are worried about paying rent and putting food on the table; we live in a world where children go hungry, where good people lose jobs, where illness bankrupts families.

So, what does Jesus mean when he says the Father knows our needs and will provide? Honestly, I've wrestled with this verse for years and here's where I've landed: Jesus isn't promising that following him means you'll never experience hardship or lack. The disciples he was speaking to would go on to face poverty, persecution, and martyrdom. Paul would write about being hungry and in need. But what Jesus *is* promising is this: **the Father's care is not absent when**

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provision looks different than we expected. When Jesus says he came to give life, that life extends beyond this age into eternity with the Father. Even if the things of this world disappear, even when inequality creates real suffering, the Father has gone before us. And one day, the things of this world will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.

This doesn't remove the ache of present suffering. But it does shift where we place our ultimate hope. It helps us slow the inner life and focus on the eternal picture alongside the temporary one.

And here's the other piece: this verse should challenge those of us who *do* have enough. If the Father knows what people need, then his people, the church, are part of how he provides as our trust in God is outwardly reflected in our generosity toward others.

When Jesus says in Verses 32-33, "*For the pagans run after all these things ... But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness,*" he's saying that there's a different way to live. That word "*pagans*" feels harsh to us, but Jesus isn't making a slur. He's describing a way of life, a life organised around anxiety, accumulation, and self-preservation. It's the way of mammon. The way of the kingdoms of this world. In the Roman Empire, "*pagans*" referred to people who didn't know the God of Israel, who didn't know they had a Father who sees and provides. So, they did what anyone would do without that knowledge: they ran after security. They hustled. They hoarded. They worried.

But Jesus is saying, "*You're different. You know something they don't. You have a Father. So you don't have to live that way.*" He offers the way out, "***Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.***" He's saying don't seek your own comfort, don't seek your own security, don't create your own 5-years plan ... look instead at the kingdom of God, his way of doing things, his priorities. Put God's kingdom first, not your stress. Put God's way first, not your coping strategies. Put God's presence first, not your inner panic.

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And then Jesus makes this stunning promise in the second half of Verse 33, **"And all these things will be given to you as well."** Now we must again be careful here. This isn't a prosperity gospel promise that if you pray enough and seek God enough, you'll get a McMansion in Herne Bay. The early church sought first the kingdom, and many of them died poor.

What Jesus is promising is this: **when you organise your life around God's kingdom, you'll find that you have what you actually need.** You might not have everything you want; you might not have what social media says you need, but you'll discover a sufficiency that transcends circumstances, a peace that doesn't depend on your bank balance, and a joy that can coexist with hardship.

What This Looks Like in Auckland, 2026

Let's get specific. If you're genuinely worried about, well, whatever it is you're worried about, Jesus is not telling you to stop being responsible or to ignore real problems. He's not saying, *"Just pray and don't worry about it."* What he is saying is, *"You're not alone. Your Father sees you. And his people, this church, are meant to embody his provision."*

If you're in that place, let us know. Not because we have unlimited resources, but because we're meant to bear one another's burdens. That's what seeking first the kingdom looks like in the community that we call the church. And this is where the rest of us need to listen carefully.

Here's a more challenging word: if we're not worried about basic provision, but if our worry is about investment portfolios, retirement plans, whether we can afford that renovation or that holiday, then this passage is confronting us with a question: **Are you running after security like the pagans? Or are you seeking first the kingdom?** Because here's what Jesus is exposing ... our worries are often about maintaining a lifestyle, not about actual need. We've been formed by a consumer culture that constantly whispers, *"You don't have enough. You're not enough. You need more."* But Jesus says, *"Look at the birds. Look at the flowers. You're chasing things that don't satisfy and you're missing the kingdom that does."*

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Seeking first the kingdom might mean:

- Giving more generously, even when it feels uncomfortable.
- Simplifying our lives so we're less dependent on mammon, or
- Asking, **"What does my spending reveal about what kingdom I'm actually serving?"**

This isn't about guilt. It's about freedom. Because when mammon is our master, we're never free; there's never enough. But when the Father is our provider, we can live with open hands.

If You're Somewhere in the Middle

Many of us are probably somewhere in the middle. We're not desperate, but we're not comfortable either. The cost of living is real. Housing is expensive. Petrol is expensive. Groceries are expensive. Jesus says to us, **"Your Father knows. And each day has enough trouble of its own."** That last line, Verse 34, is so important, **"Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself."**

Jesus isn't saying tomorrow doesn't matter, he's just saying that tomorrow has its own grace. You don't have the grace today for next month's problems. You have the grace today for today's problems. This is how the inner life slows: one day at a time. One worry released. One moment of trust.

The 6:33 Challenge (Community Edition)

So here's the challenge. I'm calling it the **6:33 Challenge** after verse 33 which says, **"Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness."**

For the next month, I'm inviting you into two practices - one personal, and one communal.

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Personal Practice: Five Minutes a Day

Every day, take five minutes at a time that suits you. For four minutes, pray this prayer, "**Father, today I choose Your kingdom over my worries. Slow my inner life so I can walk in Your peace.**" Then sit in silence for one minute. No phone. No agenda. Just breathing deeply with God. Let him meet you there. Five minutes a day. Seek first his kingdom. Let God do the rest.

Communal Practice: The Check-In

But we're also not meant to do this alone. Anxiety thrives in isolation, but trust grows in community. So find one or two people, maybe from your Life Group, maybe a friend, maybe someone sitting near you right now, and commit to checking in with each other once a week. Not to fix each other. Not to give advice. Just to ask:

- *"What worried you the most this week?"*
- *"Where did you see God's provision?"*
- *"How can I pray for you?"*

Text each other. Meet for coffee. Do it on a walk at Long Bay. But do it together.

Because when Jesus says, "**Look at the birds,**" he's not just giving you something to notice. He's retraining your vision, and we need help seeing what we've been conditioned to miss.

A Final Word

I'm not saying this is at all easy. What I am saying is that spiritual practices take time and they take effort, but they're so worth it. What if you worried less by 10% over the next month and trusted God 10% over the next month – that's a 20% shift in your heart, and I would suggest that this brings the opportunity for a significant transformation in your relationship with God.

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A Father who sees you, knows you, and he holds you.

Look at the tūi.

Look at the pōhutukawa.

If God cares for them, how much more does he care for you?

Seek first his kingdom.

The rest will follow.

Let's pray.

Father, we confess that we are anxious people. We worry too much. We run after security. We trust in our plans more than your presence. Forgive us. Slow our inner lives. Teach us to seek your kingdom first, not as one more thing on the to-do list, but as the reorientation of our entire lives. Help us trust you 10% more this month. Help us worry 10% less. And help us see, really see, the world you've made, which preaches your goodness every single day.

Amen.

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Reflecting on Sunday 4th January 2026:

Last week Aidan introduced our summer series, **Summer Slowdown**. Using the story of Mary & Martha's interaction with Jesus, he encouraged us to think about how we might slow down our busyness to spend more time with Jesus. How did that work out for you over the last week?

These questions help you think more about this message. We hope they might be a conduit for conversation and reflection, encouraging us to wrestle with how this message might practically work itself out in our lives.

1. What was the biggest worry that competed for your attention this week, and what did it reveal about what you were trusting for security?
2. Where, even in a small or unexpected way, did you notice God's provision or presence this week?
3. What would "**seeking first the kingdom**" look like in one practical decision you're facing right now (money, time, relationships, or rest)?
4. How can someone else help you slow your inner life this month - what kind of check-in, prayer, or encouragement would be most helpful?

If you'd like to chat with someone about your spiritual journey or anything else going on in your life, please contact us at care@windsorpark.org.nz; **we're better together** and **no perfect people are allowed**.

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Below are some further resources that may take the message further and deeper and enable you to explore other viewpoints on the same theme. We also encourage you to engage with the preacher if there are further questions you have or if you'd like clarification on anything. Email info@windsorpark.org.nz and we'll direct your query to the appropriate person.

1. **The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry** is a book by John Mark Comer that we've mentioned many times since it was published three years ago. We still strongly endorse this book to you, which is available in a variety of formats – Google is your friend to find different ways to access it!
2. Psalm 131 is a great passage to aid the slowing down of our inner selves. In his article, **A Calmed and Quieted Soul – Reflections on Psalm 131**, Professor Joe English breaks this psalm down to help you enjoy its richness. There's a beautiful prayer at the end of the article as well. <https://jonenglishlee.com/a-calmed-and-quieted-soul-psalm-131/>
3. The Bible Project has an informative podcast called, **What Does Jesus Say about Anxiety?** It's a popular podcast, possibly because this is a 'popular' topic. You can listen online here: <https://bibleproject.com/podcasts/what-does-jesus-say-about-anxiety/>