

**FOUR STEWARDSHIP
SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
FOR ADULTS**

Writer:

Keith Wilkinson

Retired, Baptist General Convention, Oklahoma

LESSON 1

Practical Helps for Living and Giving

—Keith Wilkinson—

How To Use This Resource

This resource contains four Sunday School lessons. These lessons can be used as a series or each as a stand-alone Bible study. The Learners' Guide follows with a plan for teaching adults. Teachers should read the Learners' Guide first and then use the Teacher's Guide to prepare.

Priority Living: First Things First

Focal Scripture: Matthew 6:25-34

Key Question: How can getting first things first lead to worry-free living?

Scratching the Surface:

Jessica threw up her hands in exasperation. Her outfit suddenly looked out of fashion. She didn't like how it was fitting and the look wasn't right. Even though she had vowed to curtail her shopping, she headed for the mall to buy her some new clothes. She and her husband had barely been able to make last month's credit card payment. Now she was adding more.

Mark likes sports. When his best friend showed him his new plasma TV, Mark vowed that he had to have one for the big game coming up. He knew they were expensive but he determined that his buddy would not get ahead of him. He knew that his wife and he had argued over last month's bills. But with payments delayed three months, he told himself that they could afford the new television.

Jesus once posed a question for his disciples. He asked **“Is not the life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”**

It's a basic question for today. Perhaps in the cases above, He would be asking if life is more than new clothes or the latest entertainment?

What is life all about? Does the Bible have something to say about how we live and what causes us to worry?

Increasingly, Americans live lives of worry over debts, addictions, and identity. Christians are called to a new standard for living. Is it possible to live a worry-free life?

Digging In:

The Futility of Worry

Read Matthew 6:25

Jesus tried to get his disciples to come to a realization of what their lives are really all about.

Jesus suggests that even worrying about having basic necessities can be wasted energy. We would each readily agree that having food and clothing is basic to our very existence. In our land of plenty, most don't wake up every day wondering if there is going to be enough food on the table for our families. Food is now so readily available, the question most families face is "where are we stopping for a quick bite" or "what can we order in tonight for dinner?" In Jesus time, food and clothing were not as readily available. Someone from the household went to the market each day to purchase or barter for food. Clothing had to be spun from wool and required much effort. Now with technology and an international economy, our clothing is grown from cotton in Egypt or India, spun into cloth in Asia, sewn into clothing on remote Pacific Islands, transported by freighters registered in Greece or Norway, distributed to mega-discount stores throughout the United States. Then it is purchased by us to fill our closets and dressers, perhaps to be worn a few times and given to charity when we have grown tired of them. Yet, we never seem to have enough.

Question: How much time do you spend worrying about your clothes? What do you worry most about food?

Jesus taught that even the basic necessities of life have to be put in proper perspective if we are to lead worry-free lives. He saw worry as a lack of faith in the provision that God makes for us every day.

As they walked along, Jesus directed the disciples' attention to nature. They should take notice of the birds of the air. Birds went about their daily lives without the need for planning and worry. They just lived! Apparently, it is only humans who have the capacity to over-complicate their lives by worrying about how everything will work out. Birds never sowed seeds, harvested, or stored away seeds in barns. Jesus was suggesting that they lived the moment. They flew each day and ate the seeds available to them. His point was that life should be lived in the moment!

Worry is a form of projecting bad things that *might* happen. It is easy to fall into a pattern of worrying about the "What if's" of life. Perhaps our fascination with disaster movies reflects our tendency to anticipate the worst and to worry about all the consequences. I have a friend who tends to be that way. "I would take this trip, but the airlines might cancel my flight." Or, "If I drive, I might have an accident." True, those are things that could happen. But to live one's life in the fear of disaster keeps some from experiencing life as it is.

Worry produces no practical result. Jesus asked "**Who of you by worrying, can add a single hour to his life.**" If all the time and effort spent in worrying produced good results, then it might be worthwhile to worry. The reality is that nothing is produced by worry. Life is not extended. In fact, it may be shortened by excess worry.

God's Provisions for Nature Are Spectacular

Read Matthew 6:28-32

Jesus used examples drawn from the observable world of nature around Him to reason with the crowd. Although, these are not parables, in the sense conceal and reveal truth, they illustrate. His hearers knew exactly what He was talking about.

When He says “**Look at the birds of the air**” and “**consider the lilies of the field,**” Jesus asked his hearers to look around them. He was teaching outside. It is likely that birds were flying about and that they could literally look at the fields to see the flowers in bloom. There was always immediacy to Jesus’ teaching. He related to those things that people saw, felt, and experienced every day. Had Jesus lived in our day, in our culture, this scene might well have taken place in the atrium of a busy shopping mall. He could have pointed out people scurrying to buy clothing or other goods or lining up in food courts for a quick lunch. Perhaps by a video store, He would pause by a video clip playing a nature documentary. Perhaps Jesus would stop for a moment and point out the scene from nature and contrast the busy, worried shoppers hurrying by. Well...you get the picture.

What Jesus talked about on the dusty roads of Galilee resonates with our lives today. We indeed find ourselves caught up with worry about having enough, getting by, or keeping up with our material culture. In so doing, we often fail to notice how carefully God not only provides for the world of nature, but how abundantly and beautifully He does so. Who has not enjoyed a refreshing moment by a mountain stream? Or, a wooded lane, a vast prairie grassland, a peaceful seashore, or a sunny day in a city park? What about a special moment observing the beauty of a flower we had planted in our yard or in a patio flower box? God’s provision for nature should remind us how God, not only provides, but enhances our lives with beauty.

Solomon was the ultimate of Hebrew kings in terms of splendor. The nation’s wealth and power were at a peak never to be seen again. Solomon’s palace and court were the envy of all who visited. Yet, Jesus suggested, the very finest of human achievement paled in comparison to the common scenes of nature that God had prepared.

Living lives full of worry wastes valuable time and energy. Worse, worry becomes a denial of God’s provision for us.

In fact, Jesus suggested that worrying put the believer on a plane with pagans. Worrying allowed them to slip from the higher plane of faith to the lower plane of living as if God didn’t matter. Worrying kept people from experiencing faith!

Q: Do unbelievers today see Christians whose values are little different from theirs?

When our primary concerns are about our houses, our cars, our clothes—in short, our material lives, there is little wonder that have so little influence on our pagan world.

Jesus calls us to a new way of life. It is not a call to a denial of basic necessities. He acknowledges our need for them. Rather, we are admonished to realize our necessities come from God’s provision. Jesus further suggested that a worry-filled life was a life without faith. Such a life produces nothing positive. Lack of faith keeps us from experiencing something more wonderful and beautiful that God has in store for us.

Getting it Right: First Things First

Read Matthew 6:33-34

Jesus' reasoning led to a conclusion and a principle by which one can live a worry-free life. It reached back to the model prayer given earlier in Matthew 6 when Jesus taught the disciples to pray **"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread."** (Matthew 6: 10-11) Getting things right means putting first things first!

Faith is about priority. The essence of mankind's sin has always been in putting self ahead of God. Faith comes when one recognizes that God is more important than self. We must acknowledge that reality for ourselves. We then become open to God's salvation and direction for our lives. Without a basic faith experience, we find ourselves totally incapable of ordering our own affairs. We are doomed to fail! It is a given. Success comes only with a humility that recognizes our total dependence on God. Our selfish values will lead us astray. Selfish priorities disconnect us from the very thing we need and want most—a life with needs being met and exceeded with abundance and joy.

Do you know people whose lives are filled with abundance and joy? Are they always people who have lots of material goods? Often they may be people who derive joy from the basic experiences of life—family, friends, services to others and respect for the values to which they ascribe, rather than wealth. God's rule in our lives allows for everything to fall into its proper order. We are not promised freedom from trials and other difficulties. Rather, we are promised that we can meet them head-on with confident faith.

What are the priorities of your life? Who's first? Who's in charge? How do your daily time, concerns, conversations, and spending habits reflect your priorities?

Years ago, as a boy, I came to know Christ as my Savior and Lord. I was taught from the beginning that giving back to God was part of the Christian life. My allowance was only 25 cents—now you know that was a long time ago! My conviction as a child was to give at least ten per cent of that back to God in my Sunday School offering. Since ten percent of 25 came to two and a half cents, I knew it wasn't a practical division. The choice for me was easy. I would give five cents in my offering! With the remaining twenty cents I was able to spend the money on the things that a young boy, at that time, might need and want. More importantly, I started early a life-long practice of giving back to God. Since then, God's blessings have always exceeded my giving!

When your priorities are right, everything else works out.

Yes, there will always be trouble to face. Verse 34 speaks to that. No need adding tomorrow's troubles to those we have for today. Today's troubles will be plenty enough to deal with.

It is always easy for me sometimes to worry about health issues. I have lost three siblings, and my spouse, to various forms of cancer, I sometimes find myself starting to worry needlessly about every little pain, or twitch or blemish on the skin. I reached a point where I had to confess that my worries were not only counterproductive, they showed a lack of faith. I gave it all over to God. Yes, I continue to be careful and vigilant about health, but now I try to live in the moment. I trust God's provision. Whenever I face troubles, I can have faith in His continuing care. His abundance is real.

**Applying the Discoveries:
Guidelines for Living a Worry-free Life**

Consider: Perhaps a big meeting at work on Monday may be worrying you. But worrying only adds to your troubles. By living in the moment each day, you can more fully experience life. Try releasing the worry. Tomorrow's meeting may indeed be bad, but nothing good comes from worrying about it. Go to work, face the meeting, and move on to the next thing. Can you trust God to release you from such worry?

1. Accept that every area of life is subject to the sovereignty of God. In the context of Matthew 6:33, let your relationship with God be the focal point of life and every other area of life becomes an outgrowth of this relationship.
2. Understand Christ's command to "Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness" as the priority of one's life. Our mission is to share the good news of God's salvation to every person through both a verbal and life witness.
3. In light of 1 and 2 above, identify specific ways you can live out God's priorities in your family, finances and service to others.
4. Live life by allocating your time to reflect godly priorities.
5. When you find yourself slipping back into worry, stop, confess, and seek God's help to live your faith in the present.

LESSON 1
Teacher's Guide
Practical Helps for Living and Giving
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Priority Living: First Things First

Preparation:

1. Spend time in reading the Scripture passages and prayer for the session and the group you will be leading.
2. To enhance visual learning, write key questions on small placards and attach to walls around the room at slightly above eye level when seated. Create a visual focus by clipping ads from the newspaper or magazines advertising new clothes, large screen plasma TV's or other items that may appeal to your group.
3. Provide copies of the members' guide for this Bible Study session.
4. Make sure your meeting space is well arranged and welcoming for guests. Invite guests to enroll in your Sunday school group. Welcome the entire group and conduct a brief prayer time leading to the Bible study.

Leading the Session:

Scratching the Surface:

1. Ask participants to read the "Scratching the Surface" and ask members to identify the top 3 items they would buy if they could. To get greater involvement, ask members to pair up and share their "Top 3" lists with each other. Call on volunteers to share their lists with the entire group and explain why they chose what they did.
2. Ask participants if they believe that Americans tend to worry over debts, addictions, and identity?

Digging In:

3. Read aloud the Scripture text under "The Futility of Worry." If members are comfortable with reading aloud, call on a member to read the text.
4. Ask: Is worry about basic needs a waste of energy?
5. Make additional comments about the passage based on the commentary provided.
6. Direct participants to the "Question" section and ask them to respond to the questions. (If you have posted placards on your walls with these questions, direct attention to them.)
7. Follow a similar process with each of the Scripture sections.
8. Conclude this section by discussing things that participants find they are more prone to worry about.

Applying Our Discoveries:

9. Ask participants to read the list of application statements and select one that most resonates with them.
10. Conclude with a prayer asking God to help us as we seek His kingdom first and let other things take care of themselves.

11. Accept that every area of life is subject to the sovereignty of God. In the context of Matthew 6:33, let your relationship with God be the focal point of life and every other area of life becomes an outgrowth of this relationship.
12. Understand Christ's command to "Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness" as the priority of one's life. Our mission is to share the good news of God's salvation to every person through both a verbal and life witness.
13. In light of 1 and 2, identify specific ways you can live out God's priorities in your family, finances and service to others.
14. Live life by allocating your time to reflect godly priorities.
15. When you find yourself slipping back into worry, stop, confess, and seek God's help to live your faith in the present.