

Sunday | MATTHEW 6:25-34

Do you worry? Doesn't everyone worry? Many of us find ourselves ruminating over issues we cannot control, scenarios that may or may not happen, things that really don't deserve the energy we're investing in them. No matter that intellectually we know that our worry resolves nothing, helps not at all and distresses us, we find we cannot get our minds to stop running on that mental treadmill. This beautiful text poetically nudges us to let go of all that keeps us up at night and makes us anxious. Let's be clear, however, there are those for whom worry about food and clothing and shelter are present, real and pressing. There are also those for whom anxiety is an illness and should be treated as such. These words from Scripture should not be used to shame, dismiss or silence those already in pain. Rather, they should teach us that God's will for all is peace, provision and safety.

This Lent, as we seek to let go of fear and trust God's ability and will to give us what we need, we are called to work in ways that make this promise tangible for everyone. If we go to bed fed and in a safe dwelling, without the need to worry about our next meal or place of slumber, how might we show those in radically different circumstances that they too can be relieved of these worries?

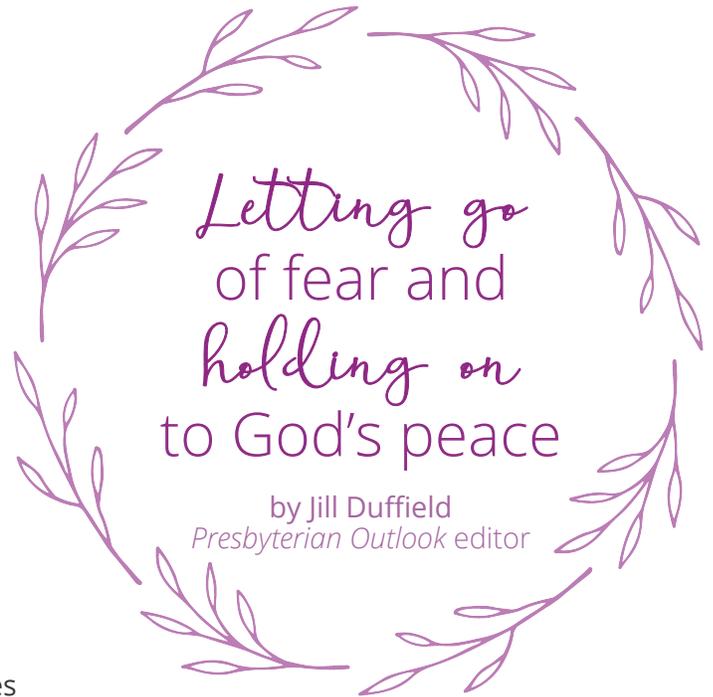
If God does not want us to worry about tomorrow, how can we alleviate today's troubles for those overwhelmed by them? Doing so would be striving first for the kingdom, every day.

*Lord, we forget to seek your Kingdom first. We notice what we lack, rather than giving thanks for all we have. We neglect the needs of those without their daily bread, despite having been fed on the bread of life. We ask for your wisdom so that we will focus rightly and live accordingly until no one has cause to worry. Amen.*

Monday | ISAIAH 12:2

How often do we think about what it means that God is our salvation? From what and for what are we saved? Salvation is one of those churchy words that we often use without considering what it means or why it matters. What difference does it make to you that you have been saved by God?

*God who saves us, who is our strength and shield, our hope and haven, your coming to us and rescuing us from sin and isolation, separation and estrangement, frees us to live without fear and with divine purpose. We thank you for loving us enough to intervene on our behalf so that we can live fully for you. Amen.*



*Tuesday* | PSALM 27:1

What are your greatest fears? List them and then pray through the list. Picture God's light surrounding each one. Remember that God knows them already and right now is present, offering you strength and working for good. Can you turn one of those fears over to God's care just for today?

*Heavenly Father, our fears threaten to overtake us. We fear for the state of our world, for those we love, for ourselves. We obsess about what might happen and if resolution to wicked problems will come. Our regrets linger and our hopes remain unfulfilled. At least for today we put down our burdens and rest in your promise of light and love. Amen.*

*Wednesday* | 1 JOHN 4:18-19

We love because God first loved us. Use this verse as a breath prayer throughout the day. Breathe in "we love," and breathe out "because God first love us." As you find yourself stressed or distracted, breathe in "I love," and breathe out "because God first loved me." Pay attention to how this practice impacts your attitude, emotions and perspective.

*Lord of love, you loved us first. You knew and loved us even as we were being knit together in our mother's womb. You called us by name, said we belong to you and stopped at nothing to be in relationship with us. Recognizing the magnitude of this gift, we want to love you and others with our whole being. Amen.*

*Thursday* | 2 TIMOTHY 1:7

How do God's power, self-discipline and love go together? How might they go together for disciples of Jesus Christ? Loving requires intentionality, effort, practice, God's power and our self-discipline. How do you see these three things working together in your life and faith community? Where do you need most to practice self-discipline in order to be more loving?

*God of power and might, we often lack self-discipline and fail to love as we ought. Self-centeredness replaces self-discipline. Selfishness overtakes your call to serve you and others. Forgive us for trusting in our own power, rather than relying on yours. Strengthen our self-discipline so that we can love you and our neighbors fearlessly. Amen.*

*Friday* | JOHN 14:27

Peace is illusive, ineffable and so much more than the absence of violence. Jesus gifts us with his peace. Where do you find and feel Jesus' peace that passes understanding? How can you cultivate a deep sense of Jesus' peace in ways that impact the people and places around you? Read the headlines and pray for peace for those without any this day.

*Prince of Peace, in a world too often overflowing with violence, cruelty and war, we long for your inexplicable peace, not only for ourselves, but for all of creation. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. May your offspring increase exponentially until all the earth is enveloped by your peace. Amen.*

*Saturday* | ISAIAH 54:10

What in your life feels tumultuous, as if the very earth beneath your feet is shaking? Reflect on your faith journey and remember other seasons of upheaval. How was God present? Looking back, where do you see that God was at work? Can recalling those times give you comfort and assurance now?

*There are seasons, Lord of all, when nothing in our world seems stable or certain, the foundations on which we stand shake and tremble and we wonder what will be left standing when the tumult stops. Remind us, compassionate God, of your unfailing covenant and persistent compassion. Help us to hold on to you when everything else is crumbling. Amen.*