

## **A Living Faith: The End Of Ourselves**

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Oct 20, 2019

Matthew 6:25-34

Sometimes we do everything that we know to do and we are left short of what we are working toward or hoping for. We have come to the end of ourselves and the challenge is to let go of control and trust that what we need will be provided, or we will somehow make it through.

We hold out hope that we might find or receive what we are looking for, be it mentally, emotionally, spiritually, socially, materially, financially, or physically.

We also have to face the reality of what might happen if what we desire isn't available and we will simply have to make due without.

We don't exactly have a guarantee that we will always get what we want or are working toward. This is simply a reality of life.

It is not an easy thing to face — that point when we have come to the end of ourselves. For many people it is the hardest thing that they will ever do. If the stakes are

high enough, sometimes at these points we might freak out, we might worry, we might get angry. We might even look for a way to get distracted by something else so that we don't feel the pain quite so much.

Sometimes we will turn our attention inward and blame ourselves for not having what we want — even though if we are honest there may not have been anything different we could have done.

In Jesus' day people also hit the end of themselves. Jesus noticed that there were many who were prone to worry at these points.

Jesus stepped into that space and addressed the reality his friends faced when they wanted to control things they simply could not control. In one case in a book written by a man named Matthew, Jesus addressed his friends when they felt stress around money.

Jesus was clear that the value system of society was not so healthy. Society in those days as well as today places emphasis on accumulation of wealth and money, and the pursuit of these things often become a distraction from our dedication to God.

It is helpful to note that most of those who followed Jesus were not wealthy. In fact, most of them were either poor or what we might call the “working class poor.”

They were more likely struggling to make ends meet and wondering from where their next meal might come than sitting down and counting their gold coins.

It was easy for those folk to become jealous or envious of those who had more than they did. Jesus affirmed this also was a trap.

Both were distractions — too much focus on holding and increasing wealth, or focusing too much on how little they had. In both cases, money overtook their life energy and became for them a god.

Perhaps you can see this happening in your neighborhood or your family as well.

Listen to Jesus’ words.

### **READ MATTHEW 6:25-34**

Jesus’ friends were concerned about their basic needs and they wanted more than they had. It was hard for them to trust God to provide.

Jesus was not condemning them for wanting these things. He even

acknowledged that they indeed needed food and clothes, but their lives were out of balance because there was simply too much attention given to possess things they did not currently have.

Jesus encouraged them not to worry about such things like so many other people did.

He pointed out that all of this was a horrible distraction from something much more important. Jesus was helping his friends develop a laser focus on living a righteous life, one that would please God and be in balance with this amazing world that God has made.

So many things can steal away our attention and get us distracted from living how God designed us to live.

I can imagine what Jesus’ friends might have been thinking. “Jesus, what if I don’t have what I need? Is God really in control of all of this?”

Perhaps Jesus’ response would be to shift their attention from worry, because it simply leads them around in circles.

It was Monday morning and Gary was sitting in the business office of Kentucky Christian University. The man across the desk looked at him sadly,

“I’m sorry Gary, but you can’t stay. You need a fourth of your tuition. That’s just school policy.”

Gary heard the same message three days before and had spent the weekend walking up and down the streets of the small community, knocking on doors offering to do any odd job like painting, mowing, clearing brush — anything that could earn him the money he needed to go to school.

Gary had left home with a suitcase and \$50 in his pocket having sold the only thing he owned of value, his saxophone.

His parents had gone through a divorce a couple of years prior. His dad had filed for bankruptcy, lost the house, and his mother had an emotional breakdown and was suicidal.

Around the same time, Gary himself had been in a car accident without insurance.

Needless to say, Gary didn’t have much money for college and this was before the days of grants and loans. But he also felt strongly about going into ministry and he needed an education to get there.

So, Gary pleaded with the man across the desk. “There must be

some way I can pay for school. I’m willing to work.”

The man simply shook his head. Gary had reached the end of himself only one week after arriving on campus. There was nothing more he knew to do.

Have you been at a point in life like Gary where you felt a strong sense of direction, but every door seemed to be closed, every option faded away, every resource had evaporated? Things were not going well and there didn’t seem to be any redeeming aspect of the experience. Have you been there?

Just then, a secretary walked into the office with a check in her hand saying that a nearby church sent over one fourth of Gary’s tuition. A few minutes later she opened another envelop with a check for the remainder of the tuition he needed for the first semester — this one from an anonymous source.

Gary felt unworthy. He felt confused. He felt humbled. This was all completely unexpected.

Then every semester, for four years, anonymous checks arrived at the school’s business office to pay for his education.

Gary did what many people in his shoes would do, he went about looking for a purpose and explanation for what had just happened. He determined that the anonymous checks were God's doing after he had come to the end of himself and was desperate.

We seem to be always looking for the reason, the purpose, the lesson that was assigned that we are supposed to learn.

It makes sense that we do this because it is very uncomfortable to think about a world that is out of control. Maybe we are afraid of a life that seems random.

It gives us some solace to think that even though we might not understand it, everything is controlled by God and happens as part of a bigger plan.

"Everything happens for a reason," people often say. But let's think about this for a minute. Does everything happen for a reason? Is God pulling all of the strings in every situation bending them to his will?

But when we look at what happens in our lives, this really doesn't make much sense. It isn't very helpful either, because we are often in situations that seem to have no purpose and certainly not a

purpose that brings goodness and love into the world.

It is precisely because God doesn't seem to be in control that we struggle.

What about when we have all the qualifications and experience but nobody wants to hire us and our bills are over due?

What about when we leverage every dollar we have in savings to start a new business we felt God wanted us to start in order to fulfill our big dream ... but nobody wants to buy what we are selling?

What about when we get married and soon realize we are in an abusive situation and we feel trapped and alone?

What about when our elementary-aged child is diagnosed with a terminal illness?

Do we really think that a loving God who is full of grace and compassion would hurt us, wound us, cause us pain and send us through hell just to teach us a lesson?

I'm not sure that fits the character of God.

How much God intervenes in life and alters the order of things we

may never know. Why do things work out for some and not others? We will never know.

Why did Gary receive what he needed and others never make it to college because of a lack of funding.

If we say God is in control then why isn't it working out for us? Is God to blame? Do we not have enough faith? Have we not prayed hard enough? Is there some sin of ours getting in the way?

All of these questions lead us around in circles and probably into fear and greater worry.

And Jesus said "Do not worry." Change the conversation. Don't get stuck in that unhealthy loop.

Think about it. If we approach those tough situations not expecting that there is a divine plan that God is working out, perhaps we will invest ourselves a bit more and take greater ownership and responsibility for those situations.

Maybe a more helpful way to think is to understand the challenges and struggles as simply part of the natural flow of life. It is not as though God is making these specific things happen to us, but instead we can always learn and grow from whatever happens. And

all the while, our good, generous, and compassionate God identifies with our struggles and will always walk every step of that messy journey with us.

After all, Jesus himself is described as a man of sorrows who is acquainted with grief. If Jesus wasn't spared from pain, do we think we will?

We share this experience of pain in life with Jesus and we share it with one another because that is what it means to be human.

What do we do when we come to the end of ourselves?

We go into and through that experience doing the best we know how, knowing that we are not alone. We also go with a companion who knows us, and not only our beautiful side, but also our ugly side, and loves us and is committed to us anyway.

And we also walk among other broken and healing human beings in the community that God has called together.