

Buzz King
buzz@BuzzKing.com
BuzzKing.com
303 437 7419

Matthew 6:31–34, ESV.

³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

³⁴ “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Seek first the Kingdom of God.

Christians often talk about walking in the footsteps of Jesus, of living the way he lived, of having his values and acting the way he acted. I’d like to look at some quotes of Jesus, taken from the Gospels, and see what it would mean to do this in a literal sense. We of course don’t know the evolution of the Gospels. There’s good reason to believe that only the Gospel of John was written by a true witness to the life of Jesus, and that is the Apostle John. One other Gospel might be written by an Apostle. Matthew worked as a Roman tax collector - a profession reviled by his Jewish peers. But few believe he wrote the Gospel. The authors of Matthew, Luke and Mark probably got their material secondhand, from oral accounts. There is very strong evidence that the authors of Matthew and Luke borrowed material directly from the Gospel of Mark. But rather than trying to analyze the accuracy of

the Gospels, let's just accept them as they are. The Bible is our holy book. The New Testament is the basis of our New Covenant, the agreement with God that gives us a personal relationship with God. We will simply accept the Gospels as they are and look at the words and actions of Jesus. We will learn that to fully understand what it means to emulate Jesus, we must look carefully at the full context surrounding passages that we find relevant. Let's start with Matthew 6:31-34.

³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

³⁴ "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

This appears in the longest speech of Jesus recorded in the Gospels, the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew. He begins with the Beatitudes. Then Jesus moves on to a series of moral teachings. Roughly in the middle of this sermon, Jesus tells us that we should not be anxious about what we will eat or what we will wear. He makes a comparison with birds. They are not anxious, worried about how they will survive. They simply live. We need to look carefully, though, at the words of Jesus. He doesn't say that we should just flit around like a bunch of birds, not being anxious because we aren't capable of thinking about long term food supply issues. Jesus does not say that we should be lazy and not work to take care

of ourselves. What Jesus says is that non-believers spend their lives focused on what they will eat, what they will wear. They obsess on these things, and nothing is as important to them. But believers know that our highest priority is to “*seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness*”. This is how we avoid the anxiety that comes with the unknowns of life. He tells us to “*not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*” It’s enough that we work hard today to take care of ourselves and our families. Because of our faith in God, we don’t get neurotic about the future.

This will be the foundation for this message as we strive to live like Jesus. We will be relaxed and unworried. We will hand our anxiety off to God. Let’s start with the only substantive story that we have of Jesus as a boy. Let’s see how he lived when he was twelve. His parents were devout Jews. They regularly traveled to Jerusalem for major holidays; they did this along with thousands of other Jews who lived in the area surrounding Jerusalem, the home of the Great Temple. Jesus and his parents were in Jerusalem for Passover. They were not well-off people and they probably walked the full distance, seventy-five miles, from Nazareth to Jerusalem. After the holiday they started for home but didn’t know that the boy Jesus had remained in Jerusalem. This isn’t as bizarre as it would seem: people traveled in large groups for safety and all the adults would look after all the children. They

probably thought, at first, that he was with other adults on the journey. They find the boy in the Temple, the most holy place of the Jews, sitting among the rabbis, listening and learning. He apparently shows deep wisdom. We are told that *“all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers”*. When his parents find him, his mother asks him how he could treat his parents like this. Jesus says this to Joseph and Mary: *“Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”* He tells them that his first duty is to God. His first home is his father’s house, not his parent’s house. We are then told this:

⁵⁰ And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. ⁵¹ And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

Jesus did, however, understand his duty to his family. It came only second to his duty to God. But the bottom line for Jesus, throughout his life, was to grow in his spiritual wisdom and to strengthen his bond with God. That is how we must live if we are going to emulate the life of Christ. We work on our faith all our lives.

Let’s turn to the middle of the Gospel of John, Chapter 13. Jesus says this to his disciples, verbalizing something he illustrates over and over with his actions:

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

This is very clear. He not only tells us how he lives – by loving other people – he tells us that we are commanded to live the same way. If we do this one thing, everyone will know that we are in large part modeling our life after the life of Jesus. Then in Chapter 14, Jesus predicts that Peter will deny his relationship with Jesus at a critical moment. Jesus goes on to be even clearer about what it means to follow in his footsteps. He is talking to Philip, one of the first Apostles to abandon his former life and follow Jesus. Jesus says this to Philip: *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do.”* This seems like an extremely tall order. If we are truly going to live like Christ, we’re supposed to do the works that he does. Maybe we need to introduce a new concept into our plan to live like Christ: it’s called an upper limit. There are scientists who tell us that the upper bound of the age of a human is 122 years, that no one could ever live longer than that. An upper limit is often something we aspire to but perhaps never in practice achieve. We are going to have to accept that although we will do our best to live like Jesus, we will never do many of the things he did. We will, however, come as close as possible. But I will return to this. We’ll see that by putting Bible passages in a larger context, our upper limit might not seem so imposing after all.

Here is one life principle with which we are all familiar, one that Jesus followed with no limit. Jesus is being crucified. This is what we’re told:

when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴ And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Jesus was not only always willing to forgive those who wronged him, he forgave one of the greatest wrongs most of us could imagine – being murdered. Further, he was willing to attribute the actions of those who killed him not to them being evil, but simply to them being ignorant. He forgave and he didn't even judge.

Here's another one that's going to seem very hard to match in our efforts to emulate Jesus. This is from Chapter 17 of the Gospel of Luke. It's from an extended piece of Luke where Jesus is traveling about seventy miles from the Sea of Galilee to Jerusalem. When he gets there, he will make his triumphal and final entry into the Holy City. In our quote, he is working his way south to Jerusalem, passing between Samaria and Galilee to the south. We are told this:

as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance ¹³ and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." ¹⁴ When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed.

So, this should be an easy one. If we want to live like Jesus, if we want to emulate him, we should strongly consider finding some lepers and healing them. But let's look at this more closely, with our upper limit notion in mind. These lepers stood at a distance because they were forced, under threat of death, to stay away from

other people. They lived in groups in isolation. That's why there was ten of them together. We can read this story differently, as a metaphor. Jesus didn't just cure them of a disease. Jesus did something more important. He freed them from their rejection by society. He welcomed them back into the civilized world. We can't do miracles, but we can embrace people who have been marginalized, perhaps by poverty, disability, or having political opinions that differ from the norm.

Let's get back at our upper limit notion. We looked at John, Chapter 14 where Jesus seems to be saying that we need to do the works that he does. This seems intimidating. But maybe we can look at this the same way we just looked at the curing of the lepers. Is there a more abstract, more important statement being made, one that we can in fact achieve? Here is the entire exchange with Philip:

⁸ Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." ⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

¹² "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

This begins with Philip asking Jesus to show them the Father, to help them find God, to develop a relationship with God. Jesus has an answer for him, saying that if you

know Jesus, then you already know God, because Jesus and God are one - they are both God. Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in him. Jesus says that you can believe this on its own, or you can believe this by looking at the works that Jesus has done. Jesus says that if we believe in him, if we follow him, then because he and the Father are one, Jesus will aid us in doing those great things. Jesus says that *“¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.”* The point is that if we try to emulate Jesus, we’re not on our own. We have a lot of help when we look at that upper limit of what we can do. We can achieve tremendous things because of our faith. In fact, let’s look at what happens even before this, before Philip engages Jesus. Just before Philip speaks in Chapter 14 of John, the Apostle Thomas speaks, asking Jesus where he is going to go when he leaves them. He doesn’t understand that they will not be alone when Jesus goes away. Here is how Jesus responds:

I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

No one comes to the Father except through him. If you know him, you will know the Father. Jesus is referring to a primary goal of his: bringing people to a life of faith. We don’t have to cure lepers or raise the dead. But, in our emulation of Jesus, we will still do one of the most important things that Jesus did on Earth – and we will have a lot of help. We’re going to introduce others to God, to faith, just like

Jesus did his whole life. And because of the density of modern life, and with the help of technology, we can reach many, many more people than Jesus reached. He never went far from the Jerusalem area. We encounter radically more people than Jesus encountered. The Apostles, to whom he is speaking in this passage, will use the roads and ships built by the Roman Empire to evangelize far and wide. Imagine our upper limit being higher than Jesus' limit, higher than the Apostles' limits.

To emulate Jesus, we will make our relationship with God our greatest responsibility. We will make our duty to our family number two. We will live with forgiveness, love, a determination to help those who are not as blessed as we are. We will always grow our faith. We will help others find faith. We will do all this on the foundation of our unwavering trust in God, which keeps us calm and joyous.

There is more. We've looked at Mathew, John, and Luke. Here is something from Mark. It is probably the first Gospel written. Consider the first Chapter of Mark. Jesus has just been baptized by John in the River Jordan, ritualistically cleansing himself before he begins his ministry. He is starting to gather his Apostles. But John the Baptist is arrested. Jesus declares this: *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."* He declares his overriding goal in everything he is about to do. If we want to emulate him, this is certainly something to listen to. He is here to usher in the Kingdom of God. We

can be a big part of establishing that Kingdom here on Earth. Here is what Jesus says much later in the Gospel of Mark, when the plot to kill him is about to unfold:

³²“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. ³⁵Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning— ³⁶lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. ³⁷And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”

This is ultimately how we can emulate the life of Christ. We do more than be on guard. We can do more than keep ourselves awake. We can make sure that others know – and there are so many people to whom we have access – that the day and the hour are unknown to us. The master will return to our home. We can do our best to make sure that people are prepared for the end, whenever it comes.

I met a man recently who suffered brain damage when he had a stroke. He is a young man. He had to have his brain opened up to stop the bleeding. Doctors removed destroyed tissue. He now has some trouble expressing himself. He survives by trading a living space for his manual services. Recently, he was living in a camper on someone’s land in exchange for taking care of their animals. He said that he is not afraid of tomorrow. He is not worried about whether he will have a place to live and money to buy food a month or a year from now. He said that because of his brain surgery, he loses memories, words, and thoughts. But, he said,

he will never forget that his goal every day is very simple: to live like Jesus did.

Please pray very briefly with me.

God, guide us as we strive to live like your son did. Although we cannot bring the dead back from life or walk on water, we can – with your help – do the most important things that Jesus did. Help us live with love and forgiveness, and help us spread the Word and make sure that everyone is ready when the Master returns home. Amen.