

Anyone listening to the recent local or national news is routinely informed about the hazards surrounding the coronavirus outbreak. The leadership at Lynden Community Church take the health and safety of our members very seriously and are closely monitoring the guidance and recommendations provided by health professionals. In response to these recommendations the leadership has decided that the formal gathering for worship on Sunday mornings will be suspended for three weeks. We will continue to be in contact with you via phone or email. The current plan is for us to meet on Sunday, April 5. Should this change you will be informed by phone call or email.

The Coronavirus brings out fear, worry and anxiety in many people so over the next few weeks I will be sending out a devotional addressing this issue. Enjoy!

How To Get Rid of Worry

Day 1

Read - Matthew 6

Worrying can be an everyday occurrence for some people. Sometimes it becomes such a normal part of life that it's not even noticed. It becomes a piece of who they are. Many anxious people find themselves wishing to be more laid back, and they begin to think, "Okay, today I will not worry as much. Today I'm going to stop myself from worrying." But, the worrying doesn't stop. Instead, it becomes an even bigger mess of worrying about not worrying.

So, just how do we get rid of worry? Beginning in Matthew 6:25, Jesus talks specifically about worry. In fact, Jesus instructs us not to worry at all about anything. Such things even as simple as food and clothes worry us day in and day out. These worries are rooted in our doubt that Jesus will provide for us. Jesus says in verse 33, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you." We must hold on to and trust in the promises of Jesus. He will provide.

The best way to begin not worrying should not begin with us; it begins with Jesus. We must look to Jesus and build a relationship with Him, and as His promises unfold before us, we will see His faithfulness. Then and only by Jesus, our worries will begin to fade.

Reflect:

- What is the one thing you spend most of your time worrying over? How can you begin to give control of that worry to Jesus?
- Do you fully trust God to provide for you? Why or why not?
- Is worrying keeping you from having a better relationship with Jesus? What can you do to worry less and trust God more?

Are You Living In Faith Or Fear?

Day 2

Read –Matthew 8

We place our faith in countless people and things. We believe our legs will support us, so we get out of bed. We believe our brakes will enable our car to stop, so we drive. We believe our boss will pay us, so we show up for the job. When we have faith in something, our behavior is affected. We act out of faith.

The opposite of faith is fear. We can choose one or the other. Imagine a world in which car brakes only worked half the time. We would be terrified at every intersection. God is infinitely more reliable than the finest car on the market, but we don't treat Him that way. Our faith seems to extend just beyond our ability even though God is able to do infinitely more than we can imagine (Ephesians 3:20). We hope for good when God promises the best.

God is able to do infinitely more than we can imagine.

Matthew 8 is full of the fulfillment of God's promises in people's lives. If we really have faith that God works in these ways, it radically changes the way we live our lives. We are willing to address sin we've brushed under the rug because Jesus forgives and heals. We will step out and risk something for God because we know He'll provide for us (Philippians 1:6). Faith like this eliminates fear because our faith is in a certainty: Jesus.

When we are afraid to address an area of sin in our life and be obedient to God's call, it is because we doubt the truth of God's promises. Our faith is limited by our need to believe we are better equipped than God to manage our issues. Fear of condemnation and failure overtake us. God offers freedom from fear through faith in Him.

Reflect:

Does your faith in an unseen God propel you to action each day?

In what area of your life are you doubting God's promises?

What part does God have for you to play in growing your own faith?

Three Instructions We Can All Benefit From Following Day 3

Read – Matthew 10

Jesus knows our hearts better than we do. When He sends out His disciples in Matthew 10, Jesus gives specific commands, not to limit the disciples, but to prepare and encourage them for the experiences ahead. The Word of God is living and breathing, so we can learn from these same commands thousands of years later.

Live simply. Freely you have received; freely give (Matthew 10:8b). This command guards our motives. Greed and pride quickly ruin character. In the same way, heartfelt generosity can be a game-changer in someone's life.

Be wise. "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16). A life dedicated to Jesus Christ might be lonely, difficult or even dangerous. Committing your life to Christ is never guaranteed to be easy, but Jesus knows how to bring joy into our lives, even in tough times.

Don't be afraid. God give us the words to speak under pressure and calms our worrying hearts by telling us that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without God knowing. God knows every hair on our heads. Jesus tells us, "Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:31).

You are precious to God. You were created to glorify Him and bring others toward Him. "Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10:39). Jesus has called us to love a simple, wise, fearless life because He knows His strength is all we need.

Reflect:

- Living simply isn't easy because we're prone to listen to an "I want it now!" mentality. What changes can you make in your budget in order to

spend money more wisely? If you need help with this, check out these financial planning resources!

- If Jesus was generous with the resources He had, how can we be generous with ours?
- We all have areas where we need to practice more wisdom. Are you being wise in your conversations, money and time? If not, what changes do you need to make?

Are You Carrying Too Much?

Day 4

Read – Matthew 11

Do you unload all the groceries in one trip? Loading way more than you should on each arm, you awkwardly and barely close the trunk. Bag handles cut into your arms. You can make it. Just a little longer. If you are a one-trip unloader, you know the relief you feel when you make it to your destination, or better yet, someone meets you and takes some of your load.

Have you tried the same trick spiritually?

I can handle all this on my own.

I can carry the weight of my sin, my sorrow, my to do list.

Yes, it hurts. I should ask for help, but I can do this.

Carrying a load of groceries is probably not going to cause any more damage than a broken jar. Carrying our sin or sorrow is more serious. We cannot do it. It is too heavy for us. Thankfully, we don't have to. Jesus is ready to take our heavy load. Only He has the power to heal our hearts from the damage done by sin and sorrow. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus invites us, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Here are a few ways to give our load to Him.

Ask Him to forgive your sins and give Him control in your life (Romans 10:9-10). Spend time each day talking to God and reading the Bible. This is how our mind is renewed and we learn to rest in Him. Talk to someone else who loves Jesus when you are dealing with sin or hurting (Galatians 6:2). God places people in our lives to support our growth. Don't beat yourself up when you mess up. Ask God to forgive you and remember you are forgiven. Focus on Jesus instead of your sin (Romans 8:1).

Reflect

- Have you given control of your life to Jesus?
- What's one load you are trying to carry on your own that you need Jesus' help with? Tell Him how you're feeling and ask for His help today.

If you're feeling disliked, you're in good company

Day 5

Read – Matthew 12

Have you ever felt disliked? Maybe even hated? Most of us have at some point in our lives.

Jesus did, too.

The Pharisees, the Jewish religious leaders, hated Jesus. They treated Him like a suspected criminal — always following close behind, watching Him, waiting to see if He did something against the rules they had studied, memorized and defined.

Jesus was born into a humble family, and many may have considered Him to be the underdog. He was not what the Pharisees were expecting as they anxiously awaited the arrival of the Messiah, so they discounted Him.

Matthew 12 records a time when Jesus went into the synagogue, knowing the Pharisees would be there to condemn Him. Still, He approached a man with a shriveled hand. As the Pharisees watched to see if Jesus would heal this man on the Sabbath (a day of rest when no work was to be done), Jesus healed him by restoring his hand, just as sound as the other.

The Pharisees thought they had caught Jesus in the act. Now they had evidence that Jesus was unlawfully performing miracles on the Sabbath. Jesus had gone after the one, a man whose life needed to be changed, in the face of persecution. Jesus explained this man's life was more valuable than recovering a lost sheep on the Sabbath. Whereas the Pharisees thought it was more appropriate to keep the letter of the law.

Jesus still goes after the one. He accepts us for who we are no matter who is watching. You are valuable to Him.

Reflect:

- What is something in your life you need Jesus to restore?
- Do you ever find yourself trying to conform to rules instead of following Jesus' example?
- What can you learn from Jesus when it comes to showing your faith in the face of adversity?

Don't let obstacles get in your way

Day 6

Read – Matthew 13

Gesù è il Signore.

Those are powerful words, but unless you speak Italian, they mean nothing. "Gesù è il Signore" means "Jesus is Lord" in Italian. The frustration we feel when we're surrounded by a language we don't understand is the same feeling people get when Christians speak their own language or refuse to meet them where they are.

In Matthew 13, a large crowd came to Jesus. He didn't break them into manageable groups or send people away. Instead, Jesus got in a boat so everyone could see and hear Him speak. Then, Jesus taught using parables, or simple stories. When the disciples asked why He taught in stories, Jesus replied, "You have been given the chance to understand the secrets of the kingdom of heaven. It has not been given to outsiders" (Matthew 13:11). Jesus met people on their level by using words they could understand. Teaching again in a parable, Jesus explained meeting people where they are allows the seed of the Gospel to sink into their hearts and grow more easily.

Obstacles can make it difficult to share the Gospel. Jesus didn't let obstacles stop Him, though, so we can't, either. In this story, Jesus met people where they were by stepping out on a boat. How can we step out to reach people where they are and share the Gospel?

Reflect:

- What obstacles hold you back from sharing the Gospel?
- How can you overcome them?
- One great way to share the Gospel is to tell your story.

Are you in need of a little R&R?

Day 7

Read – Matthew 14

We all have situations, issues, problems, and discomforts that push us and pull us this way and that, leaving us overwhelmed and emotionally exhausted. Matthew 14 begins with Jesus experiencing one of those situations

One of Jesus' closest friends just died, and He needed time to reflect. Jesus withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place (Matthew 14:13). Although Jesus was looking for space and quiet, He didn't receive it right then. "When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick" (Matthew 14:14).

Rest is a command from God, but so is loving our neighbors. Too often, we can ignore one at the expense of the other. We over focus on loving others and neglect the need to take care of our own spiritual and emotional health. Or, we over focus on resting and neglect the hurting people around us, justifying our actions as “needing some me time.”

Jesus showed us that these two ideas — resting well and loving others well — can coexist.

The people followed Jesus, and He met their needs, putting them before Himself. But Jesus still found time for rest. After this, He rearranged His schedule to make time for God, going "up on a mountainside by himself to pray" (Matthew 14:23).

By drawing close to God, Jesus' spirit was renewed, and He was able to do many miracles for those He loved. As we take time to draw closer to God, we feel more encouraged and equipped to manage our hectic schedules and enjoy all life has to offer. God can do miracles in and through us if we put Him first. Just as God poured into His Son when they spent time together, He will renew

us so we can do the work He has for us. We can only begin to imagine the miracles we will be witness to when our eyes are solely upon our creator.

Reflect

- Jesus was the perfect role model of how to steward our time and put God first. How are you modeling this behavior in your own life?
- What is a one way you can rearrange your day to spend more quality time with God?
- How can you serve more people in your life who may desperately need your time and attention?

Who are you putting first in your life?

Day 8

Read – Matthew 16

It might sound silly, but this children's poem describes the mind of most humans.

I had a little tea party,

One afternoon at three;

'Twas very small, three guests in all,

Just I, myself and me.

Myself ate up the sandwiches,

While I drank up the tea,

'Twas also I who ate the pie

And passed the cake to me.

Like a tea party with I, myself, and me, our thought life is all one-sided: “More! Mine! No fair! What about me?”

The Jewish leaders were No. 1 in their own eyes, too. They exalted themselves as the greatest and most holy in the land (Matthew 16:11-12). Moreover, the Jewish leaders hated Jesus because He received the people's devotion, which they desperately desired.

The disciples were no different. They bickered constantly about who would be the greatest in Jesus's kingdom (Matthew 18:1). Even Peter unintentionally tried to thwart God's plan, reasoning Jesus could bypass the cross and establish His kingdom right then and there. In Peter's mind, he could receive his place in the kingdom sooner, and everyone would see how awesome he was (Matthew 16:22-23).

The solution for everyone was the same. Jesus responded, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). It was an invitation to all requiring a decision to either follow Jesus or the Pharisees. Being subjects under Roman authority, the Jews knew the cross would mean pain, humiliation and certain death.

For us, denying ourselves means setting aside the will and rights to our own lives. Then, we submit ourselves completely to Jesus' will. The time for doing whatever we want has ended. The cross was Jesus' test of His obedience to His Father's will. As Jesus followers, our test is the same. If we will not submit to God's authority, are we really His disciples?

Reflect:

- Jesus gave up His life in obedience to His Father in heaven. Are you willing to give everything to follow Jesus?
- How would you describe your obedience to God today? Are you all in or are you still trying to hang onto your rights?
- God's invitation to follow Jesus is open to everyone. As Jesus' ambassador, is there someone in your life you can share His love with today?

Your Faith Makes a Difference

Day 9

Read – Matthew 17

Have you ever stood at the bedside of a loved one and watched them suffer in despair and pain? Have you ever been drawn to make a difference in the life of another but simply didn't know what to do?

Such was the case in the story of a father who had such relentless faith that his child was healed from his days of suffering. This father recognized the power and authority of Christ. He believed that if he could get his son to Jesus, his son's life would be miraculously changed. To his dismay, when the father brought his son to Jesus' disciples for healing, he found that they could not grant his request.

The Bible says Jesus told His disciples that it was because of their measure of faith that the father's son was not healed: "Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20).

Romans 10:17 tells us that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. Jesus is the Word (John 1:1-5), and Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). Our faith in Jesus and the power of His Word positions us to see miracles and wonders in our own lives and in the lives of others.

By reading God's Word and allowing His word to saturate our hearts, we can strengthen our faith and make a life-changing difference in the people around us.

Reflect:

- What does your daily Bible reading time look like? If you aren't reading your Bible daily, there are many resources available.
- What do you believe about the power and authority of God's Word? Are these beliefs reflected in your actions?
- Have you ever witnessed a miracle in your life or in the life of others? What did this look like?

How To Be Righteous

Day 10

Read – Matthew 21

“Hed up yonder a ways til ya reach the old Miller place. Turn right then go a fur piece then left after ole Clyde Thompson’s farm. That’ll swing yous out past Tucker’s pond and then takes another left. It’s a dirt road but it’ll carry ya out to the highway you’re a lookin’ fur,” replied the farmer to the request for help.

Directions like this are frustrating and useless without knowing the area or having the farmer actually lead us there. Trying to live a righteous life without following Jesus is just as frustrating.

Jesus didn't just give His followers a list of directions to follow. He gave us an example to follow. Jesus demonstrated righteous living through His words and actions. In clearing the temple, Jesus acts in accordance with Scripture. In quieter moments with the disciples, Jesus teaches biblical principles using stories and metaphors He knew they would understand. As a result, we see them listening intently, asking clarifying questions and responding in faith.

Being lost in the sticks is one thing, but being lost in life is far more serious. Being lost in life has eternal consequences. Just as Jesus used the Scriptures to remind His disciples about truth and living a righteous life, the Bible is filled with the wisdom and direction we need for today. Get to know God’s voice by spending time with Him in His Word, and He will lead you in the way of righteousness.

Reflect:

- Think of a situation in your life where you are trying desperately to control the outcome. Have you been in God’s Word, covering the situation and your response in prayer?
- Which lessons from Matthew 2 could help you learn to trust God for the direction in your life?

What If We All Discovered a New Four-Letter Word?

Day 11

Read – Matthew 22

A forceful, off-target blow from a hammer. A screech of tires caused by slamming on the brakes. A phone call delivering unexpected news. You've probably experienced one of these scenarios, and it's possible the first thought that ran through your mind — or came out of your mouth — was a not-so-glamorous four-letter word. When things go wrong, raw emotion often comes out.

Jesus understands that we endure pain and suffering. He experienced the fears and trials we all have and gave us the example of how to act. Jesus was hated, mistreated, falsely accused and plotted against, and His response was a four-letter word, but not the one we may have been tempted to use. Jesus responded with love. The Bible gives many commands, but Jesus made it clear which commandments were most important in His response to the Pharisees in Matthew 22:37-40. Love God first, then your neighbor as yourself.

Loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind means to completely surrender to Him. Before we can love others, we must first love God. After all, we can't give someone else what we don't have. We show God how much we love Him in the same way we show love to our spouse or our children — by spending time with Him. We can do that daily through reading the Bible and prayer. Then, we show our love for others by sacrificing our selfish desires to help someone in need or finding a way to be a blessing to a coworker, friend, or stranger. Love. Imagine what the world would look like if everyone used this four-letter word.

Reflect:

- How are you experiencing Jesus' love on a personal level?
- How can you draw closer to Jesus? Numerous books and tips on reading through the Bible are available.
- What's one way you can serve someone else today?

Does What You Say Match What You Do?

Day 12

Read – Matthew 23

It's a rule: No phones allowed at dinner.

Then, while waiting for the food, you hear that familiar "ding." So you check that text message. (It might be important, right?) But your teenager is quick to call you out, saying, "Hey! No phones allowed!"

This is an embarrassing reminder of the need to practice what we preach because our kids are watching. We're setting an example for them. As Christians, it's even more important to practice what we preach, because non-believers and other believers are watching.

In Matthew 23:1-7, Jesus warns the crowds and His disciples to obey the Pharisees. They were to submit to the Pharisees' authority but not follow their hypocritical example. The Pharisees' motives were self-serving. They put heavy burdens and extra rules on themselves so they look holy and others would admire them. There was no love in their hearts, and they didn't lift a finger to help those who were struggling.

If we aren't careful, we can fall into the same trap of trying to follow the rules at the expense of renewing our minds (Romans 12:2). If we profess our belief but don't possess Jesus in our hearts, we become hypocrites. Jesus also warns us that if we focus on religion instead of relationship, we may lead others astray.

When we have a relationship with Jesus, He will be reflected in our words and our actions — no matter where we are or what trials we face — because He will be in our hearts.

Reflect:

- How do your actions reflect the love of Jesus? In what ways are your actions more like those of the Pharisees, critical and self-serving?
- How are you growing in your relationship with Jesus so He can change your heart, not just your behavior?

The Best Place To Find The Truth

Day 13

Read – Matthew 24

As networks compete to cover breaking news, the desire to be first can cause mistakes. Experts are sought out to provide deeper insight, but when there's little information available, they have to choose their words carefully and lean on clarifiers like "suspect" and "allegedly." Viewers who rely solely on what they see on TV may find themselves misinformed.

The same is true when it comes to Jesus' return. Several imposters have proclaimed the day the world will end, building sturdy shelters and hoarding food and supplies. But then the day comes, and nothing happens.

Jesus addresses the truth concerning the end of times in Matthew 24:36, "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." Believers in Jesus are already prepared for the end of times. The only shelter we need is a relationship with Jesus.

When we have a strong relationship with Jesus, we are less likely to be misled by false predictions. The first step to building a relationship with God is to read the Bible and know the truth for ourselves. God speaks to us through His Word and provides guidance and purpose for our lives. Second, we must continually be in prayer and listen closely for His voice. Finally, we must follow God's directions and conduct our lives in a manner pleasing to Him.

Reflect

- Where do you turn when the Bible is difficult to understand? Are there people in your life you can go to when you have questions?
- What's one way you've already seen God change your mind about what's true through reading the Bible?
- As you spend time with God, He will guide you to your next step. Based on what you're reading and hearing from God, what is your next step?

Are You Playing It Safe?

Day 14

Read – Matthew 25

No matter how much you love your computer, give it time and inevitably, something will go wrong and you'll discover the magic of Ctrl+Alt+Del. As the computer restarts, it goes into "safe mode." Safe mode is designed to help fix most, if not all, problems with the operating system. Safe mode is designed to be temporary, not a permanent way of operating. But too often, we'll try to live our lives like a computer in safe mode.

That's what happened with the workers in Matthew 25:14-30. Three workers had the choice to either play it safe or make a move. As each was called to stewardship and faithfulness, only two of the workers seized the opportunity to capitalize on the talents given them. As a result, the two workers received a double portion of their investment and were highly praised for their faithfulness. The third worker, however, made the choice to do nothing. This worker decided to play it safe, and he buried his portion. The lazy worker was not only severely rebuked and punished, but the resources given him were also taken away and distributed to one of the faithful workers.

As we anticipate the Lord's return, let us remain faithful to what God has entrusted in us. As believers, we can either play it safe or we can take action. As we follow Jesus, we should not linger in "safe mode," but instead, we should move forward in productivity.

Reflect

- Is there any area of your life where you're operating in safe mode? What is keeping you from taking action?
- We are called to make wise investments with what the Lord has given us. What's one way you can better manage your time, talent, or money to bring glory to God?

How To Be On the Upside of Every Exchange

Day 15

Read – Matthew 26

When you take a trip to another country, you can't buy anything without the correct currency. To get the right money, you visit an exchange booth and trade your money for that country's currency according to the exchange rate. Sometimes, you receive more than you gave, and sometimes you get less.

In Matthew 26, we find two instances of people making an exchange. The first is a woman who interrupts a gathering to pour an expensive perfume on the feet of Jesus. We find out the price of the perfume was equivalent to one year's income. This woman was willing to give up a year's pay for the opportunity to worship at Jesus' feet. The second exchange is made by one of Jesus' 12 disciples, Judas. Judas was willing to betray Jesus for 30 silver coins.

In these stories, Matthew shows us that one person sacrificed something in life for Jesus while another person sacrificed Jesus for something in life. We have the same choice to make today in our lives. Each day we have the decision to either worship Jesus or betray Him. We can either sacrifice our lives for Jesus, or we can sacrifice Jesus for our lives.

Reflect:

- What is one thing you are tempted to exchange for the full life Jesus promises?
- Do you think we get more or less than we give when we follow Jesus?