

## HOW'S THAT WORKING FOR YOU?

Matthew 6:19-20

Kelly Boyte Brill  
Avon Lake UCC  
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As many of you know, during the program year, we plan our worship services around themes. For usually about six weeks, we focus on each worship series; it's an opportunity to explore a biblical image in depth. But during the summer, when we mix in the youth mission trip services and travel schedules, each Sunday stands alone. It gives Beau and me a chance to preach in a different way. We are more free to explore topics that arise spontaneously.

A few weeks ago, I spent one Wednesday morning at home, thinking, reading and praying about what I feel called to preach for the rest of the summer. As various people and conversations came to mind, I kept thinking about three words: anxiety, stress, and loneliness. These three words have been popping up more often in conversations in my office and in my email inbox over the past couple of years. What does our faith have to say to these three words? Are there ways that we can build spiritual resilience to help us cope better when we feel anxious, stressed and lonely? Can living out our calling to be disciples of Jesus help us be more compassionate when those around us are feeling isolated and fearful? These are the questions I will be addressing during my next three sermons. In each sermon, I will be proposing a spiritual antidote to the cultural problem that is seeping into many of our lives. My hope and prayer is that you find these three sermons helpful in some way. As always, I

welcome your feedback and your suggestions for future sermons and worship series - we are now beginning to make our plans for the upcoming program year.

Let's start with the problem. It may not resonate for you - and if it doesn't, I encourage you to pause and be grateful. But chances are, someone you know is affected by what many psychologists are calling an epidemic of anxiety. I'm not talking about a medical diagnosis of anxiety, but rather the generalized feeling we recognize as coming and going in ourselves and in our culture. For some, the constant barrage of news creates what one writer has described as "a stew of unease, helplessness, fear, rage, and grief." Others are experiencing a practical worry about their ability to financially support themselves and their loved ones in this new economy. There are a myriad of reasons why we feel anxious and stressed. I suspect that I don't have to spend any more time describing the problem, whether you recognize it in yourself or in those around you.

But before we move on to solutions, let's sit a minute more with the problem and understand it a little better. First of all, although I do think we are experiencing an acute level of anxiety in our time and place, feeling anxious, especially feeling anxious about money, is nothing new. Believing that money will solve our problems is nothing new either. 2,000 years ago Jesus said, "Don't hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it's safe from moth and rust and burglars. It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be..." 2,000 years ago, before there was the storage locker industry, before there was the stock market, before mutual

funds or safety deposit boxes, people were even then stockpiling their possessions, thinking that was the key to happiness.

500 years before Jesus, the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu wrote, "If your happiness depends on money, you will never be happy with yourself."

The spiritual question is this, "Are we worshiping the wrong things?"

Have you heard of the word "affluenza"? It is not a physical illness like influenza, but it is a spiritual and psychological illness. It is defined in these three ways: the bloated, sluggish, and unfulfilled feeling that results from efforts to keep up with the Joneses. An epidemic of stress, overwork, waste, and indebtedness caused by the dogged pursuit of the American dream. And (on a more public societal level) an unsustainable addiction to economic growth.

I don't know anyone in this church who says that they worship money. I don't know anyone who wants to worship money. But I wonder how many of us, at some level, believe that we would be happier if we just had a little more.

"I read about a recent study involving 120 people who, on average, earned \$25 million per year. These multimillionaires were asked questions about such things as whether they thought they had enough, if they felt secure, and if they were experiencing the good life based upon their standards of living. The consistent answer to these questions was no.

Next, the millionaires were asked, "How much more income would you need to have in order to feel like you were secure?" And the average answer was that if they

could have 25 percent more—which works out to about \$6.25 million more each year—they would finally feel secure and satisfied.

For those of us who don't have annual incomes in the millions, the answers in this survey may seem absurd. We would enjoy the challenge of finding satisfaction on a \$25 million annual budget. But that's just chasing after the wind on a bigger scale."

Jesus once said that life does not consist in the abundance of possessions, yet every day we are bombarded with messages like these: "If you had a little bit more, you'd be happier. If you had this thing that you currently do not have, you'd find more satisfaction in life. If you had a bigger house or a nicer car or more fashionable clothes, you'd be happy - at least happier than you are right now."

Each of us is bombarded with messages such as these. Daily. While Jesus is telling us that our lives consist of more than money or things, the culture is shouting that it's not true. The result is a wrestling in our hearts. Despite the fact that we say we believe Jesus' words, we still find ourselves devoting a great deal of our time, talents and resources to the acquisition of more stuff. We say that our lives do not consist in the abundance of our possessions, but we live as if they do.

Let me stop and address a few potential questions here. First, please notice that I am using the word "we" and not the word "you." I am afflicted with affluenza too. I'm not pointing fingers, or if I am I'm pointing at myself as well. Second, I am not saying that money and possessions are evil. People who choose to be generous can do remarkable things in this world and find an abundant source of joy. Finally, I urge us all

to avoid the temptation of judging others. We never know what someone else's financial situation really is.

Rather, what I'm encouraging all of us to do is to be aware of how we think about money and possessions. Be aware of your susceptibility to advertising. How impulsive are you when you are shopping? Are you conscious of the difference between your wants and your needs? Before you buy something, unless it's something you absolutely need, ask yourself, "Will this bring me joy?" "How does this purchase align with my values?"

Walk around your home and look at what you own. Take a good look at your financial situation. Do you feel good about your relationship with money, or do you think it is an obstacle to healthy relationships with others, with yourself, with God?

Are there ways you could simplify your life that would bring you more overall satisfaction and contentment? Are there ways you could be more generous that would bring you closer to God and to the life you've always wanted?

Sometimes I happen to be on the treadmill at the gym at 5 in the afternoon when Dr. Phil is on TV. He listens to people's often ridiculously absurd life situations and then he'll ask someone this question: "How's that working for you?" It's not a biblical or theological question, but it is a pretty good practical one. How is your relationship with money working for you? Is your approach to money creating more true joy in your life, or is it leading to greater anxiety?

Dozens of researchers have asked the question, "What really makes people happy?" and the conclusions are always similar. Usually these three factors are at the

top: “healthy relationships, a job or hobby one loves, and doing something to help others.”

Did you watch any World Cup soccer earlier this month and did you see any of the goals made by the young French superstar soccer player Mbappe? He plays with incredible joy and enthusiasm, and it seems that he lives that way off the field, too. He earned about \$500,000 by winning the World Cup, but he’s donating it all to a charity that provides sports activities to hospitalized and disabled children.

Did you see the smiles on the faces of our students and adult chaperones last week when they relived their mission trip experience?

It’s the joy that comes from relationships that matter, from spending time on a cause greater than yourself. It’s a joy that comes from being in touch with your best self, and with the God who created you to be both generous and content.

Source for this sermon and some of its quotations: [Enough](#), by Adam Hamilton