



Let's pray:

February 2023

How can we pray well as we head into this new month?



We're still in the earliest weeks of this new year. I'm still holding quite tightly onto the hopes I had as I entered 2023. It's a big year in my personal life; I'm getting married, I'm searching for a home I'll live in for (I hope) a long time after a few years of many, many house moves. And so my goals and resolutions for this new year are very much tied to and tangled with my hopes. I hope our family and friends who live far away are able to travel in for the wedding. I hope it's a fun day for everyone who comes. I hope we find the right house at the right time. I hope our new neighbours are nice.

Of course, I'm holding onto much deeper hopes for my new marriage and for my life. Many of us are holding on to hopes that have a lot riding on them. Some families right now are hoping for news for the child in their care, as what was originally supposed to be a foster home for a few nights turns into a few weeks, and then a few months; committed to offering that child the love and care they need for as long as they need it, but hoping for that little life's sake that a brilliant long-term solution might be found soon. Some families right now are hoping that a door will open to the right kind of support for the teenager in their home. Some are desperately hoping for a moment of rest.

We think of 'hope' as a positive word. But actually, often what we're 'hoping' for is fuelled by what we're concerned or anxious about. It's so easy to let our wishes and our worries blur into something we call a 'hope.'

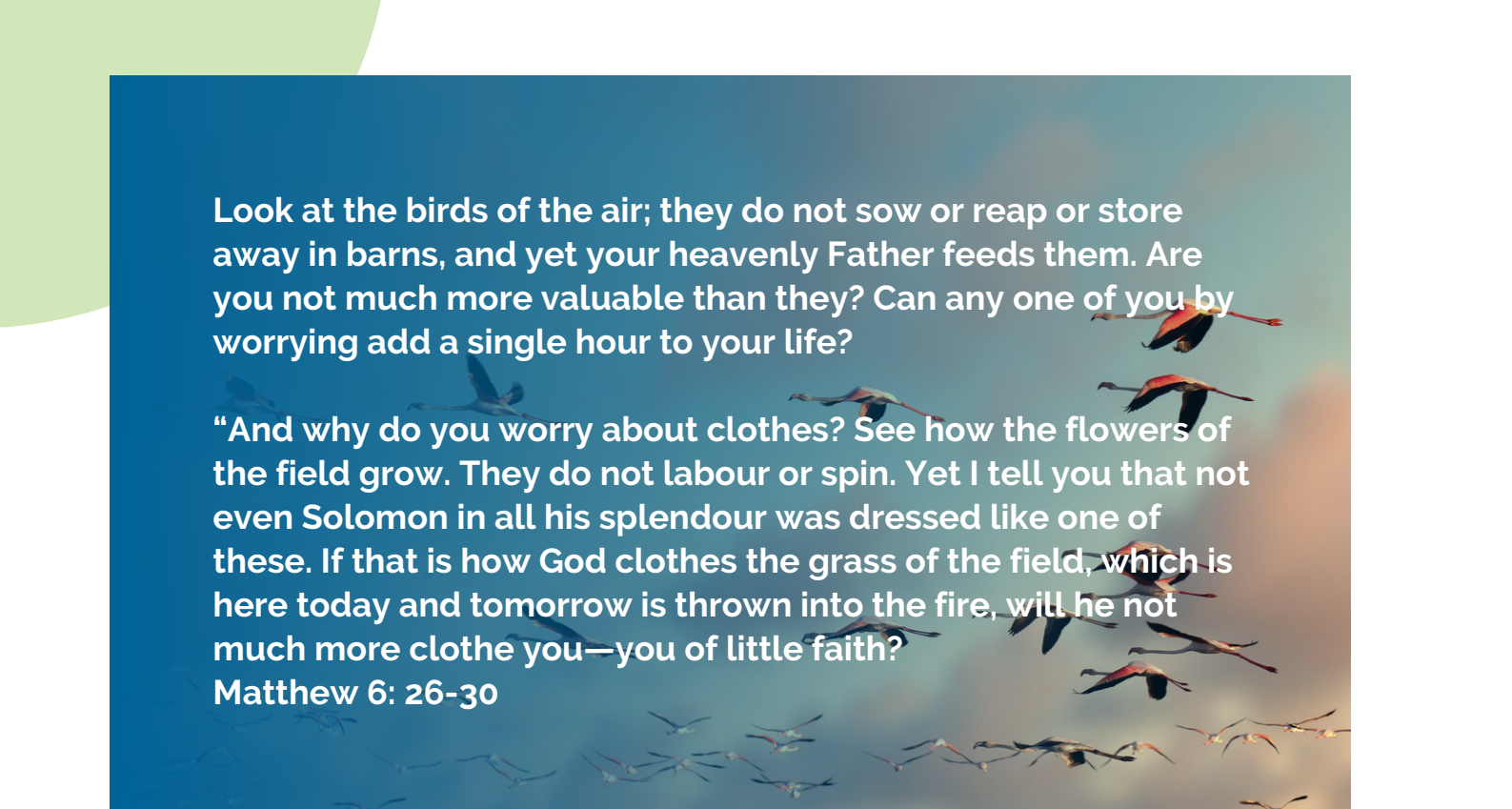
But that's not the picture of hope we're given in the Bible. Biblical hope is a certainty, a confident expectation, not based on or influenced by what we encounter day-to-day, but rather, entirely on who God is.

So, how do we hold onto this hope, when worry finds us?

Well, at first glance at Matthew chapter 6, it feels like Jesus gives a pretty blunt answer as he addresses his friends and followers. "Do not worry about your life," he says in verse 25. I don't know about you, but that doesn't feel to me like a particularly helpful or realistic command, when worry feels spontaneous and overwhelming, or when it feels like the situation or circumstance I find myself in means worry and concern are pretty justifiable.

Thankfully, those words are just an introduction.





Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?

Matthew 6: 26-30

Jesus gives us some verbs, action words. Look. See. He draws our attention to the natural world around us, and he says “Hey, I know you’re worrying – but remember who God is.”

Creation reveals to us the nature of the Creator. We get a glimpse of His glory in the magnificence of a sunset or a sky full of stars. We know He cares about the tiny details when we squint and see the tiny petals on a daisy. His competence and deep care is demonstrated in the fact that in all seasons, we see life, growth and flourishing in the world around us; trees grow tall and strong, animals find the food and shelter they need.

Jesus invites us to pause, to look around us and to see that God is still there. He is still powerful, caring, attentive to every detail. We face challenges, but He is still able, and He is still so caring. Jesus says, “I know you have a reason to worry – but look how much reason you have to hold onto hope.”

Perhaps true hope isn't the absence of worry, but the recognition – whether we feel it deep in our hearts, or are having to consciously remind ourselves again and again – that in the midst of our difficulties, stresses, concerns and fears, our loving God is present with us, and He is who He says He is.

“I’m already loved. I’m already chosen. I know who I am. I know what You’ve spoken. I’m already loved, more than I can imagine – and that is enough.”
Jireh, Maverick City Music.



Points for Prayer

As we pray together for children and young people who are in or have been in care and for the families who care for them, let's pray prayers of hope, remembering and trusting in who God is.

1

Pray for children and young people as they step further into 2023, and particularly for those who are facing challenges or uncertainty. Pray for God's peace, which we read in Philippians 4 transcends all understanding.

2

Pray for foster carers, adoptive parents or supported lodgings hosts – and for children and young people too – who have entered this year feeling wrung out and exhausted. Pray that they will experience deep rest in the God who makes us lie down in green pastures, who leads us beside still waters, and who restores our souls (Psalm 23: 2-3).

3

Pray for those who are 'hoping' for change this year; for the right home to be found, for the right support to become available, for some breakthrough in school. Let's pray that our God, who we know is with us in rough waters, and when we're between a rock and a hard place (Isaiah 43 MSG) will make His presence and power known.



Creative prayer idea

Find a piece of nature to spend some time focussing on. If you can, get outside and surround yourself in nature! But if you can't, find a flower in a vase in your house or a houseplant; you can look out of your window at a tree, or even pull up a photograph on your phone or conjure a memory in your mind. You can do this alone, or draw in others in your home or community – kids too!

Think about the conditions that allow this piece of nature to grow. Notice its resilience, and its ability to flourish in a variety of different environments. Notice what is beautiful about nature. Not just there to look nice, plants are beautiful so that they can attract pollinators like bees. Their beauty is often part of their survival.

Think about what the natural world can offer us. Can the plant or flower in front of you or in your mind be eaten, by humans or animals? Has it medicinal qualities? What difference does it make by existing?

Think about all the things that had to happen for this life to be here right now. From the balance of oxygen in the atmosphere, to the level of sunlight; the cycle of seasons that allow rain to fall and the kind of soil beneath it. Acknowledge that you have your hands on evidence of a beautiful variety of things coming together so that this life could exist.

Continue to focus on the item or the space in front of or around you. What more do you notice? What moves you? What does it teach you about nature? What does it teach you about yourself? What does it teach you about God?

Allow the natural world to remind you today of the hope we have in the One who gives life, who sustains and who cares for us.