

LIVING IN THE SHADOWS

The Shadow of Worry

Luke 12:22-31

March 8, 2026

Four o'clock in the morning. You know the hour. The house is quiet. Everyone else is fast asleep. And your body can't rest because your mind is racing.

The diagnosis. The bills. The conversation you have been avoiding. The decision you must make. The child who isn't calling you back. The parent who is failing fast. The career that is coming to an end. The news you can't stop checking even though it never makes you feel better.

At 4 AM, every fear comes alive. At 4 AM, the shadows lengthen, and the unease that you push back all day finally finds its voice. It asks questions you cannot answer: What happens if it all falls apart? What if it's never enough? What if I'm getting it all wrong?

The shadow of worry. It sits on your chest. It flashes from your phone. It wakes you before dawn and follows you through the day. And it builds.

The man in Jesus' parable thought he had the answer. He thought he could overcome worry by accumulation. And so, he built. He acquired. He prepared. The barns expanding with his growing fortune.

Someone once asked John D. Rockefeller how much money is enough. He smiled and said, "Just a little more." *Mo barns, mo problems.* You see, there is never enough to conquer our worry. The barns will never be big enough. The future will never be secure enough. And just when we think we've finally done it, life slips through our fingers.

Listen again to how Jesus tells it. The man in the parable is giving a soliloquy. That soliloquy lasts sixty words, and twelve of them are "I" or "my." I will say to myself. My crops. My barns. My grain. My goods. The man has

lost the capacity to see any other person. This is not just greed that Jesus is warning us against. This is a man whose barns have finally blocked out every person in his life. The barns get bigger, but the circle of his life contracts with time. He has everything and loves no one. And God says, "You fool!"

You fool. All that worrying. You fool. All that planning. All those barns torn down, making space to level up. None of it could buy you a single hour of life. You fool.

As the story settles on the ears of his listeners, Jesus turns to his disciples. He speaks to them directly. He flips the page with a single word: therefore.

My New Testament professor Charlie Cousar used to say whenever you see a "therefore" in the Bible, you must ask yourself, what's it there for?

Therefore, because those barns will never save you. Therefore, because your future is held not in human hands, but in divine hands. Therefore, you are free to stop pretending you control the future. Therefore, stop worrying.

Jesus says worry is a kind of worship offered to the wrong god. Every single hour spent rehearsing worst-case scenarios. Every white-knuckled attempt to hold it all in place. That is not just anxiety. It is a liturgy, praying to a god who can never answer.

Notice the man in the parable does not speak to God. He speaks to himself. "I will say to my soul, 'Soul, take thine ease.'" I have my crops. I have my barn. I have my future stored away.

Jesus says, "Look at the birds. They have no barns. They do no sowing or reaping, and God feeds them."

Jesus says, "Look at the lilies. No needle. No thread. God clothes them in astounding beauty."

And I don't want you to miss this, because it's not a Hallmark card. Jesus is asking us to open our eyes to the truth that if God runs the universe and cares for the birds and the flowers, then what exactly are you so worried about?

And then there's this turn, where it gets harder. Stop striving for those things. Jesus says, "That's what the nations do. Their systems are built on accumulation and anxiety. But you, you Children of God, don't have to live that way."

I think Jesus is drawing a line. On one side: the kingdom of built barns. On the other: the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of barn-building says: you are what you make. Your worth is measured by what you've secured. Your safety depends on what you control.

The kingdom of God says: open your hands. Prepare to receive a gift.

We know which kingdom we belong to. That's why we're here. But we also have to be honest about how we live. We have to be honest about what we reach for first thing in the morning and what keeps us up at night. We have to be honest about what we are teaching our children to chase.

We live like barn-builders. I know I do. And it's not just us. Look around. We are a nation of barn-builders. We build our barns out of portfolios and property. We build our barns out of influence and access. We build our barns out of our children's achievements, as if their résumés could secure our legacy. And now we're building all kinds of new barns. Virtual barns where we can store our identities, where we can house our outrage, where we can carefully curate our lists of friends and enemies. Barns to secure our certainty and ensure our power.

The Christ-less Christianity that wraps the cross around liturgies of scarcity is barn-building religion. It says:

God helps those who help themselves. It says: you must protect what you have and destroy the other. It says: tear down faster, build back bigger, take all you can get.

Here's an uncomfortable truth: none of the phrases I just rehearsed appear in scripture. Not one place.

On the contrary, Jesus is clear. The barn-builder is a fool. And his religion—no matter how loudly it invokes the name of Jesus—is just a liturgy of scarcity, endlessly mistaking fortresses we build for the faith we are given.

I know those fortresses. I know those barns. I've built some. I'm still building them. Usually at 4 o'clock in the morning. I think David Foster Wallace put it best when he wrote, "Everything I've ever let go of has claw marks in it."

What Jesus offers us is not another management strategy. It is trust. Trust is belief's courageous cousin. There is a crucial difference. Believing is about what you think is true. Trusting is about what you lean on when it matters most. Belief lives in the mind, but trust takes on a body.

I might believe in my head that the net will catch me, but trust is when I leap toward it. I can believe that God provides. I can give my intellectual assent to the idea that God will care for me. I can speak those words in church or in bed at 4 AM But to trust is to put that idea into action in a way that releases my control.

That's what Jesus is asking. Not that we believe that God provides. But that we live as if it's true.

Friends, the powers of this age want you anxious. Anxious people are easy to control. Anxious people will buy more, scroll more, comply more, and never quite get around to asking whether or not the whole arrangement is just. Worry is not just a personal struggle. It is a political tool. And Jesus knew it.

The kingdom of God runs on trust. On abundance. On the confidence that the one who feeds the ravens has not forgotten you.

A few years ago, I stood at the edge of the Rio Grande Gorge in New Mexico on a steel bridge 565 feet above the canyon floor. I had walked out onto it but then made the mistake of looking down. That's when my old fear of heights came rushing in.

I absolutely froze in place. My knees locked up, and my heart began to race. The ground far below (565 feet below) felt like it was pulling me down. Sara was beside me. She noticed that I had stopped walking. She didn't give me a list of the bridge's safety features. She didn't describe the engineering that went into its construction. She didn't even explain that there were dozens of people just ahead of us whose very presence in that spot proved the bridge would hold. She knew this wasn't a question of believing the laws of physics. The issue was trust.

So, here's what she did. She kept walking, but as she did, she reached back for my hand. And I found that if I focused on her hand and the next step, I could move.

So, one step at a time. Hand in hand. That's how we crossed. And that's why I'm here this morning and not on a bridge in New Mexico.

I think that's how trust works. I don't think we've ever been asked to conquer our worries all at once or all by ourselves. I think you take the next step. I think you let go of one anxious thought. I think you walk with wise ones who know the way.

The next time 4 AM finds you staring at the ceiling, remember, you don't have to hold it all. Open your hands.

Jesus ends this teaching with a phrase that I think is meant to unsettle us. He says to his disciples, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

And maybe you're thinking, "Finally! The kingdom!" *Finally*—we hear that word, and we know what we want it to mean. It is the ultimate barn. The permanent security. Forever, finally, enough...and more. The 4 AM voice silenced for good. The math finally works in our favor.

That's the kingdom we've been building. That's the kingdom we think he's offering. But, friends, I must remind you: this is Jesus. He will not give you what you expect. He only gives you what you need. The kingdom of God will never be achieved. It can only be received.

I know this because a few chapters later, Jesus sits down by the temple treasury, and he watches the crowd. The barn-builders are all there in their finest clothes—the ones with the portfolios and the safety nets and the biggest barns of all.

Their offerings are significant and carefully calculated. The math will still work out in their favor when they leave. And then comes this widow. She has no barn. No portfolio. What she has are two copper coins, and she drops them in. And Jesus stops everything. He says to his disciples, "If you want to see the kingdom of God, watch her. Look at that. That is the kingdom of God."

She was declaring her independence from the kingdom of worry. That rich fool would stay awake every night calculating. She went to sleep trusting. She looked at those two coins, and she opened her hands because she had something the barn-builder could never find.

Friends, the kingdom of God doesn't look like more. It looks like freedom.

You don't have to tighten your grip. Just open your hands. Because the kingdom being given to you is not something you build. It holds your anxious heart. Trust me. Amen.