

Practicing Our Faith: Household Economics

*A sermon preached on Matthew 6:25-34 on Sunday, September 6, 2026,
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I.

We continue in our exploration of Christian practices today, studying, as you remember, the “things Christian people do together over time in response to and in the light of God’s active presence for the life of the world in Christ Jesus.”¹

At face value, the Christian practice of “household economics” can look a little curious, so let’s unpack that a bit. By “household,” I am referring to wherever you live — your apartment, your house, your room, wherever. Whatever that household may look like, it’s a reasonable assumption that that homeplace “define[s] [your] basic way of life.”² Barbara Kingsolver understands the breadth of home and household when she says, “home is place, geography, and psyche; it’s a matter of survival and safety, a condition of attachment and self-definition.”³ So contained within that homeplace are the ways in which you spend your time, organize your space, allocate your money, rest your body and spirit, cultivate your sense of self.

Now when we hear “economics,” we can quickly think about the study of money — how to make it, keep it, and use it. But the root of the word “economics” stems from the Greek word *oikos*. Contrary to popular belief, *oikos* doesn’t mean Greek yogurt, it means “household.” So the Christian practice of “household economics” includes the management and

¹ Dorothy Bass, *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, p5. This book has informed the whole sermon!

² Sharon Daloz Parks, “Household Economics,” *Practicing Our Faith*, Dorothy Bass, ed., p43.

³ Barbara Kingsolver as quoted in *ibid*.

arrangement of the household for our well-being and how we spend the time, money, space, and energy there within.

II.

To a people rooted in and guided by households, it's no wonder that Jesus had something to say about their arrangement. He did throughout his ministry, but powerfully here in today's text, in what the Gospel of Matthew calls the Sermon on the Mount.

"Don't worry about your life," Jesus said to the crowds gathered there with him, "about what you'll eat or drink or wear." The word translated here as 'worry' comes from the Greek, *merimna*, which can also be translated as sleeplessness or anxiety that paralyzes, often beginning there in the home.⁴ So instead of that energy-draining and self-destructive worry, look instead at the birds, flying free, "careless in the care of God," as the Message translation says. Instead of the ceaseless fretting and debilitating panic, consider the lilies of the field, among the loveliest of creation. If God's eye is on the sparrow, and if God's mind is on the lily, don't you think God will take care of you, you of little faith? So let not worry invade your homes. Let not anxiety settle in to stay in your houses. Let not fear fill your rooms. Don't worry about tomorrow," Jesus says, "but rather seek first the household of God, and all these things will be yours!"

III.

Perhaps this is more of a confession than an explanation, but it seems to be one of those instructions from Jesus that immediately causes the hearer to protest, right?

⁴ Anna Case-Winters, *Matthew, Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*, p93.

You can't serve God and wealth, Jesus? Inflation's up, and markets are on the path to a certain correction, and recession fears are around every corner. The many are one crisis away from bankruptcy, and the few are richer than ever before.

Don't worry about tomorrow, Jesus? The planet is warming, and our hope is cooling. War is raging, and rage is dominating, and dominating us all is the technology that throttles attention, connection, and creativity. These days, we can't even eat a salad without worrying about the consequences!

Look at the birds and consider the lilies, Jesus? Better yet, look at the bills!⁵ Consider the mortgage! Look at this diagnosis and that relationship headed right toward a trainwreck. Consider this threat of a layoff and that pipe that's about to burst and flood the basement.

Do the birds stick to a budget or avoid the endless streams of marketing, trying to make buying as frictionless as possible? Do the lilies figure out the calculus of a full-time salary and the cost of childcare, or help out a family member who never seems to have enough? Are the grasses of the field bent over with crippling debt, or are the sparrows of the air flitting from house to shelter to couch to car in search of a steady place to call home?

Don't worry, Jesus? In *this* economy?

Yet to our protestations, Jesus is clear and calm. *Don't try to serve God and money. Don't worry. Do look. Do consider. God's new day is at hand.*

Sometimes that dawn blurs so easily with the darkness, though. The horizon is hidden and can't be seen. Yet Jesus believes it. Announces it. Points to it. Lives it. Dies for it. Makes all of it new again.

⁵ Thanks to Thomas Long for this image, *Matthew, Westminster Bible Companion*, p75.

But before we can believe it and announce it and point to it and live it ourselves, Jesus knows we have to see in a whole new way first. “Those who know that God summons the sun to rise,” Tom Long says, “are confident that, whatever tomorrow brings, it will also bring God with it.”⁶ So look at the birds and consider the lilies, Jesus says.

Let’s remember, though, all that Jesus is **not** saying here. He’s not saying “don’t worry about tomorrow, because I’m going to make everything alright. Don’t worry about tomorrow, because you’re just fine today! Don’t worry about tomorrow, because the reckoning will come, and I’ll zoom you up to heaven before we get there. Don’t worry about tomorrow, because your worries are baseless and impure, or your preparations are useless and trite. Don’t worry about tomorrow, because money doesn’t even matter.” Jesus doesn’t say those things, nor is he inviting us to “look to your bank account, for there will you find rest,” or “consider the politicians or the systems of this world, for there will you find hope.” He doesn’t ask us to “list all the issues you have with the birds of the air,” or to “critique the lilies of the field.”⁷

Rather he explains, from your household and the place it occupies in your life, the lives of those who live there, and the world, turn your attention outside of yourself with more intention than just a casual glance. Remember that this world has needs beyond the ones right in front of your face. When anxiety and worry rises up like waters threatening to crest your head, remember that God says, “when you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you.” Allow your

⁶ Tom Long, p76.

⁷ Thanks to Nadia Bolz Weber for this phrase from her sermon found here:

<https://www.mavismoon.com/blog/meditation-for-judgmental-bastards-like-me-nadia-bolz-weber>

imagination to awaken to a new day where worry isn't your daily companion. Trust that God has the whole world in their hands.

This new way of seeing Jesus describes doesn't eliminate the mortgage or save you from the layoff. It doesn't tamp down the issues with screen time in your house or pay down the credit card debt. It won't restructure your schedule or reimagine the global crisis of the unhoused. But as you see a new way of living, one ungoverned by sleeplessness and suffocating anxiety, you see what cannot be taken away from the winds and whims of this world. Your belovedness, right in God's heart. Your place, right in God's hands. Your household, all our households, right in God's love. Indeed, God did not promise to give us a happy life, but rather a **held** life. Held like the sparrows in God's eyes and the lilies clothed by God's imagination.

IV.

Back in 1953, the First Baptist Church of New Castle, Kentucky, called a young seminarian to be their new pastor. William E. Hull was his name, also known as Bill, also known as Granddaddy Bill. That search committee was chaired by John Berry, lawyer and tobacco farmer and town patriarch, whose 19 year-old son was a hotshot young college student at the University of Kentucky, also known as a farmer and budding poet, also known as Wendell Berry. Young Bill was just four years older than young Wendell, but there in the rolling bluegrass landscape of Kentucky, is where our family's shared stories began.

I could spend all the words telling you about their friendship over decades, the philosophical tensions that added color and fire and mutual respect to their companionship, all those years of letter-writing and family

care, but for the purpose of today, I want to tell you about our family's most recent experience with each other.

Last fall, I wrote to Wendell to ask if my dad and I could come for a visit. We planned a pilgrimage back to our shared homeplace there in rural Kentucky, and hoped that a visit with Wendell and Tanya could be right at the center of it. He graciously accepted my request, only if we would come after 3pm because he'd be down in his riverbank writing cabin working by daylight until then. Wendell famously didn't use computers, and by this point in his life, couldn't hear all that well and left the phone calls to Tanya, therefore our correspondence lived in letters mailed back and forth over the course of weeks.

The two hours we shared around his kitchen table were among the most memorable of my life, and in this week of his passing over from one life to the next, I'm keenly aware of the treasure I will carry with me all my days because of it. Our conversation was wide-ranging: we talked about my grandfather, of course, and politics, and farming, and technology, and Bill Hull's great-grandchildren, and his tireless commitment to the way of the land. When dad asked Wendell if he was still farming, he shared that he'd given away their last sheep several months prior and stopped. "I used to be from here," he said, "but now I'm just a visitor." Now that he wasn't farming the land each day, he meant. For Wendell, farming wasn't just a mode of interacting with the land, it was the way. Farming created a home for you in a particular place, and for him, there is no better way to do so. He condemned modern farming with all its machinery and distance, because back then, back when he learned to farm, he said with equal parts lament and righteous

anger, “the horse set the scale. But the tractor, oh the tractor could take us to Mars.”⁸

The horse set the scale. Meaning, the horse as a living, breathing being had limits of time and scope and ability. Farming couldn’t happen at any time, in any capacity, at any scale, forever and ever. Production could not be endless. There was a time to work and a time to rest, a time to pluck up and a time to plant. All had their place in the landscape of things.

As I sat there that day, listening to his wisdom, to me, it sounded like the encouragement from a man, here on this earth among the farmers and merchants, the households and houseless, the wealthy and wanting, just walking around with truth on his lips and love in his heart.

So friends, when you come up against the endless stream of anxieties about all your household demands, and when you find yourself wearied and worried about how your money will be enough, could the birds of the air set the scale of your time? Could the lilies of the valley set the scale of your worries? Could the grasses of the field set the scale of your abundance? Could you trust the One who came for life abundant – even for you, even now?

V.

I’m not leaving the sermon without tangible things for you to practice, so here’s a few to try.

What if you found something to share, maybe an item or an experience to share? Don’t just let sharing become the practice of those with more – we all can do this, no matter our scale. Find something in your life to share –

⁸ As shared by Wendell Berry to me and my dad in a conversation around his kitchen table, October 30, 2025.

maybe it's a squishy to share with your classmates, maybe it's a lawnmower you can share with the teenage neighbor wanting to learn, maybe an afternoon you have to spend on someone else, maybe some football tickets – and share it!

Or more specifically, what if you gave a little money away? As a friend once said to me, “Money is like oxygen. When you have it, you don’t even think about it, it’s just there. When you don’t, it’s all you think about, and you feel like you can’t breathe.” Opening our hands to the money we hold, no matter its size, reminds us to breathe, to not grip so tightly to the things we think will save us and open our hands to another.

What if you spent a week becoming aware of every way our modern media environment fools you into a scarcity mindset? From the credit card offers you get in the mail, to the incessant spam calls we all get for personal loans, to ads for stuff to buy that you don’t need that follow you around the internet, to the influencers making you feel bad about the shabby state of your kitchen, to alluring stories of those who made millions from pennies, to the casual reinforcement that each family unit should have all their needs figured out and met without reliance on another, just notice that this week. And maybe with each notice, you consider a lily or look to a bird to remember what grounds you.

“In the domain of economic life,” one writer says, “we typically remain strangers to one another – each of us essentially alone with our sense of busyness and clutter, anxiety and guilt.”⁹ Practicing our faith doesn’t just remind us of God’s care, it gives it a face one to another. From one household to many, from one patch of land to all, from birds of the air to lilies of the field,

⁹ Daloz Parks, “Household Economics,” *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for Searching People*, p47.

God holds us, every single one. May that be enough for today. And tomorrow.
And all the days of our lives. Amen!