

## “One Who Cares”

One of the profound and fundamental questions of life is this: Is there a God? And a second question often naturally follows: If there is a God, does this God really care about me?

Teenagers sometimes ask these questions. Elderly people ask it. Rich people ask it and poor people ask it. People who aren't religious ask it, and even seasoned Christian believers at times ask it. *Does God really care about me?*

Many people have trouble believing that there is a God who cares about each of us. *For some, it's an intellectual problem.* They may believe in some kind of a god – but this god is just an impersonal force or a vague supreme entity, not a God with human-like qualities who loves and cherishes the creatures God has fashioned. Some people's philosophical system allows no room for a God who relates to us and cares about us individually.

*More often, perhaps, we find it difficult to believe that God cares about us because of the pain of personal suffering.* A young woman said, “I've watched four members of my family die of cancer. Surely you don't expect me to believe in a personal God who loves us and cares for us.” What do we often say (or at least feel) in the wake of a major disaster or a senseless tragedy? “If God really cares about us, why did He let this happen?”

In a world filled with pain and suffering it's very easy to doubt that each of us matters to God. A little boy learning the Lord's Prayer got mixed up, and prayed, “Our Father who art in New Haven, how do you know my name?”

However, Christianity says: God *does* care about and you and me! 1 Peter 5:7 states clearly, “Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you.” Or, as the Common English Bible has it, “Throw all your anxiety onto him, because he cares about you.” Do you have any anxieties? We are to throw all our anxiety onto God. Why? Because He cares about you and me!

Now there is no way to prove this! We're dealing with *faith* here. *Trust* in God. Not surefire proof! But there are some indicators that suggest God really cares for each of us. *Look at the natural world.* The structure and orderliness of creation. For the most part, the universe is not fragmented and chaotic, but intricately ordered to provide for our care. For instance, the earth is tilted at an angle of 23.5 degrees. If it were more, or less, life as we know it couldn't exist on this planet. But a caring Creator has so ordered the universe, and tilted the globe, so that human life can exist.

Think of how God provided ahead of time for our needs here on earth. Before you and I ever got cold God began storing up oil, coal and natural gas to keep us warm. Before we ever felt hungry, God built fertility into the soil to ensure growth for trees and plants that would provide food for our tables. Now you may say, “But there are hungry people in the world.” True, but God has provided enough food for everyone – it's just our human selfishness, greed, and corruption that denies certain people their daily bread in today's world. Nature itself points to a God who cares for us and our needs!

Consider how God has created each of us and stamped us with the mark of individuality.

Sometimes we say of a person who's eccentric or non-conforming, "God made her (God made him) then threw away the mold!" But God did that with everyone one of us! God cared enough about you to not make anyone else just like you! Even identical twins are not identical! A young woman came to her pastor, and asked, "How can I believe that God is interested in what happens to me?" He answered, "Look at your fingers. There are billions of finger tips in the world, but no others are like yours. Even your fingertips have had special attention from God." Then he added, "Whenever you doubt, look at your hand-carved fingertips and know that God is interested in you personally."

If the natural world suggests that God cares about each of us, the Bible sharpens and amplifies that message about God's infinite care. *The Old Testament reveals a God who cares about each of us.* Sometimes people mistakenly think that the God of the Old Testament is just a God who gets mad at people and is always punishing them – a God of wrath and judgment. Yes, there were times when God punished His people, and even turned His back on them for a while. But the underlying message of the Old Testament is that God never stopped caring for His people!

The writer of Psalm 8 wonders about God's care. "'When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" (Psalm 8:3-4). But then he answers his own question in the next verse: "Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor" (Psalm 8:5).

There are some beautiful images in the Old Testament that reveal how God cherishes and cares for all. He is the "Shepherd" who cares for His flock: "He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young" (Isaiah 40:11). The psalmist, in Psalm 57, verse 1, writes: "I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings" – God is like a mother bird, nestling her young ones (us) under her protective wings.

How about these verses in Isaiah. "But now, this is what the Lord says — he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior...since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life. Do not be afraid, for I am with you'" (Isaiah 41:1-5). Read these words slowly and thoughtfully. Does this sound like our Creator God thinks nothing of us?

Nature points to a God who cares about you and me. The Old Testament verifies this truth. But most of all, *we're assured of God's care for each of us because of Jesus' words and life.* The Scripture reading today was from Luke, chapter 12. Jesus is reassuring His followers not to fear those who can harm them physically. Then our Lord goes on: "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God...don't be afraid; you are worth more

than many sparrows” (Luke 12:6-7). Matthew’s rendering of these words of Jesus says, “Not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father” (Matthew 10:29). I remember a day, early in my life and ministry. I was serving as the pastor of two churches while I was still in seminary. I was single. Feeling lonely, and overworked. It was winter, and we were in the middle of a bitter cold wave. There was a little room just outside the kitchen of the parsonage where I lived. There was no heat in this room. I was hurrying out to go somewhere, and I glanced down and saw a dead sparrow, frozen to death. My immediate thought was, “Yeah, God, your eye is on the sparrow, isn’t it? But you let this one die.” Then the words of Jesus came to my mind, not even that frozen little sparrow had fallen without the watchful eye and care of the heavenly Father.

Jesus says God cares about His own children so much that even the hairs of our head are all numbered! How many hairs are on your head? (By the looks of it, not all of us are created equal in this regard!) Someone has computed: a blonde person has about 145,000 hairs; dark-haired persons have about 120,000 hairs; red-haired people, about 90,000 hairs on their head. (I wonder if we color our hair blonde, does that mean we can grow more hairs?)

Jesus’ point in all of these Scriptures I have referenced is that the heavenly Father infinitely cares about each person!

Can you believe God cares about you? *I think sometimes we may have trouble believing God cares because we don’t understand what that may look like.* For instance, something bad happens – perhaps a string of misfortunes – and we react cynically, “So, God really cares about me, does He?” Or, we want something and pray for it, and it never happens: “Yeah, God cares, right!”

Does this mean we believe that life should have no problems, or hardships, or challenges? That everything should go as we want, or that we should face no consequences if we do something wrong or stupid? Let’s think about this in terms of *human parents*. There are a lot of things that good, caring parents do that may cause their children to think, “Dad doesn’t really care about me!” “Mom really doesn’t care!” Good parents say “no” to certain things, not because they don’t care, but because they *do* care about their sons or daughters. They set rules and boundaries because they care, and their children may get grounded when the kids break the rules. This happens because loving parents do care and want to teach their children.

As our children grow older, there may be times when we *pull back and don’t step in* – we allow our children to work out their problems for themselves – even to suffer some unpleasant consequences, because we want them to grow up and learn responsibility. Maybe this is true of our heavenly Father also! Some things God does, or allows, may seem harsh and uncaring, but in fact are just the opposite.

1 Peter 5:7 tell us to “Throw all your anxiety onto him, because he cares about you”. God really does care about *you*. Say it: “God really does care about me.”

So, what difference does it make if we believe we are created individually and uniquely by a loving heavenly Father? What difference does it make if we know in our heart that God cares about us deeply, and we're not just a chance happening in a random universe, or are merely the product of our parents' sexual passion, or just a biological accident? What difference does it make? *A lot!*

When we are assured that God cares about us and has put us here on earth for a reason, it gives meaning and purpose to our life.

And if a time comes when we are abandoned or forgotten by someone important to us, we can find comfort and strength in knowing God will never leave us nor forsake us.

Or if life puts us down and we feel worthless (we lose our job, or we lose our marriage, or we make a stupid mistake) we can know that we are still valued by our Creator, and His love for us isn't dependent on our performance.

Knowing God cares saves us from a lot of worry and anxiety! This is the setting for the words of Jesus we've been looking at today in Luke 12. "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life...'" (Luke 12:22). We don't have to worry, no matter what, because we will be eternally safe in the arms of a heavenly Father who cares for us deeply! 1 Peter 5:7 tells us to throw our *anxiety* onto the Lord.

A former Governor of Wyoming, Millard Simpson, told in a devotional article of flying in a plane that developed trouble. When the pilot announced they were going to try an emergency landing, the governor took the hand of his wife and together they offered a simple statement of faith they often shared:

"The light of God surrounds us,  
The love of God enfolds us,  
The power of God protects us,  
And the presence of God watches over us;  
Wherever we are, God is."

The governor then added that both he and his wife realized saying this affirmation wouldn't magically make everything come out ok, but it was their way of saying with confidence, that "living or dying, we are in his care."

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