

Even I

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When you and I were first born we knew next to nothing about the world and our place in it.

You and I were both born relying on someone else for everything.

But its not just the obvious, food, shelter, a place to sleep, blankets to keep us warm.

When you and I were born we relied on other people to interpret the world for us too.

It is subtle. But perhaps you have noticed this before.

A toddler stumbles and falls. A baby bumps its head.

The tears usually don't start right away. The first thing they do is look at a trusted caregiver to see how *they* respond.

Their eyes shoot to whoever is taking care of them as if to ask “should I be scared?” “was that ok?”

We were born needing other people to make sense of the world for us.

British psychologist John Bowlby noticed this too. He developed a theory around this observation called Attachment Theory.

Through his clinical work Bowlby began to realize that a strong attachment between a child and a caregiver was enormously important. He worked in the early 1900's, a time when many pediatricians still warned parents about the dangers of “spoiling” a child by holding them too much or responding to their cries too quickly.

Quite the contrary, Bowlby argued. What makes children capable of growing into independent, courageous, and adventurous adults is having that strong attachment with a parent. What he called a “safe base.”

I saw it last week when our friends brought over their toddler who lives on a houseboat and had never seen a flight of stairs before.

She went to climb, one step. Then the next. Then a look back over her shoulder at Dad. If he looks calm. If he is smiling. Then I can keep going.

Having a safe base, a secure attachment, gives children the courage to explore their world. They can take risks, knowing that there is someone who is looking after them the whole way.

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Jesus was asking his followers to do some very difficult things. He was asking them to leave behind family and livelihood to follow him.

He asked them to betray the social and religious norms they were raised with.

He called on them to speak out, and act out, against the mighty Roman Empire, the most powerful empire the world had ever known.

He was asking them to face a world few of them had ever known. Beyond the myopic cares of everyday. He asked them to see the world in the big picture. To know that even strangers from a foreign land where their neighbors, and even the worst sinners were worthy of their love.

And so in the midst of his teaching on a hillside one day. Perhaps aware that their fears were about to overwhelm them, and their worries were paralyzing them, he said:

“Do not worry about your life. Look at the birds, they don’t work yet God feeds them. Look at the lilies, they don’t make clothing, yet they are clothed more beautifully than the kings. Could you add a single hour to your life by worrying? Don’t worry about tomorrow. Tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today is enough for today.”

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The world Jesus lived in, just like the world now, did not have a lot of regard for ordinary people. Humans have always had an obsession with celebrities. The rich and famous. The well connected and highly regarded.

There are the people who make things happen. And the people who things happen to.

For the vast majority of us who find ourselves living ordinary lives, it can be natural to wonder if we matter.

In the grand scheme of things, am I important?

Jesus answer was shocking to people. Yes.

You matter to God. As much as a the birds. As much as a king. Every life is important to God.

“Even I?” Some of his followers must have asked. “I’m nobody.”

Even you.

God knows about you. God cares about you. God loves you. God will take care of you.

Yes. You.

God loves you. Yes you. Even though you did that thing. Even though you are not sure you deserve it. Even if you can scarcely believe it.

God loves you.

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It can be a very hard thing to fully feel, and fully embrace. But it's true.

This is what Jesus teaches his friends.

God cares about you. God loves you. Yes, you.

So don't worry.

Could you add a single hour to your life by worrying? Don't worry about tomorrow. Tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today is enough for today.

At first glance it might seem like Jesus is preaching the kind of feel-good mantra that you might find in a contemporary self-help book. Just don't worry. Live in the moment.

But, like it always is with Jesus, the message is a little more complex.

There is this one verse, tucked in there, easy to miss.

Jesus says, don't worry about your daily cares. But "strive first for the kingdom of God, and for God's righteousness."

Jesus is not telling us to give up all our worries.

He is just telling to give up the routine worries of our day, so that we can turn our attention to what really matters.

Jesus is not just telling us to "find our bliss" or "kick up our feet" or "let Jesus take the wheel."

He is not saying, don't worry, be happy, everything will be alright.

Rather Jesus is saying.

God loves you. God cares about you. Yes you.

You can trust God.

Your firm foundation.

God is reliable and steadfast.

Just a step behind you as you climb the stairs for the very first time.

Jesus was asking his followers to do some very difficult things.

And he is asking us to do some very difficult things.

To resist evil in the world. To bind up the brokenhearted, care for the poor and the sick.

To trust our lives to community in a world that tells us to be self-made.

To refuse to go along with what we know is wrong.

To speak up on behalf of the vulnerable and oppressed. Even when it means standing up to the most powerful people in the world.

To not just look after the wellbeing of our children, but all children.

To not only care about people who look and live like us, but all people.

To give up convenience and comfort for the sake of a planet in peril.

To face down the hateful with steadfast love.

To hope in a world that can feel hopeless.

This is what God wants us to do.

And that's the same God who says, but don't worry. I'm with you. I love you. Yes you.

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This is perhaps the most important way in which God is like a parent to us.

God is our safe base.

Our secure attachment.

And even though not all of our parents were safe and secure for us.
God is better than any human parent.

God is safe and secure for all of us.

God is the one whose love we can trust so deeply, that we are willing to venture out. To face what frightens us. To explore what is unknown to us.

We may have grown up a lot since the days we took our first steps.

But the truth is we still rely on other people for a lot.

And we rely on God for quite a lot.

And we still take steps out that feel scary, new, and unknown. Here's what you do.

Next time you feel like you are out on a limb, or facing uncharted waters.

Take a peek back at God's smiling face.

Don't worry. I'm with you. I love you. Yes you.