

“FROM ATTAINMENT TO ATTUNEMENT”

A SERMON ON DOWNWARD MOBILITY FOR LENT 2026

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Anxiety is the emotional form that misplaced allegiance takes. That is the thesis—the single sentence beneath everything Jesus says in this passage. Before we can understand the remedy he offers, we must understand the disease he diagnoses. And the diagnosis begins with a contrast: God versus Mammon; attainment versus attunement; the life of the flesh versus the life of faith. Hear now the Word from **Matthew 6: 25-34**.

The Attainment Life

Attainment is not merely a behavior; it is an orientation—a worldview. It is always forward-leaning, future-oriented, perpetually measuring the gap between where we are and where we believe we need to be. It is foresight, competition, and goal-orientation. It is what we instill in our children in good schools. It is why we celebrate when the Dodgers win the World Series and feel deflated when Gonzaga gets knocked out of March Madness.

The attainment life is focused and disciplined. Winning comes only through hard work, honed practice, and self-sacrifice. And let us be clear: it is not simply about money. No amount of wealth will help a billionaire’s child win an Olympic gold medal. Those who reduce the attainment life to mere materialism are missing the point. Attainment runs deeper than the checkbook.

This is the life the world knows and how it operates. Jesus himself acknowledges it plainly:

“For the Gentiles seek after all these things.” — Matthew 6:32

It is the way of this world and of this-worldly kingdoms. It keeps score. It measures worth by ranking. It is the King-of-the-Hill, the Rat Race—and also, honestly, the life we live in the flesh. We are here and must make our way through this world. There is no sin in working hard or in succeeding.

But hear this carefully: the attainment life is also a form of spiritual formation. By it, we learn to measure all things—including ourselves, our worth, and our value to others—by finite, earthly standards. It shapes the soul. It is just that it shapes the soul toward the wrong things.

And Jesus will not let us stay there.

Seek FIRST, Not INSTEAD

“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” — Matthew 6:33

Notice what Jesus does not say. He does not say, “Seek instead.” He does not call his followers to a life of total detachment from earthly concerns—Jesus was no ascetic. He was

not a monk who shunned the world and retreated to the desert. He was precisely the opposite: the God who left perfection to be born into the world of flesh, who knew hunger and fatigue, who wept at a grave and celebrated at a wedding. He knows the struggles of this life. He knows there are injustices, pains, afflictions, wins, and losses.

Far from telling us to escape this world, he calls us to re-orient ourselves within it. The word is “first.” It is a call to a re-ordered hierarchy of seeking—not the elimination of legitimate concerns, but the proper placement of them.

And this matters enormously, because those who seek first the attainment life will harvest anxiety all day, every day. They cannot help it. The attainment life is anxiety’s native habitat.

We must say something bold here: chronic anxiety is not merely a psychological problem requiring only psychological solutions. It is a theological problem. It is, at its root, a rational but mistaken misreading of reality. When we are anxious, we are saying something within ourselves—something we may never articulate aloud but that drives our behavior nonetheless:

“God is not trustworthy. I alone am responsible for attaining my own security and happiness.”

That is not just a mental health crisis. That is a confession of unbelief. It is an outright rejection of the providence of God. Anxiety, at its deepest level, is the emotional consequence of misplaced allegiance. We serve God, not Mammon—and when we forget that, our hearts bear the cost.

Attunement: Life of Faith

In contrast to the spiritual formation program of attainment, Jesus sets before us a different life entirely. We might call it the life of attunement.

The Core Confession

Attunement begins not with effort, but with a doctrinal confession: God cares for us. Jesus makes this case with a simple argument from creation:

“But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?” —
Matthew 6:30

Beneath all its many symptoms, the attainment life is driven by the fear of death in its many forms: scarcity, poverty, suffering, and captivity. These are the fires beneath us that keep us serving Mammon instead of God. Fear is the fuel. Anxiety is the flame.

But the life of attunement is the life of faith. Attunement means living in this world with a constant eye trained to see what God has done and is doing—and then seeking to align ourselves to it. It is not passivity. It is active trust. It is righteousness—alignment with God’s will rather than servitude to the nagging drone of anxiety.

The life of attunement trusts in the goodness and providence of God. God is good. God loves us. God will provide. That is faith. That is attunement. And it is the antidote to anxiety—the thing that sets our feet on high places, well above the King-of-the-Hill and far beyond the Rat Race.

Jesus wants his disciples to live there—beyond anxiety, formed by a different spirituality altogether.

The Prescription: Look and Consider

And he tells us exactly how to get there. Jesus gives us a prescription for this new, different kind of life, and it may surprise us by its simplicity. He says: look at the birds. Consider the lilies.

Let us be clear: these are not sentimental suggestions or poetic flourishes. They are commands. The verbs “look” and “consider” are Greek imperatives—command words, carrying the full force of a direct order. Jesus is not inviting us to a peaceful moment of nature appreciation. He is commanding us to pay attention in a particular way.

The whole non-human creation is living proof of a providing Father, and we are constantly surrounded by this testimony—and missing it. The birds are not working for their provision; they are simply functioning within a web of God-given care they did not design and could not earn. The lilies do not labor, do not spin, and yet they are clothed in glory that outshines Solomon’s finest robes.

When we look—really look—and genuinely consider the world around us, we begin to see what we have been too anxious to notice: God has designed this cosmos with such infinitely intricate fine-tuning that our souls can be formed here and, by grace, live with him eternally.

And then comes the quiet, devastating logic of verse 27:

“And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?” —
Matthew 6:27

Anxiety—practically speaking—does not even work. It is not only theologically wrong; it is functionally useless. It has never extended a life, fed a family, or clothed a child. It has only consumed the person who carried it.

The Added Bonus

Here is the remarkable grace of the gospel: when we seek first the kingdom, we reorient our entire lives. We become attuned to God’s will and purposes. We align ourselves with him—and that alignment is what the Bible calls righteousness. And once we cease striving anxiously over food and clothes and status and all the other prizes of the attainment life, something unexpected happens.

We receive everything anyway.

“...all these things will be added to you.” — Matthew 6:33

This is the paradox of the kingdom: the one who clings most tightly to provision receives the least, while the one who opens his hands in trust receives abundantly. Today's anxieties are enough for today. Worry a little, if you must—and then go outside. Look at the sky. Watch the grass. Read about the size of the universe, or consider the staggering improbability that you exist at all. Release your grip on attainment, and you will find yourself receiving all the more.

This is what we might call downward mobility—trusting less in our own devices and trusting more completely in the goodness and providence of God. And this is faith in its most practical form: when we trust in God and step into that trust, we renounce the false god of Mammon. We are spiritually re-formed. We come into tune with God's intentions for us.

And that is the source of our joy.

What Is the Chief End of Man?

The Chief End of Man Is To Glorify God, and To Enjoy Him Forever.