

f e a r s w e f a c e

The Fear of Misery - Extreme Poverty

Life can be tough! Listen to one pro athlete's financial struggles.

"It's unlikely new Los Angeles Clippers forward Josh Smith perceives his nearly \$7 million salary the same way you do.

The Clippers offered Smith, the ex-Piston and Rocket, a \$1.5 million contract for the 2015-16 season, which he signed. The team introduced him to the Los Angeles media Tuesday. On top of that, he is going to make \$5.4 million from a prior deal with the Detroit Pistons for a grand total of \$6.9 million next year.

Smith let America know of his struggle, as reported by David Whitley of the *Orlando Sentinel* (via the *Detroit Free Press*). "At the end of the day, you know, I do have a family," he said. "So it is going to be a little harder on me this year. But I'm going to push through it, you know. ... I made a decision for me and my family."

By Ananth Pandian | NBA writer, July 25, 2015 5:29 p.m. ET

Critics took to the internet to show mock pity for the player – one even starting a GoFunding account (in jest) to help the player over his financial hump.

But we know of real cases where someone is about to lose everything or has lost everything.

"Now I find myself unemployed, bills piled up, facing foreclosure, medical bills, kids nearing college which I can't afford (but of course they are looking forward to college). Seems I can't even think anymore. Laid off for 8 months, unemployment ran out and about to lose everything."

And it makes us afraid - What if I become a 'riches to rags' victim? "What if I lost my job, or health, or retirement, or family. What would I do? Whether it is unemployment, or massive medical debt, or an ever-increasing credit card debt to keep our heads above water, and upside down mortgage, or school debt that looks like Mt. Everest we all potentially have things to worry about. And when it begins to look impossible to find a solution we panic and become afraid of what lies ahead.

Question: In your season of life what is your chief fear about your financial future? What does this fear look like – how does it play out in your life?

Job is a real life “lost it all” story. In Chapter 1:12, Satan is given permission to test Job.

Read Job 1: 14-22.

¹⁴ a messenger came to Job and said, “The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, ¹⁵ and the Sabeans attacked and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

¹⁶ While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, “The fire of God fell from the heavens and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

¹⁷ While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, “The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

¹⁸ While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, “Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother’s house, ¹⁹ when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

²⁰ At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship ²¹ and said:

“Naked I came from my mother’s womb,
and naked I will depart.
The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away;
may the name of the LORD be praised.”

²² In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

Oxen, sheep, camels, servant, sons, and daughters – Job a wealthy and influential man had just lost nearly everything. Later he would lose his health and even the support of his wife and friends. His response: “he fell to the ground and worshipped” God.

What is your normal response when bad things happen?

Do you come up with a “game plan” to fix it all or like Josh Smith in the above story just push through it? Do you blame God? Or are you tempted to lie, or pad your expense report, or take just a little when no one is looking – You know just enough so I don’t get swamped by all these bills.

The Bible says that through it all Job did not sin or did he blame God. We all want to be that kind of person. But we think I don’t see any good outcome and it is a little scary. What else can I do?

What do you think had been going on in Job's life that caused his first response to the anguish and fear he must have felt was to bless the name of the Lord?

Jesus has a response to our fear of poverty, loss, and misery. **Read the words of Jesus when it comes to worrying about financial issues.**

Matthew 6:25-34:

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

²⁸ "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Jesus' prescription for worry/fear of my financial future is found in these verses.

Underline every time you see the Jesus use the word "worry" in this passage.

Three areas we are commanded not to worry about in this passage:

- life (vs. 25)
- your needs (vs. 31)
- tomorrow (vs. 34)

Which of these do you have the hardest letting control of?

Jesus poses 5 questions in this passage:

1. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing?
2. He mentions how faithfully the Father feeds the tiny birds and then asks, Aren't you worth much more than they?

3. This he says how wasteful worry is by asking, Which of you by worrying about it (your financial future) can add even one day to your life?
4. Why are you worried about what you will wear?
5. Won't God do much more for you than He does, say for the field lilies or the grass that grows wild in the pasture?

These 5 questions challenge the things we are tempted to make a priority in our life just like the Gentiles who do not know the Father. Knowing the Father's character and how he treats the tiny and seemingly insignificant things with loving care helps me to realize a simple truth: God takes care of His own and I belong to Him. How does that simple truth help us get through the hard things – when life is seemingly becoming unglued?

When we can take our focus off all these issues we tend to worry about but can trust in the loving care of the Father (that He knows about my needs, that He anticipated our crises, that he is moved by our weaknesses, and at just the right time He is able to step in and prove Himself to be our faithful heavenly Father) then I can focus on what Jesus says is to be my priority: **SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD.**

What does it look like to seek the kingdom of God?