

LIFE GROUP LEADER GUIDE

The Cloud: G.K. Chesterton

Matthew 6:28-30



SERMON NOTES

Exegesis

VS 28-30 – *And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 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?*

The teaching of Scripture goes completely against seeing the world as this mechanistic set of wheels that are blindly in motion. Yes, God created the world, its processes, its meticulous intricacies and systems. But He is not removed from them. He upholds them. He delights in them. He playfully continues their function.

Jesus highlights the work of the Father in creation and uses it to exhort listeners not to live in fear or be anxious about things in life. Why? Because God meticulously cares for His creation, even down to the smallest of things. He is involved in feeding birds and clothing lilies.

Pay attention to this world God has made. Look at these small little creatures but watch in amazement at their design and activity. The Lord is in the activity of birds, ants, stars, and planets. Rather than seeing these as mundane experiences, they should be seen as wondrous realities. This picture from Scripture has been embodied and taught by many others, but perhaps none more well-known or effective than G.K. Chesterton.

Biography

The Jolly Defender of the Faith. The Humorous Defender of the Truth. Either of these descriptions could be used to describe G.K. Chesterton. But it is crucial that you don't leave off the jolly or humorous parts. To truly understand and appreciate the man is to recognize his joy and playfulness. He usually had a cigar in his mouth, walked around wearing a cape and crumpled hat, had tiny glasses

pinched at the end of his nose, a sword stick (cane sword) in hand, and laughter bellowing out from his thick mustache.

G.K. Chesterton (Gilbert Keith) was born in London in 1874. He was educated at St. Paul's (an all-boys school for the gifted founded in 1509), but never attended college. He did go to an art school. He was baptized in the Church of England as a one-month-old baby. But his family didn't really attend church. As a young man Chesterton was fascinated with the mysticism of the occult, playing with Ouija boards with his brother.

In 1900 (26 years old), he was asked to contribute a few articles to an art magazine. This became the doorway into the writing world. He would go on to write 100 books, contributed to 200 more, wrote hundreds of poems, five plays, five novels, and 200 short stories (the most famous being the Father Brown stories featuring a priest-detective). All of this writing was secondary to his main writing as a journalist. He wrote over 4,000 newspaper essays, including a weekly column for the Daily News. He also edited his own newspaper called, G.K. Weekly. Chesterton was a prolific writer.

In 1901, he married his wife, Frances, and remained married the rest of his life. On marriage he said, "Marriage is a duel to the death which no man of honour should decline." They were unable to have children. Frances attended to all the details of his life, since he continually proved he had no way of doing it himself. She was later assisted by a secretary, who became the couple's surrogate daughter. One day while at a train station not knowing where he was supposed to be, wired to his wife, "Am at Market Harborough. Where ought I to be?" She replied, "Home." Chesterton once wrote about marriage, "The whole pleasure of marriage is that it is a perpetual crisis." He was absent-minded, larger than life, laughed loudly at his own jokes, and amused children by doing things like catching buns thrown at him in his mouth. Chesterton credits his wife for leading him back to the Church of England (Anglicanism). But he later entered into full communion with the Catholic Church. He never entered any vocational role in the Church, though at his death the sitting Pope declared him "Defender of the Faith," a title Catholics and Protestants can both agree on. He wrote the occasional jabs at the Reformation, the Puritans, and Protestantism, on the whole, his focus was on defending the virtues and claims of classic Christianity, or what C.S. Lewis would go on to call "Mere Christianity." Chesterton once said, "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried."

If there were a word to describe the life and essence of Chesterton, it would be "enormous." He was physically enormous at 6'4" and weighing 300+lbs. But even that is something Chesterton deployed his unmatched wit and humor to address. A chauffeur recalled when Chesterton was stuck in his car door when getting out told the chauffeur he would have tried to exit the car sideways, but "I have no sideways." His personality and enjoyment of life was enormous as well. Listen to this incredible excerpt from *Orthodoxy*:

"The sun rises every morning. I do not rise every morning, but the variation is due not to my activity, but to my inaction. Now, to put the matter in a popular phrase, it might be true that the sun rises regularly because he never gets tired of rising. His routine might be due, not to a lifelessness, but to a rush of life. The thing I mean can be seen, for instance, in children, when they find some game or joke that they specially enjoy. A child kicks his legs rhythmically through excess, not absence, of life. Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, "Do it again"; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-ups, people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, "Do it again" to the sun, and every evening, "Do it again" to the moon. It may not be an automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we. The repetition in Nature may not be a mere recurrence; it may be a theatrical encore."

Do you hear how Chesterton saw the world? How he fought to maintain wonder. This is a theme of his life and work. He saw the universe as enchanted with the presence and wonder of God. Everything mattered. Everything was spiritual, not just the things done at church. He once wrote, "You say grace before meals. All right. But I say grace before the concert and the opera, and grace before the play and pantomime, and grace before I open a book, and grace before sketching, painting, swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing and grace before I dip the pen in the ink." Grace before everything, or giving thanks to God, before everything, was a way of enjoying that thing as a gift. He reminds us in another place of why we should do that, "The way to love anything is to realize that it may be lost."

Realizing everything is a gift, not a right, should cause us to love it as a gift, and to give thanks to the Giver. And it upset him when Christians would try to turn gifts from God into sins, when the Bible didn't. "The truth is, of course, that the curtness of the Ten Commandments is evidence, not of the gloom and narrowness of a religion, but, on the contrary, of its liberality and humanity. It is shorter to state the things forbidden than the things permitted: precisely because most things are permitted, and only a few things are forbidden." Most things are permitted, but many religious people like to forbid things the Lord does not, leading him to say, "Idolatry is committed, not merely by setting up false gods, but also by setting up false devils; by making men afraid of war or alcohol, or economic law, when they should be afraid of spiritual corruption and cowardice."

Chesterton's fresh eyes open up your whole world once you see it. Nothing is meaningless or boring anymore. He said, "There is no such thing on earth as an uninteresting subject; the only thing that can exist is an uninterested person." So you may be uninterested in things, but nothing is uninteresting. Not in God's world. In fact, Chesterton says, "The unpardonable sin is being bored." How could you dare be bored in God's fascinating universe?? How can you be given the gift of life in this amazing place, teeming with life and the presence of God, and be bored? Even the disruptions of our plans, if seen rightly, are a part of this worldview. Chesterton challenges us, "An inconvenience is only an adventure wrongly considered; an adventure is an inconvenience rightly considered."

Chesterton was a writer. Most of his ideas were transferred through something he wrote. Not only did he write a lot, he wrote well. His writing is enjoyable. He deployed the English language with precision and wit unlike few others. His humor is one of his lasting trademarks. He said once, "Journalism largely consists of saying 'Lord Jones is Dead' to people who never knew that Lord Jones was alive." Another funny one is, "The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies; probably because they are generally the same people." He used that humor and ability to write to address everything from art, literary works, social criticism, history, politics, economics, philosophy, and theology. One person remarked on Chesterton's influence and skill by saying, "G.K. Chesterton was the best writer of the 20th century. He said something about everything, and he said it better than anybody else." Most of that writing was done from a train station since he usually missed the train he was supposed to catch.

His big personality did not keep him from serious work. His book, *The Everlasting Man*, is credited by C.S. Lewis for bringing him from atheism to Christianity. Lewis wrote in *Surprised By Joy*, "I did not know what I was letting myself in for. A young man who wishes to remain a sound Atheist cannot be too careful of his reading." Lewis also wrote about the impact of the book and Chesterton (before his conversion):

"I read Chesterton's *Everlasting Man* and for the first time saw the whole Christian outline of history set out in a form that seemed to me to make sense." (Lewis)

"Chesterton had more sense than all the other moderns put together; bating, of course, his Christianity." (Lewis)

Chesterton also debated the leading intellectuals of his day. He went head-to-head with people like George Benard Shaw (writer, socialist, atheist), H.G. Wells (famous writer, socialist, non-Christian), Bertrand Russell (famous intellectual and atheist), and Clarence Darrow (lawyer, Scopes Monkey trial). Most contemporaries hailed Chesterton as the victor. He hammered his opponents for claiming to be open-minded, but only used it as an excuse for not believing anything concretely, saying, "The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid."

Despite the philosophical and theological differences Chesterton had with these individuals, all of them regarded Chesterton with warm affection. George Bernard Shaw remarked, "The world is not thankful enough for Chesterton." On one occasion when Chesterton was with Shaw, he said to Shaw, "To look at you, anyone would think a famine had struck England." Shaw retorted back, "To look at you, anyone would think you had caused it." Chesterton erupted in laughter. Others like Earnest Hemingway and T.S. Eliot remarked on the impact of Chesterton, Eliot even wrote Chesterton's obituary in the *London Times*. Chesterton died on June 14th, 1936, of congestive heart failure, aged 62, in his home with his wife.

Chesterton argued eloquently against all the trends that eventually took over the 20th century: socialism, materialism, scientific determinism, moral relativism, and spineless agnosticism. He once said, "Fallacies do not cease to be fallacies because they become fashions." He defended the faith, the

family, and beauty. He believed Christians needed to engage in this task. He once said, "It's not that we don't have enough scoundrels to curse; it's that we don't have enough good men to curse them." Christians need to know how to speak to the issues of our day with truth. The Christian, who has been brought from spiritual death to life, can fight against the rot and decay in society. Chesterton remarked on this reality by saying, "A dead thing can go with the stream, but only a living thing can go against it." On the subject of defending the faith (and this could be true of defending a country as well), he said, "The true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him." In other words, we fight to preserve something we love. We live in such a day as well. We fight not because we hate what is in front of us, but primarily because we love what we are defending. And love for what we are defending is why Christians ought to defend it. Why shouldn't we? "Men do not differ much about what things they will call evils; they differ enormously about what evils they will call excusable." It is true in our day just as it was in Chesterton's day. Everyone loves to spout their beliefs, and everyone is encouraged to speak their truth, that is unless you're Christian. Chesterton said it this way, "These are the days when the Christian is expected to praise every creed except his own."

Reading Chesterton will astonish you. He will stir up wonder and imagination. His words so long ago feel fresh and relevant today. He did all this while making you laugh. Where should you start reading Chesterton? Orthodoxy and Heretics (either one first). Then The Everlasting Man. Wherever you start, just read Chesterton.

Let Chesterton stir your awe and wonder. Imitate him in seeing the beauty of the mundane. Imitate him in enjoying the small things. Recognize that God's big world is full of wonder because it reflects the majesty and artistry of the God of Wonders.

Enjoy it in His created works.

Enjoy it in your relationships.

Enjoy it in eating.

Enjoy it in drinking.

Enjoy it with deep thinking.

And like Chesterton, enjoy it with laughter.

Matthew introduces us to John the Baptist. John the Baptist is prophesied about in the book of Malachi when the Lord promises to send the "Elijah to come" before the day of the Lord's appearance. John's role is to prepare the way of the Messiah.



- How was your week? What is one thing you're grateful for and one thing that challenged you?
- How did you grow in obedience to Christ over the last week?
- Where did you go to share the gospel or have a spiritual conversation with someone?



- **REVIEW**
 - Read **Matthew 6:28-30** and then have someone else in the group read it again, preferably from a different version.
 - What big takeaways did you have from the teaching?
 - Additional Scripture:
 - Psalm 8:3-4
 - Psalm 104:24-25
 - Luke 12:6-7
 - Proverbs 30:24-28
- **REFLECT**
 - What role does faith play in combating anxiety according to the passage?
 - Chesterton is known for his wittiness and use of rhetoric. How should Christians view sarcasm and sharp language?
 - In light of Chesterton's social engagement, how should Christians think about political and cultural engagement?
 - Considering Chesterton's Catholic practice, how should evangelicals think about partnering with Catholics?
- **RESPOND**
 - What can you learn from G.K. Chesterton's life?
 - What is a practical step you can take as a result of this sermon?
- **MEDITATE**
 - Matthew 6:30 – 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?

- **MEMORIZE**

- Proverbs 4:23 – Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.



- **FOLLOW:** How will you follow Jesus this week and grow in your love and understanding of Him?
- **FISH:** Who in your sphere of influence needs to hear this story, your story or the gospel?
- **PRAYER**
 - Pray over any request from your group members.
 - **Staff** – Morgan Cates
 - **Ministry** – Discipleship Director
 - **Pray for our long-term units on the field:**
 - The Wilsons
 - The Grays
 - The Starks
 - **Pray for our short-term teams**
 - Asian Pacific Rim Team #2 departing August 16
 - Central Asia Team #2 departing on September 27
 - **Pray for the unreached.** Want to keep up with Unreached People Groups? Download the Unreached of the Day App <https://joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday/app>