



SERMON RECAP

FEBRUARY 1, 2026

The Sermon on the Mount: Treasures Matthew 6:19-34

Bobby McFerrin wrote one of the most iconic songs of the 20th century but hasn't played it live in decades. "Don't Worry, Be Happy" was a number one hit in 1988. The National Endowment for the Arts ranked it as number 301 in the 365 best songs of the century ("Over the Rainbow" was number one). In 2024 it was selected for preservation by the National Recording Registry of the Library of Congress. These are no small feats of a little song that McFerrin had no idea would become a hit.

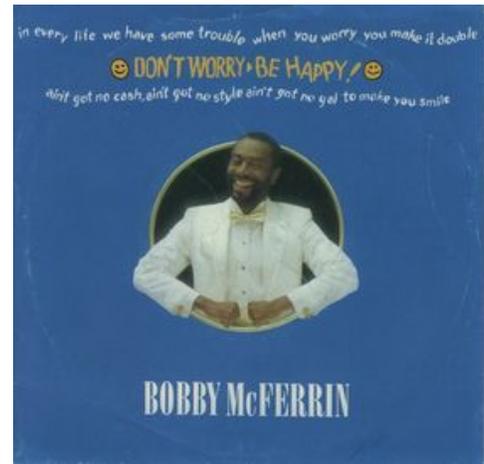
But there is a darker side to the song - the side that in time became the target of vitriol, and a part of the reason McFerrin doesn't play it live any more. He went on to become one of the respected musicians of our time. He conducts symphonies, won 7 more Grammy awards after "Don't Worry," including a Lifetime Achievement Award.

I remember however, in a time before the internet, when a rumor circulated that Bobby McFerrin died by suicide. In the days before my ability to just go online and look him up, I believed it for several years. There was a dark humor behind the rumor. In 2003, *Blender* magazine named it number 7 in its list of "Worst Songs Ever" (Starship's "We Built this City" was number one). In 2011, *The Village Voice* crowned "Don't Worry" as the worst song of all time.

And it's not just about lists. In 2024 Sarah Paris wrote in the online magazine *Medium* an article called "Why 'Don't Worry, Be Happy' is Terrible Advice." In it, she writes:

The philosophy McFerrin espouses is decidedly a Western world luxury. Tell someone who has lost everything in a war-torn nation, who has seen their loved ones killed in front of them, "Don't worry, be happy," and you'll be lucky if a punch in the kidney is the only consequence you face. I now find the mantra insulting — maybe even damaging.

People hate "Don't Worry, Be Happy" for its unbridled optimism, and what they may say a false sense of hope. To simply go through life not worrying while terrible things happen seems to be a slogan of incredible privilege at best, but more likely damaging for ignoring the reality of suffering in the world.



McFerrin's song however, is not blind to suffering. In fact, in the there is an important that reveals the Gospel truth that Jesus shared in this passage of the Sermon on the Mount. "In every life we have some trouble. But when you worry you make it double."

Jesus said, "Who among you by worrying can add a single moment to your life?" Those who say "Don't Worry," is a patronizing, even dangerous, song, might also not enjoy this part of Jesus' sermon. The criticisms are fair. It doesn't feel very helpful to tell someone struggling with poverty, hunger, or lack of health care to just "don't worry."

The truth of this passage however, is that the worry in and of itself doesn't help. The Sermon on the Mount is a type of wisdom writing. There is a spiritual truth here that is not just about telling someone what to do or think. Jesus offers a challenge and a truth that resonates beyond a motivational poster saying. Worrying does not help. Action does.

This is not telling people "don't do anything and let God handle it." Jesus is telling people to seek the Kingdom of God. This means that we should seek justice, live in generosity, and build community. Worry doesn't put food on the table, but if we are living into the Kingdom of God, then no one will go hungry.

Seeking the Kingdom of God is not about waiting for God to take you to heaven, or praying for prosperity, or having enough faith that God will just miraculously provide. Seeking the Kingdom of God means that we are active in building systems that have safety nets. It means that we are building a world that operates under a mindset of generosity, not scarcity.

Worry helps nothing. Justice, generosity, and community change the world.