

## Is the World Getting Better or Worse?

Matt. 6.31-34

When I was your age, unemployment was very high. In 1992, when I was year 10, it reached almost 11%. That's more than 1 out of every 10 people not being able to get a job. You can imagine that this made us very nervous about life after college. A lot of us imagined that we would have to struggle along on a benefit, or at least have to compete really hard against everyone else out there looking for jobs. We were constantly told that we needed to push ourselves hard to get the best marks possible to give ourselves a chance at being employed when we left school. I really worried about it. Our economy was not in a good place, and people were really struggling everywhere. I heard so many stories of people having to live in poverty. There were stories in the news of old people eating cat food for dinner because they couldn't afford proper meals. I remember the anger I received at home if I lost an item of school uniform, because we couldn't afford to buy new ones. I would wear second-hand clothes a lot growing up. I don't think that was unusual at the time, either. Needless to say, the future felt scary and bleak.

But everything turned out fine. I never had a lot of trouble finding a job. And the future turned out better than I had thought.

I know that a lot of you feel anxious about the future, and if you read the news then you probably have every reason to feel that way. The impression that we get from the news is that everything is getting worse: Climate change, housing prices, youth crime, inflation, natural disasters, the roads, political divides, conspiracy theorists, gangs. It could make you feel very afraid for your future.

After all the world is just getting worse and worse, isn't it?

Consider a 2016 survey that asked folks in 17 countries, "All things considered, do you think the world is getting better or worse, or neither getting better nor worse?" Fifty-eight percent of respondents thought that the world is getting worse, and 30% said that it is doing neither. Only 11% thought that things are getting better.

In the United States, 65% percent thought that the world is getting worse, and 23 % said neither. Only 6% of Americans responded that the world is getting better.

But in fact, the statistics would say that the world is in fact getting better:

Firstly, poverty around the world has decreased. The world has gone from almost 80% of the world being in extreme poverty in 1820 to about 10% of the world being in that position today.

Secondly, We are healthier than ever before. Child mortality rates have fallen steeply in the last 100 years, and overall life expectancy is at its highest point ever, and increasing. In 1770 the average life expectancy was 35 years. Nowadays, it is about 80 years old - that's the average.

Third – even though global warming is in full swing, and carbon dioxide emissions are increasing, we now produce far more renewable energy than ever before. So the transformation of the way we live and how we fuel our planet is beginning to change significantly, and has been noticeably since 2005.

The world is improving in many ways. There may be some things that go backwards temporarily, but the overall trend is for huge improvements in the quality of life. It's just that for some reason, negative news has become the dominant form of news story, and this skews the way we see the world.

What does the Bible have to say about this? What did Jesus say about the world getting better or worse?

Nothing really; what Jesus taught was don't worry. Don't be afraid. Don't be anxious. If we were to be observant, and really think about it, then we would notice that the details of our life really have very little to do with the global economic trends, or the major political movements. Our life is really made of the things that are happening now. In this present moment. Most of the major things we fear and are highlighted by the media will never happen and never affect us. As Mark Twain once said: "I've suffered a great many catastrophes in my life. Most of them never happened."

Instead, I think life is filled with good things. But we can be so preoccupied with our fears and our worries that we can miss the goodness of life that is happening right in front of us. So, to finish off, here's my top three good things to look out for in life, and to enjoy:

1. Laughter. Nothing feels as rejuvenating and as uplifting as genuine belly laughter. Engage in regularly. There is a lot that is funny in the world. Good old fashioned laughter is part of what makes for a good and happy life.
2. Kindness – either given or received. Nothing softens and surprises us as much as receiving unexpected kindness from someone. Even just the simple thoughtfulness of someone saving me a seat or sharing a treat with me can bring a lot of happiness into my day. And when I am kind to someone else, I always seem to get a good buzz out of it too.
3. YouTube. It has some great stuff on there. Sometimes there's nothing I love better than seeing inspiring American Idol auditions. Or funny animal videos. Or prank videos. Or sneaker meet-ups. Sometimes we all just need something to lift us up and make us feel good. Sometimes a little bit of YouTube does the trick.