

Living a Worry Free Life

Decades ago, in the waiting room of a Minneapolis hospital three expectant father's nervously paced, while they anxiously awaited news from beyond the swinging double doors.

The nurse came in and announced to the first father that he was now the proud daddy of two beautiful twins. "That's quite a coincidence," he responded, "I play for the Minnesota Twins!"

A few minutes later another nurse came in and announced to the second man, "Your wife has just given birth to triplets."

"That's amazing," he exclaimed, "I work for the 3M company!"

At this point the third man passed out and fell out of his chair. The nurse quickly attended to the man, as he came to, she asked, "Are you feeling ill?" He said, No, but I work for 7-up."

Is there anything that ever gets you stressed out? What is it that fills you with anxiety? We live in a day when worry is assumed to be a normal part of life. Anxiety is expected. We all worry sometimes, but what is alarming is how often worry cripples our ability to live life. 43% of adults suffer negative health problems because of worry, and these numbers are mushrooming among Generation Z or the iGeneration those aged about 8 to 23. Did you know that half of all people in the hospital at any given time can be diagnosed as chronic worriers. 75% of all visits to primary care doctors are stress related. 275 million workdays are lost every year to worry related absenteeism. 31 million Americans suffer from insomnia and anxiety plays a major role in that. The bottom line is worry is killing us.

Against all of this the best the world can do to help is to manage your worry. Coping with anxiety is big business. We spend 42 billion dollars a year dealing with worry. You can see a counselor help you cope with your anxiety or visit a doctor who can prescribe pills to counter the effects of worry. Books dealing with stress and anxiety are perennial bestsellers. You can stream some audio programs to help keep your anxiety level in check.

All of those things can be helpful, and in some cases necessary, but is worry really an inevitable part of life? Must anxiety always be an unwelcome companion that we can only hope to keep at arm's length? In Philippians 4:6, our Core Verse this week, the Apostle Paul writes, "*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplications with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*"

"*Do not be anxious about anything.*" Easy for him to say, right? Do I need to remind you of Paul's biography? Imprisoned. Shipwrecked. Bitten by poisonous snakes. Whipped with a cat of nine tails. Beaten with rods. Stoned—the kind with rocks not herbs Targeted by murder plots. Paul had a thing or two to worry about.

Still, Paul seems to think that worry is optional. Worry is something we choose, and Paul tells us not to choose it. Where would Paul get such an idea? What would make him think such a thing? How about Jesus? A dozen times in the gospels Jesus says, *“Do not worry.”* Seventeen times he says, *“Do not be afraid.”* Overcoming worry isn’t just a matter of your mental health, or your physical health; it’s essential to your spiritual health.

Anxiety doesn’t just keep us awake at night or make us pace the floor talking to ourselves. Worry doesn’t just give us tension headaches and stomach ulcers. It’s an act of disobedience that attacks God’s purposes in our lives.

But, oh we worry, don’t we. You know I have this terrible habit of chewing my nails. I never thought much about it until one time a lady asked me what I was so worried about? I thought, nah, I don’t worry, it’s just a habit like chewing the end of your pen or drumming your fingers while you’re thinking.

Over the next few years I tackled the problem with varying degrees of success. This last time, I was doing really good. Nails looked great. I was having to clip them regularly. I had to clean under my nails. I finally thought I’ve got this thing whipped.

And then 2020 hit. I think I’ve had these things chewed down to the quick half the year. Typing this sermon, I had one part of my thumb chewed so low, that it hurt every time I hit the space bar. You suppose God is trying to tell me something?

Have you stressed about anything this year? About having to wear a mask? About other people not wearing masks? About getting sick? About a loved one who did get sick? About the election? About social unrest? About your job? Relationships strained to the breaking point.

We worry about money. We worry about our possessions. We worry about our jobs. We worry about our families and relationships. We worry about our health.

First thing I want to point out is that when Paul says, *“Do not be anxious,”* or when Jesus says, *“Do not worry,”* it’s a command. This isn’t just his opinion. It isn’t just good advice. It’s a matter of spiritual faithfulness. Not only does Paul not see worry as inevitable. He sees it as sin.

This command written in the sense of stop doing what you are doing. The Philippians were worried. It’s not just a modern issue. We’re not the first to fight anxiety. And Paul offers them a way out. Paul also sees anxiety as something that with God’s help we can completely defeat.

Let me give you 3 reasons why worry is more than just a bad habit. It’s sin. And I also want to give you 3 remedies.

I. Worry Distracts Us From What Matters Most

The first reason is that worry distracts us from what matters most. Worry has a way of taking our eyes off what is most important, and keeping them on things that ultimately are of only

secondary importance. When you begin to worry about a thing, you take your eyes off of God, and put them on whatever you're worried about. In the moment that happens, you no longer trust God in that area. You have taken complete ownership of that concern and let it consume you. You've taken it out of God's hands and have said, "I'm dealing with this on my own."

But if we won't trust God in the secondary things, we won't trust him in the things that matter ultimately. Jesus says in Matthew 6:25,

"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 important than food, and the body more important than clothes?"

There is more to life than the things we usually worry about. Why do we spend so much time and energy worrying over little things we can't change, when that time and energy could be focused on more productive things?

Worry is like a heavy fog that keeps you from seeing. According to the National Institute of Standards and Technology, a dense fog that covers a area of 7 city blocks 100 feet deep is composed of less than 1 glass of water divided into sixty thousand million drops. There's not much there, but it can bring a city to a standstill. This is exactly what worry does. It takes what is in the grand scheme of things something small, breaks it into its most nitty gritty until it clouds our view of everything. It keeps us from seeing what matters most.

Remedy – Give Your Worries to God

So how do we free ourselves from the fog of worry? Give your worries to God. Paul doesn't just say, "*Do not be anxious about anything.*" He gives us a superior alternative. Do this instead, "*In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*"

Paul knows we have legitimate concerns in life. He understands that life is filled with all kinds of things that bring stress to our front door like the UPS truck dropping off packages from all your online Black Friday shopping. We can't just ignore it. We can't just pretend it isn't there. We have to do something with it.

Paul uses three synonyms for prayer– prayer, supplications, and requests. The word translated prayer usually signifies intercessory prayer for other people. This is praying about people and relationships. So, instead of worrying about spouse, our children, our parents, or friends, Paul says pray for them. Give those relationships to God.

Supplications are those urgent pleas for some vital need. These are the kind of issues that completely wreck your schedule and shred your budget. These are the health concerns and money problems that can send us into a complete tailspin. But Paul says, "Nope, you can give those to God too.

Requests is simply a general word for all of life's. In other words there is no problem too big or too small that we can't pray about it and give it to God.

Give them God and let him deal with it. Who's better equipped to deal with this stuff? You or God?

Money can buy a bed...but it cannot buy sleep.
 Money can buy amusements but it cannot buy happiness.
 Money can buy companions but it cannot buy friends.
 Money can buy books but it cannot buy brains.
 Money can buy a house but it cannot buy a home.
 Money can buy medicine but it cannot buy health.
 Money can buy flattery but it cannot buy respect.

The importance of consciously and verbally turning these things over to God is that it is a return of trust. These anxieties enter our life and they demand our time, our energy, our effort. Satan uses them as blinders. Don't you see that need over there that God has called you to, because you must spend all your time on this problem right here. You can't grow in this area here because you have to spend all your energy worrying about this problem.

But prayer slams the door shut on Satan's face, it turns all these things over to God, and it frees you to pursue His plans and purposes. It doesn't ignore the problem or pretend they don't matter, It simply puts you in a better position to deal with them. You can deal with them by yourself, or you can deal with them with God.

II. Worry Forgets that God Knows What You Need

The second reason that worry will always let us down is that it forgets that God knows what we need. When we worry we are acting like it all depends on us, like we have to take care of everything ourselves. Worry convinces you that you're all alone. Anxiety forgets that God already knows everything that you need. Jesus says it this way in the Mathew 6:26,

"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?" In verses 28 & 29 he says, "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies 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."

Birds and animals, flowers and plants don't spend time worrying about their future. They are not plagued by anxiety, and yet they manage just fine.

But oh do we worry. And the more we worry the more we forget about God. Arthur Somers Roche wrote, "Worry is a thin stream of fear trickling through the mind. If encouraged, it cuts a channel into which all other thoughts are drained." You may start with just a little worry and it slowly begins to engulf your whole life, pushing God further and further away.

Remedy – Be Thankful for What God Has Already Given

Instead of worrying and forgetting that God knows what we need, Paul points us to a remedy—be thankful for what God has already given. Knowing that God has taken care of us in the past, helps us trust Him in the future. Notice that Paul doesn't just say to turn all of our worries over to God in prayer and supplication. This is not just about praying about your list of requests.

Paul adds two essential words— *with thanksgiving*— it's appropriate given the holiday we just celebrated.

Be thankful for what you already have. Give God glory for what he has already provided. Rejoice in what he's already given you. You see when you're worried about something, you tend to forget the blessings you already have. Anxiety convinces you your current blessings don't matter, but thankfulness forces a change in perspective. Wow, God really has taken care of me. Maybe I can trust Him in this thing to.

Not only does God know what we need, but he wants to meet those needs. God cares for you. He loves you. He knows every hair of your head. But not only does God know what we need, and wants to meet those needs, He's also able to do something about it. God has the power to meet those needs. He's able to provide.

Thanksgiving takes away the pressure of anxiety. It gives us great assurance. When they were getting ready to build the Golden Gate Bridge one of the great fears was that they would lose dozens of lives as was typical with such high rise steel structures. The builder decided to construct at a very great cost in depression era dollars, a large safety net underneath the bridge. Officials protested saying such precautions were expensive and would force costly delays.

But the net was a great success. Not only were many lives saved, the safety net actually saved money, because the workers could work without the fear of falling. They worked more quickly and efficiently. The net gave freedom from worry.

That's how God's provision is for us. We can pursue the greatest things in life, because we know that God's provision is supporting us. It gives us great freedom from worry.

When we give our worries to God, and when we are filled with thanksgiving for God's blessings there is an amazing promise. That promise isn't that God will answer every supplication or request just the way we want, but He does promise us peace. Peace is the opposite of worry and anxiety. Verse 7 says, *"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

This is a peace that only comes from God. Peace is rest for a weary soul. Peace is comfort for a hurting heart. Peace is the serenity the soothes a troubled mind. It is rooted in God himself, and it transcends our ability to even understand it. It doesn't even seem to make sense. We can't

explain it. But it's very real. And this divine peace will guard your heart from all that worry tries to steal from it. It guards your mind from every burden that anxiety tries to lay upon it.

You see the true answer to our worry is not getting everything we want, but it is in having the peace of God.

III. Worry Doesn't Work

One more reason why worry is sin is that worry doesn't work. Anxiety is simply a waste of time and energy. It isn't helpful. It isn't productive. That's the ironic thing about worry. It doesn't help the situation that has you so anxious. Worry focuses so much on the negative, that it is unable to act positively in the situation.

Jesus makes this point clearly when he says in Matthew 6:27, *"Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?"*

According to one study on worry:

- 40% of our worries never happen
- 30% are concerns of the past that we can't undo anyway
- 12% are needless health worries
- 10% are petty concerns
- Only 8% are legitimate concerns.

We expend so much time and energy worrying about the other 92% of things, that we can't do anything about the 8% that matters. It's like the woman who spent her whole life terrified of cancer. She talked about it frequently. She worried about it constantly. The slightest thing sent her trembling to the doctor. She finally died in her 80s of a heart attack.

That's just the thing about worry. Not only is worry ineffective. It makes you ineffective. Worry either paralyzes you, so that you do nothing, or it makes you act in desperation, so that you do something foolish or stupid. Worry makes really dumb ideas sound good.

Our English word "worry" comes from an old German word which means to choke or strangle. Worry chokes your ability to live the life God intended for us.

Worry changes nothing but you. It is a leading cause to most major causes of death including heart disease, cancer, lung disease, accidents, and suicide. Anxiety can lead to depression, ulcers, irritable bowel syndrome, various skin conditions, chronic headaches, insomnia, high blood pressure, digestive disorders and sexual dysfunction among many other conditions. Not only can worry not add a single hour to your life, but it can take years away.

Remedy – Focus on the Positive

Instead of worrying about all the negative things anxiety wants you to focus on, the remedy is to focus on the positive. This is more than just thinking happy thoughts or looking on the bright

side. But this learning to focus your mind on all that is good. Listen to verse 8, the very next verses here in Philippians 4.

8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 What you have learned[e] and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Worry gets you dwelling on everything negative. You begin to think that everything that could go wrong will go wrong. You only consider everything that isn't right. You think of all the times you failed, but Paul says, "No, set your sights on everything that is excellent and praiseworthy.

There's a time for singing the blues. Listen to your downtempo tunes played in a minor key. There's a place for tear in your beer country music. Just look at the Psalms. We see those kinds of songs there. But it gets to a point that is if all you watch, all you read, and all you listen to is dark and depressing, and negative, it will just drag you down with it.

One of the things I've learned about guns is the bullet always hits where it was pointed. If you've done a good job zeroing in your sights, it's going to point the gun wherever your sights are aimed. If everything you're focused on in life is negative, you are zeroing the sights of your soul on the negative, guess where your life is going to hit. Listen to your sad song, but then give it to God, thank Him for His many blessings and focus on something that will pull you out of it. You need something that encourages the heart, that lifts the spirit, and heartens a weary will.

And when you do, guess what will happen? Paul says in verse 9, "*Practice these things and the God of peace will be with you.*" That's the second time in three verses Paul gives us a promise of peace.

Bruce Larson, in his book *Believe and Belong*, shares a story about a time when he ministered in downtown New York City. He would take them down to the RCA Building on Fifth Avenue. Outside the entrance of that building is a gigantic statue of Atlas, a beautifully proportioned man who, with all his muscles straining, is struggling to hold the world upon his shoulders. There he is, the most powerfully built man in the world, and he can barely stand up under this burden. Bruce would point at the Atlas statue and say "Now that's one way to live...trying to carry the world on your shoulders."

Then he would take them across the street to Saint Patrick's Cathedral. Behind the altar was a statue of Jesus, and with no effort at all, He is holding the world in one hand." Bruce would then say, "Or you can live this way." The choice is up to you. Are you trying to carry your own world on your shoulders, are you going to let Him carry it for you?