

## Living a Worry Free Life

We all have times that we worry about the future, times that we are fearful about what tomorrow may bring. I am reminded of a story that comes from the time before expectant fathers were allowed in the delivery room as their wives gave birth. In the waiting room of a Minneapolis hospital, three new dads nervously paced, smoked and snacked 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 father 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 father, "Your wife has just given birth to triplets." "That's amazing," he exclaimed, "I work for 3M!"

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." Needless to say, his stress levels had just shot through the roof.

We live in a day and age when stress and anxiety have reached epidemic levels. This was true before Covid, but since 2020 anxiety related disorders have shot up 25%. We all get stressed-out at times, but what is alarming is how often worry cripples our ability to live life. 43% of adults suffer negative health effects of acute worry, and did you know that half of all people in America's hospital beds 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. Worry plays a huge role in the fact that 31 million Americans suffer from insomnia. It is estimated that worry costs us around 44 billion dollars annually.

Against all of this, the best the world can do to help is to manage your worry. Worry management is big business in this country. You can see a psychiatrist help you cope with your anxieties or attend a mental health conference to develop worry management skills. You can listen to CDs or read books to help keep your anxiety level in check.

Many speculate and pontificate about why worry is so engrained in modern life, but did you know there is an ancient answer to this seemingly contemporary problem. A dozen times in the gospels Jesus tells us, "*Do not worry.*" Seventeen times he says, "*Do not be afraid.*" In fact, that's the most frequent command in scripture. "Don't be afraid. Do not fear." Defeating worry becomes possible as we grow closer to Jesus.

We find Jesus' most extensive teaching on the subject of worry right in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount. Three times in just ten verses, Jesus tells us not to worry.

Matt 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 important than food, and the

*body more important 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 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?*

*28 "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. 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, O 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.*

This passage is really a continuation of what Jesus says about not storing up your treasures on earth. When you look at the things we worry about, it is often those treasures we store on earth. We worry more about money and possessions than anything else. We worry about adding hours or losing them from our lives. We worry about tomorrow and what it will or won't bring. But if what our Savior says here is true, the key to overcoming worry about our earthly treasure is not getting more of it. It's something else.

Three times in this passage Jesus tells us, "Do not worry." This is a command. Jesus doesn't say, "try not worry," or "it's better if you don't worry." Jesus doesn't preface this statement by saying, "Here's just a little piece of personal advice," or "Here's my recommendation." Not worrying is a matter of obedience and faithfulness. Not only does Jesus not see worry as inevitable. He sees it as sin. He sees worry as something that with God's help we can completely defeat.

In this text Jesus gives us three reasons why worry will never work. He also gives us three remedies for overcoming worry.

### **I. Worry Distracts Us From What Matters Most**

The first reason worry will always fail us 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 really won't matter. Listen to what Jesus says here in verse 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?*"

Jesus is saying there is more to life than the things we usually worry about. Why should we spend so much time and energy worrying over such things, when that time and energy could better be used elsewhere? We spend all this effort worrying about things we can't really do anything about, and then we won't have that energy when we really do need it.

When we worry we can't see what we need to see. According to the Bureau of Standards a dense fog that covers a 7 city block area 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 – Remember What's Most Important**

Now Jesus' remedy for the distraction of worry is to remember what matters most. Keep in the front of your mind what's more important than what we will eat, what we will drink and what we will wear. Money can't get us most of the things in life that are really important.

I have in my files this little anonymously written piece.

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.

I read an interesting quote in an interview with Sylvester Stallone where he was asked about the effect money had on his life. He said:

*Money does not bring peace of mind. Actually it brings more problems. Everything is magnified one hundred thousand times. That's not to complain. But once you make a fortune, you'd think it would be all green lights and blue skies. But that's not true. As a matter of fact it brings out some of the most vile characteristics that you can imagine.*

Jesus says that the greatest things in life aren't physical or material. They are spiritual. In verse 33, he says, *"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you as well."*

This is both a command and a promise. First is the command to seek God's kingdom and his righteousness. The kingdom refers to God's divine rule in human hearts, and we seek that kingdom by growing in our own relationship with God and leading others to have the same relationship. God's righteousness is living our lives in accordance with God's will and truth.

But Jesus follows up this command with a tremendous promise. If we seek first the things of most importance, we'll get the other things as a bonus. This isn't a promise of material wealth and luxurious prosperity, but a promise of what Jesus called "our daily bread" in the Lord's prayer. Our basic needs will be met. We will have something to eat. We will have something to

drink. We will have something to wear. We will have a roof over our heads. We will have a place to sleep at night. If we seek his spiritual riches, he will also supply our physical needs.

## **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 makes us think we're in it all alone. Worry forgets that God knows everything that we need.

In verse 26 Jesus says, *"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."*

Jesus points to nature as an illustration. 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. American mystery novelist Arther Somers Roche once said, "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 – Trust in God's Provision**

Instead of worrying and forgetting that God knows what we need. Jesus points us to a remedy. Trust in God's provision. 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. God's having to know less about me every year. 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. This is why Jesus reminds us that though the birds don't plant crops or store away in barns, the *"heavenly father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?"*

When we're able to trust in God's provision, that 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. Others were critical that it create unnecessary delays and make the project too costly.

But the net was a great success. Only a few lives were lost. It also turned out that the safety net actually saved money, because the workers labored without the fear of falling, and with the assurance of the net were much more productive and did their work more quickly and efficiently. The net gave them 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.

God's provision doesn't mean that we don't have to work to provide for our own needs. One of the main ways that he provides is by giving us the skills and intelligence to work and be productive. Although God provides for the birds, they still have to build nests and hunt for food. Jesus' point was not that they don't work, but that they don't worry.

### **III. Worry Doesn't Work**

Jesus gives us one more reason why worry is simply a waste of time and energy. Worry doesn't work. 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. Jesus makes this point clearly when he says in verse 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 the thing about worry. Not only is worry ineffective. It makes you ineffective. Our English word "worry" comes from an old German word which means to choke or strangle. That's exactly what worry does to our ability to live the life God intended for us. Worry has been linked to all the 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. Apparently, by worrying we will actually remove hours from our life.

### **Remedy – Focus on What You Can do Something About**

Instead of worrying about things that we can't change and control, we should focus on what we can do something about. Jesus says in verse 34, *"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."*

Jesus doesn't say that we won't have problems or concerns in life, but we have enough to focus on today. Today is the time we can choose and act and make a difference. We can't control tomorrow, so do the best you can today, and trust the rest to God.

Jesus offers us in this passage two ways to live life. It's up to us which way we will choose. Bruce Larson illustrates this well with a story he tells. He tells about a time when he ministered in New York City. When people would come to his office seeking counsel over something they were worried about, he would take them on a little walk.

He would take them down to the RCA Building on Fifth Avenue. In 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?