

Stop Worrying

Matthew 6:25-34

Read Matthew 6 verse 19-34

A word of Thank you

Introduction

Someone has written that an average person's worry and anxiety focuses on:

- 40% of things that will never happen
- 30% of things about the past that can't be changed
- 12% of things about criticism by others, mostly untrue
- 10% about health, which gets worse with stress
- 8% about real problems that will be faced

Worry is like telling our omnipotent God the unthinkable: "I don't trust You." Yet worry is still a struggle for many who have experienced God's goodness—even mature believers.

"What worries you, masters you". - Haddon Robinson

"Worry is assuming responsibility for things that are out of our control. That's pretty much everything." — Chuck Swindoll

What are we to do when worry comes knocking on the door of our mind?

We have to decide that we are going to commit this worry to God right now and refuse to entertain it.

How you deal with your anxiety will reveal your heart.

How do you respond when you don't get what you want? Or when you get what you don't want?

Are you full of fear, anxiety, and worry? Do you have trouble sleeping? Do you become obsessed with your problem?

Does your mind go over your troubles again and again, like your tongue goes to a sore place in your mouth?

All of these responses give you a window into your heart.

Because there's trouble in this world, we have good reasons to be anxious. In the midst of trouble our hearts forget God, and we get attached to other masters—to all kinds of desires, needs, and beliefs.

We get anxious for bad reasons, and we overreact even to the good reasons we have to be anxious. Living in a world where there is trouble, with hearts that quickly stray, means we will always be tempted to lose sight of God.

When we lose sight of God, we try to control our world on our own, and become filled with worry. But don't despair: God, in his Word, gives you better and imperishable reasons for responding to the troubles of life in faith. You can learn to remember God instead of forgetting him.

God wants us to know him so intimately and trust him so completely that our desire to fix our troubles in our own way will no longer consume us.

As we grow in our love for God, we will experience the right kind of concern in the midst of our troubles.

TRANSITION

Jesus addresses this issue in **Matthew 6:19-34**. Jesus does not want us to be anxious and full of worry. He wants us to live life in a different manner. He does not want us making decisions based on a fear of the future.

He wants the direction of our lives established on eternal truths rather than temporal things of earth and the hollow promises of man.

In the first section of this passage, **Matthew 6:19-21**, Jesus centers in on the issue of what you value the most. If you treasure the things of earth, then your heart will be set on them, and the direction of your life will be to gain in the things of earth.

If you treasure the things of heaven, then your heart will be set on heavenly things, and your life will be spent in gaining reward in heaven.

Jesus uses this truth to lead into the discussion of the next section of this passage that you can not serve two masters, or more accurately, you cannot be a slave to two masters.

You will either be a slave to God and serve Him, or you will be a slave to the things of earth and serve them. That is a principle we can build upon. If God is your master, then He is the one who will take care of you.

If the things of earth are your master, then you must rely on them for your future. It is precisely at this point that we find the cause of anxiety.

Consider again what Jesus says in Verse 19 in light of this. “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.”

What feelings and emotions accompany the person who is trying to store up for themselves treasures on earth?

Worry that something will eat up what he has stored. Anxiety that what has been stored up will corrode, devalue and become worthless. Fear that someone will break in and steal what they have worked so hard to accumulate.

The cause of anxiety is fear that the treasure that has been accumulated will be lost. The master they serve, their source of security, could be destroyed or stolen.

We will not be anxious if we follow verse 20, But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal.” The treasure we accumulate in heaven is protected by our master and therefore safe. We can be at peace. That is a principle that we can build upon.

If our master is the things of this world, if we serve mammon, then there is no security and worry and anxiety will be present. If on the other hand our master is God, then we can be secure and at peace because He will provide and protect.

Jesus speaks to you and I

With Jesus’ words about worry, you feel as if he is talking to you alone.

Jesus essentially says, “*I know something about you.*” He knows that you struggle with financial fears, risk of job loss—anything related to money and the insecurities we experience when we are on the financial edge.

Picture yourself on a hillside. Jesus is talking to a huge crowd of people. They’re out in the open air, up on a hillside overlooking the lake, the Sea of Galilee.

The living God is speaking about real daily struggles, and he is speaking to you. The one who is risen from the dead, who is the same today as he was when he was sitting on the hillside, is speaking to you.

Jesus Speaks Persuasively

When Jesus speaks, he decides to use lots of words. He could say “**Don’t worry**” He knows you have reason to worry. He even knows that anxiety and worry aren’t conquered easily, so he perseveres in trying to reach your heart.

As a way to keep you engaged, he is going to ask you a number of questions along the way. “**What is important?**”

Every question and sentence you hear from Jesus will be good for hours of meditation, especially this first one: ***“Isn’t life more important than food, and the body more important***

than clothes?" Trick question. Life certainly is about food and shelter. So, no, there is nothing more important.

Jesus' question implies, "**Yes, there is something more important.**"

One of the strategies for dealing with worry is to be overtaken by something more important than the object of your worries. Jesus is showing us what is more important.

Three times in this text the Lord tells us not to worry:

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life." (v. 25)

"So do not worry ..." (v. 31)

"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow." (v. 34)

Here our Lord powerfully and memorably gives us his counsel regarding anxiety. It was needed then, and it is even more needed today. Anxiety is the universal disease of our age.

The Command Against Anxiety

Notice how Jesus introduces **Matthew 6:25-34** which we will concentrate upon in this study.

He says, "**Therefore.**" What is the "therefore" there for? In light of what Jesus has already said about making sure that the master you serve is God, you are now to obey the following command and then take security in promises following.

The command Jesus gives in verse 25 is predicated upon the principle given in the verses prior. The command is built on the principle that God is to be our master. We are to serve Him and set our hearts upon heaven rather than on the things of earth. The promises given in the passage are predicated on obedience to the commands.

The command is in **Matthew 6:25**, "do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on."

What would the Lord Jesus Christ say to or about your anxiety? In Matthew 5:25---34, Jesus instructs his disciples to trust God and not worry.

In the Greek, the command do not be anxious includes the idea of stopping what is already being done. In other words, we are to stop worrying and never start it again.

For your life makes the command all-inclusive. *Psuchē* (life) is a comprehensive term that encompasses all of a person's being-physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. Jesus is referring to life in its fullest possible sense.

Jesus taught that those who are part of the kingdom of heaven are not to worry about what they eat, drink, or wear.

To be anxious means to have a divided mind. Faith pulls you in one direction. Doubt pulls you in another. Hope drags you one way. Fear drags you another way. You wish for the best. But you expect the worst. You become mentally, emotionally, and spiritually pulled apart with excessive concern.

In fact, our English word worry is derived from a German word that means to choke or strangle. Worry is internal strangulation at the ruthless hands of uncertain circumstances.

Jesus commands his disciples to trust God and not worry. This prohibition is in a grammatical emphasis that forbids an action that is already in progress.

Literally, Jesus says, “Stop worrying.” What are you worrying about? Whatever it is, Jesus commands you to stop it. But this passage is more than a prohibition against worry.

The Reasons To Not Be Anxious

Jesus gives a clear command that we are not to have a fearful concern over the basic needs of life such as food, drink, clothing. Jesus could have simply given the command and left it there with full expectation that we should obey Him, but graciously He also explains the basis of the command. He gives us the reasons why we should obey it. The primary argument is from the lesser to the higher.

Jesus says, “Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing.” The obvious answer is, of course life is more than food and the body more than clothing.

The argument is that since God is already master over your life, don’t you think He will take care of the needs of that life which are so much more insignificant. Jesus uses two analogies to demonstrate this.

What are we to stop worrying about?

Your life, food, clothing

A. DON’T WORRY ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO EAT (6:26)

First, Jesus talks about food and anxiety. Remember that they are sitting on the side of a mountain overlooking the sea of Galilee.

Jesus is the expert of pointing out something common around Him to explain a spiritual truth, and here Jesus points out the birds that are flying around and uses them to bring home this spiritual truth.

Matthew 6:26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

Look - a command (aorist imperative). This verb (emblepo) means to look in the face, to fix the eyes upon, to stare at, to contemplate or to look at distinctly.

Jesus tells us to look at the birds and remember the sovereign, faithful, and generous ways God cares for his creation. The birds do not work the soil, plant seeds, or harvest grain. They do not have stable jobs, bank accounts, insurance policies, or 401k plans. Birds also do not have high blood pressure, panic attacks, or nervous breakdowns. The birds simply trust God to take care of their basic needs.

Birds don't sow, reap or gather and our heavenly Father feeds them - we are worth much more. If we worry constantly about having these essentials, we show that we have not yet learned the basic lesson nature teaches that God provides for His creatures' needs.

The carefree life of the birds does not sanction laziness, negligence, or irresponsibility. God feeds the birds. But he does not put food in their nests. Birds work for food. When Jesus says birds do not sow, reap, and harvest, he is not saying farming is unnecessary. The ancient Near East was an agricultural society. Their economy was based on the process of sowing and reaping. They worked hard and trusted God to send the harvest. Jesus is not condemning legitimate work. He is condemning our thinking or acting like your survival depends on your work. Your life is in the hands of God. Verse 26 says, "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" Of course you are. You are so valuable that God sent his only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for your sins. Romans 8:32 says:

"Heavenly Father" is Jesus' preferred way to talk about God, and it is how he teaches us to address God in prayer. His emphasis on our Father encourages us to listen even more attentively. How perfect for those who worry! The term Father immediately connotes care, compassion, and strength.

All that we have ultimately comes from God's hand. Whether we have much or little, we must remember that God provides for our needs.

B. DO NOT WORRY ABOUT HOW LONG YOU ARE GOING TO LIVE.

Many of us would do well to ask ourselves this question every morning. Daily we face new challenges, concerns, problems, and choices.

Will we worry, or will we pray? Will worrying be of any help whatsoever?

Because of the ill effects of worry, Jesus tells us not to worry about those needs that God promises to supply.

Worry may damage our health, cause the object of our worry to consume our thoughts, disrupt our productivity, negatively affect the way we treat others, and reduce our ability to trust in God. Worry may, in reality, take time away from our span of life rather than adding to it. It accomplishes nothing.

The second illustration has to do with life expectancy. Our culture is obsessed with trying to lengthen life. We exercise, eat carefully, supplement our diets with vitamins and minerals, get regular physical checkups, and do countless other such things in the hope of adding a few years to our lives.

Yet God has bounded the life of every person. Exercise, good eating, and other common-sense practices are beneficial when done in a reasonable way and looked at in the right perspective.

They no doubt can improve the quality and productivity of our lives, but they will not force God into extending our life's span.

You can worry yourself to death, but not to life.

Dr. Charles Mayo, of the famous Mayo Clinic, wrote, “Worry affects the circulation, the heart, the glands and the whole nervous system. I have never met a man or known a man to die of overwork, but I have known a lot who died of worry.”

The gift of life is a gift from God to be used for His purposes, for spiritual and heavenly reasons, not selfish and earthly ones. Our concern should be to obey, honor, please, and glorify Him, leaving everything else to His wisdom and care.

C. DO NOT WORRY ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO WEAR.

In **Matthew 6:28-30** Jesus brings up the matter of clothing and anxiety. Food is a basic need and so is clothing, but when a person become pre-occupied with it, they can easily center their life around it.

Jesus tells us not to have a gloomy, fearful concern about these things. When it comes to clothes, Jesus says in Matthew 6:28 *And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin,*

Consider - a command (aorist imperative). This verb is unusual and is found only here (katamanthano = learn thoroughly, to study carefully so that one learns thoroughly)

Again, Jesus is not saying that we should expect to be clothed like Solomon without working or that we will be clothed as lovely as the flowers, but He is saying that if God takes such good care of such insignificant things, then He will take care of us.

The lilies of the field were the common flowers that those hearing the sermon could see all around them. They were also aware that later in the year those same plants would dry out and then be used for tender in starting fires for the ovens used to bake bread.

If God cares for something so insignificant, then He will take care of us.

These truths apply regardless of whether you are rich or poor, we should not be pre-occupied by food or clothing.

For the poor, the temptation to worry may be over concern that they will have enough to eat and enough clothing to keep warm. Jesus says that you are worth far more than the birds of the sky or the lilies of the field and God takes care of them, He will take care of you.

For the rich the temptation to worry may not be that they will have enough food or clothing, but over what kind of food and what fashion the clothing.

Concern over what you will have to eat will lead to being unthankful for what God provides, and that is sin plain and simple. We want steak & lobster and we get macaroni and cheese so we fail to rejoice in what God has provided.

That is the sin of ungratefulness. This was one of the sins by the children of Israel in the Wilderness as expressed in their constant murmuring and complaining (Numbers 11:4,31f; 1 Corinthians 10:10). It is one of the many sins that will characterize the last days according to 2 Timothy 3:2.

This is one of the areas we seek to train our children. If we want our children to demonstrate gratitude, then it first must be in our own hearts. They learn by our example. If you want them to be thankful even when they do not get their favorite meal, you need to be thankful as well. The same is true with clothing.

Fashion is big business and it causes people to worry about what they are going to wear because they want to be thought well dressed. Women are more susceptible to it, but there are plenty of men that get caught in this too.

How many of you worried about what you were going to wear to church this morning?

Let me ask it in another way, did you wear what you wore today to impress people or God? If the former, then your interest what not the worship of God.

If the latter, then take notice, He looks at your heart, not your clothes. How you dress should reflect your heart. 1 Peter 3:3 says it this way, “And let not your adornment be merely external – braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses, but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gently and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.”

Certainly we dress in respect for God whom we worship, but more important is the heart attitude with which you come to worship Him! Neither silk suits or name brand blue jeans impress God. **He is impressed with the person who desires to give their best to Him in all things.**

The Little Faith of Worry

The underlying cause of worry is identified in Jesus' statement, "**O you of little faith**" (Matthew 6:30). With those few words He reminds us that being burdened down with care can reflect a lack of trust in Him.

Too often we don't really believe that He is present, knows what we need, and wants to shoulder the burdens of our life. On far too many occasions, we stop short of trusting Him to care for our needs—even though He promised that He would. Our eyes shift from heaven to earth and from the strength of God to our own limited resources.

If one truly trusts the heavenly Father to provide, the focus will not be storing up earthly riches, the eye will be clear and the body full of light and a desire for mammon holds no control or mastery over our heart..

Worry shows little faith. It is a trust issue. Worrying never solves anything, but wastes energy and time concerning things that are usually beyond one's control. God provides; trust God; don't waste energy worrying about how God will do His job. He cares for the least of the creatures of His creation. Can't you see how He will take care of you who are so much more special to Him? Believers shouldn't spend their energies worrying about things on earth.

Worry shows that we are mastered by our circumstances and by our own finite perspectives and understanding rather than by God's Word.

Worry is therefore not only debilitating and destructive but maligns and impugns God.

LEARN TO WORRY ABOUT THE THINGS THAT MATTER THE MOST

That leads into verses 31 & 32 in which Jesus says, [31] *Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'* [32] *For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.*

To worry about our physical welfare and our clothing is the mark of a worldly mind, whether Christian or not.

When we think like the world and crave like the world, we will worry like the world, because a mind that is not centered on God is a mind that has cause to worry.

Your anxiety level is a good indicator of how much you really trust the Lord.

When it comes to what we eat and what we wear, those are tangible items we deal with daily on a personal level. They are the real indicators of your trust in the Lord.

We know that God knows our needs. We saw that some weeks ago when were studying the section earlier in this chapter in which Jesus deals with prayer. He tells us in Matthew 6:8 that God knows our needs before we even ask in prayer. We can pray with confidence. We should have that same confidence that God will provide for us

We have all heard a hundred stories of how God has met this person's or that person's need. Most of us have seen this in our own lives as well.

We know that God will meet the needs we have. Sometimes it will be through gifts by relatives or friends or even strangers, sometimes through an opportunity to earn some extra money, sometimes by His graciousness in allowing us to stretch our funds out to incredible lengths.

The **Gentiles**, here used simply as a reference to those people that do not know God, the unbelievers, are anxious and seek after what they will eat and drink and what they will clothe themselves with.

Those who do not know God anxiously seek a way to get their needs met. This is a warning. If God is not your Father through the new birth in Christ and the adoption agency of his cross, you have a lot to worry about.

Worry is the symptom of an absentee God.

A child does not worry all day about whether his home will be there when he gets home from school or whether his parents will have a meal for him that evening. Children do not worry about such things, because they trust their parents. In the same way, trust your heavenly Father to supply what is best.

Notice the contrast in verse 32: "For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all." You do not have to worry about how your needs will be met from day to day because the Father knows you need food, clothing, and shelter.

The Cure for Anxiety

The Cure for Anxiety is simply, but logically stated in Matthew 6:33

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

If they are seeking the Father's heavenly kingdom, then they'll not worry about their earthly provision from Him. If they are seeking His righteousness, He'll take care of their needs on earth so that they can do what is righteous.

Seek is in the present imperative so what Jesus is saying is that the antidote to anxiety and worrying over our life and our needs is to make a daily choice to prioritize God. Make it the habit of your life to prioritize seeking His Kingdom and His righteousness. The concept of

“seeking first” for the things of God is a predominant biblical concept that touches one's motivation and priorities including how one spends their “leisure” time, the goals one sets in their life, and whether or not they experience spiritual growth.

Pastor Ray Pritchard writes that...

Here's a simple test to help you discover what you truly seek in life. This test is absolutely foolproof. You tell me how you spend your time and your money and I'll tell you what you are seeking. You can say anything you like, you can come to church and look very religious, but your time and your money don't lie. Time is life and money is nothing but the time it takes to make the money. Show me your calendar and your checkbook and I'll know the truth about your priorities... What we seek, we find. This is true in every area and realm of life. Unless we seek, we will not find. And what we seek, for good or for ill, we eventually find. (Matthew 6:33
The Fourth Law: What You Seek, You Find)

What would keep a person from seeking His kingdom and His righteousness above all?

Matthew 6:33 is the grand summation of this section of the SERMON ON THE MOUNT. The passage is filled with rebukes, warnings, and prohibitions. But here Jesus gives a positive command with a wonderful promise: “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” This is a word to believers. Sinners may seek the benefits God provides. But they do not seek God. Romans 3:10 says: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God.” Lost people do not seek God. God seeks them. Luke 19:10 says: “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” Only salvation through faith in Christ makes a person a God---seeker.

The command here is not to seek God. It assumes disciples of Jesus seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness. The focus of the command is to see God “first.” This word does not refer to what is first in series, order, or process. It is first in priority. Seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness is to be the most important thing in your life. To put anything ahead of God is the worst thing you can do. Seek God first in your family. Seek God first in your career. Seek God first in your possessions. Seek God first in your time. Seek God first in your money.

Psalm 37:4 says: “Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”

The word “added” means to place alongside. If you focus on your needs, you will never get your needs met. But if you focus on the kingdom of God and his righteousness, God will place what you need alongside of you.

Psalm 37:25 says: “I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken of his children begging for bread.”

Matthew 6:34 *“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

Here Jesus makes a reference to the original story of the manna, when Israel was only supposed to gather food for one day, and not store it up for the future. Worry is focused on tomorrow and God has already promised us that he will care for us tomorrow.

A fair interpretation of Jesus' words could be, "Don't worry about tomorrow because your Father will care about tomorrow." He is taking care of both the big picture and the details. This frees us to focus on the work of the kingdom today. Even in human relationships, if someone competent and reliable is going to take care of future details, you are freed from worry and able to focus on the matters that are right in front of you.

Because God cares for his people's needs, do not worry about tomorrow. In an appeal to common sense, Jesus explained that what we worry about happening tomorrow may not happen, so we will have wasted time and energy worrying.

We need to reserve that energy for today because each day has enough trouble.

We only add to today's burdens when we worry about the future.

The future is in the hands of God, and we may never make it there anyway. We need to live for God in the present and not live for ourselves fearing the future.

We should not worry about what will happen tomorrow because He has given us the conditional promise that if we focus on God's kingdom and righteousness, He will meet our daily needs.

Each day has enough worry of its own. Worry and anxiety are the interest paid on trouble before it is even due and most of which never even occurs.

So focus on today, not tomorrow!

Spurgeon wrote that..."our anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, but only empties today of its strength."

EUGENE PETERSON'S Message paraphrase of verse 34 reads: "Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when tomorrow comes." Do you believe that? Then wait to worry. Leave tomorrow in the hands of God. Trust God who has been faithful in the past to be faithful in the future. In Psalm 90:12, Moses, prays, "So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom."

GEORGE MCDONALD put it this way: "No man ever sank under the burden of the day. It is when Tomorrow's burden is added to the burden of today, that the weight is more than a man can bear."

Making reasonable provisions for tomorrow is sensible, but to be anxious for tomorrow is foolish and unfaithful. God is the God of tomorrow as well as the God of today and of eternity.

“The Lord’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness” (Lam. 3:22–23).

All the anxieties about tomorrow will not change the outcome, and it will have enough anxieties of its own. The burdens of today are enough, so let God take care of them.

God’s certain promises of care for our needs do not mean that life will be without trouble. Trouble comes, so we must trust that God will provide through his grace. We must trust him for today without worrying about tomorrow.

Planning for tomorrow is time well spent; worrying about tomorrow is time wasted. Sometimes it’s difficult to tell the difference.

Careful planning is thinking ahead about goals, steps, and schedules and trusting in God’s guidance. When done well, planning can help alleviate worry.

Worriers, by contrast, are consumed by fear and make it difficult to trust God. They let their plans interfere with their relationship with God. Don’t let worries about tomorrow affect your relationship with God today.

APPLICATION

Turn Worry Into Prayer

Few of us have endured the kind of problems encountered by the apostle Paul. Yet in spite of all the threats on his life, the beatings, and the imprisonments, he wrote to the Philippians 4:6–7

do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

There are three words used by Paul in Philippians 4:6 that describe what we are to be doing instead of worrying.

“Prayer.”

Paul began with the most common word for talking to God—prayer. It refers to prayer in general and is most likely related to the worship aspect of prayer. When we pray, we are to consciously express our awareness of God’s greatness, goodness, and presence. Such prayer lifts our spirit in adoration, devotion, and reverence.

Recognizing God as sovereign Lord, we bring our anxious concerns and worries to Him.

“Supplication.”

Next, Paul used the word supplication, or request. These are our earnest desires, our desperate cries for help. These requests can be for ourselves or for others.

When we are worried, we need to take that worry to God. Ask for His help. Earnestly petition Him. The God who told us to ask, seek, and knock will give, help us find, and answer (Matthew 7:7–8).

“Thanksgiving.”

Sometimes we become so concerned with our problems that we forget the gracious ways God has worked in the past. We fail to see that He has dealt with us according to His grace and mercy and has met so many of our needs. It helps to calm us when we remember how God has cared for us in the past.

When we pray as an alternative to worry, we are removing the burden from our shoulders and placing it on the broad shoulders of Almighty God. And when we trust Him with our cares, we can thank Him for being the kind of God who loves us, understands our problems, and has the power to answer our prayer.

A Practical Approach to Worry

The apostle Peter wrote to people undergoing intense persecution and offered this alternative to worry:

“Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:6–7).

Two steps are *involved in this process*:

A. Accept What We Cannot Change.

Instead of emotionally unraveling, or avoiding reality by denying our worry, we can humbly accept that these circumstances are part of our life. We don’t have the right to dictate the terms of our own happiness. We need to have an appropriate sense of who we are, and then be willing to accept as much or as little as God gives in the present moment.

B. Give to God What We Cannot Change.

Peter’s words also encourage us to put our helpless feelings of worry into those same all-powerful hands. He urges us to cast our cares on God, entrusting ourselves to the One who cared enough for us to send His Son to die for us.

Such counsel goes against our own inclinations to act on what we can see. It runs counter to our natural desire to rely on our own ability to think or to act through our problems. It

challenges our inclinations to self-sufficiency. It helps us to remember that we were not made for ourselves. We were made to prayerfully discover our need for one another and above all for our Father in heaven.

We alone know whether or not we have been practicing prayerful reliance on the Lord or trying to carry a heavy burden on our own. Others don't know the extent to which we are living under the weight of concerns we've been too proud or ashamed to talk about. We alone know what we need to bring to the Lord and leave with Him.

Let Worry Turn Our Attention to God

When we worry, we focus on possibilities that have not yet happened or are beyond our control. What we need to see is that this is our moment of opportunity. In the weakness of our fears, we have reason to look for the assurance of God's presence. This assurance comes when we turn our attention to God's character as revealed in His Word.

Nothing happens in this world that is beyond the knowledge and power of our God. The Scriptures declare, "The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all" (psalm 103:19). He is God Almighty. He is the sovereign Lord of all.

When we worry, we are actually acknowledging the truth that we are not adequate to meet the demands of life in our own strength. This is our moment to remind ourselves of some important truths about God.

1. He is everywhere. There is no place, no matter how alone we may feel, that God cannot be. He is everywhere! (Psalm 139:7–12; Jeremiah 23:23–24).

2. He knows everything. He knows how afraid we are, how bad we feel, and what scares us. The more worried we become, the more we act as if God were ignorant of our situation. We don't know the future, but God does; and He knows our needs (Job 7:20; Psalm 33:13–14).

3. He is all-powerful. Worriers feel that no one has the power to stop bad things from happening—not even God. But God has limitless power and His own wise reasons for what He permits (genesis 17:1; 18:14; matthew 19:26).

The cares of life that weigh on us so heavily need to be placed on the shoulders of the Lord. He is even more concerned than we are about our health, our work, our friends, our family, and our nation.

It was God who helped David kill the bear, the lion, and the Philistine giant. He protected David from the murderous rages of Saul. He kept him safe in enemy territory.

Perhaps that's the reason David could write, "Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved" (psalm 55:22).

But how do we give our burdens to God? The answer to that is not in what we do, but in what we believe.

Are we trusting in our feelings? Or do we believe, on the basis of what we see in the created world around us and on the wisdom of the Bible, that our creator and sustainer is an all-powerful, trustworthy God?

But what if our fears are rooted in past experiences or medical conditions beyond our ability to understand or control? The answer does not contradict our faith.

If, in the process of coming to terms with our fears, we sense a need for medical help or a wise counselor, this may be God's way of helping us trust Him in new and deeper ways.

David knew God's goodness and love by experience. That's why he could write that even in the darkest valleys of life, he feared no evil (psalm 23:4).

When we feel vulnerable, we become distracted by our concerns. God can sustain us during those worrisome times, not by promising that nothing bad will happen, but by reminding us that we were made to trust Him above all else.

In a broken world, we have no guarantees except that God can be trusted, and that He wants us to draw on the depths of His love and grace in every circumstance that He gives or allows. We too can use worry as an opportunity to say, "Therefore we will not fear" (psalm 46:2).

He Will Never Leave or Forsake Us. Worry is often a solitary burden. We tend to carry it alone. The more we worry, the more alone and helpless we feel. But if we are the children of God, we are never away from our Father's watchful eye and reach.

In Psalm 139, David assured us of God's presence when he said that God knew everything about him even before he was born (vv. 13–16). He could never escape God's Spirit (vv. 7–12). Morning or night, land or sea, heights or depths, God is there.

David also wrote, "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me" (psalm 27:10). Many of us feared parental abandonment as children. Sometimes those terrible feelings return to us.

Our fears close in on us from all directions. It's then that we need to remember the Father's promise that He will never leave or forsake His children.

Isaiah knew of God's ever-present care. The Lord said through him, "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God" (isaiah 41:10).

Moses knew it. "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible" (hebrews 11:27).

Joshua knew it. God said to him, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you" (joshua 1:5).

The disciples knew it. Jesus said to them just before He ascended, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (matthew 28:20).

We can know it too. When Jesus gave that promise to His disciples, He was also talking to us.

The next time worry starts to overwhelm you, turn to God and remember that (1) He's in charge, (2) He can carry your burdens, (3) He can take away your fear, (4) He can sustain you, and (5) He will never leave you.

HOWTO

First, name the pressures. You always worry about something.

What things tend to hook you? What do you tend to worry about? What “good reasons” do you have for anxiety? The very act of naming it is often very helpful. In the experience of anxiety, it seems like a million things. You’re juggling plates, round and round and round and round. But really, you’re juggling only six plates— or maybe obsessing on just one. It helps you to name the one thing or the six that keep recycling. Anxieties feel endless and infinite—but they’re finite and specific.

Second, identify how you express anxiety. Spot the signs.

How does anxiety show up in your life? For some people it’s feelings of panic clutching their throat, or just a vague unease. What a huge step forward when you stand back and say, “Aha, a red light on the dashboard!” Rather than just indulging your worries, you can name them. For some people it’s repetitive, obsessive thoughts: “Oh, now that’s the fourth time I’ve repeated that scenario in my mind.” For some people the sign is anger. They get irritated, but when they work back, they realize, “I was fearful and worried about something.” For other people, worry shows up in their bodies (e.g., a tension headache) or in the cheap remedies that sin manufactures to make us feel better (e.g., gobbling ice cream, or an overpowering desire for a stiff drink). Spot the signs. How can those things become cues to you? “I’m losing it, I’m forgetting God, my flashlight is going dim.”

Third, ask yourself, Why am I anxious?

Worry always has its inner logic. Anxious people are “you of little faith.” If I’ve forgotten God, who or what has edged Him out of my mind and started to rule in His place? Identify the hijacker. Anxious people have fallen into one of the subsets of “every form of greed.” What do I want, need, crave, expect, demand, lust after? Or, since we fear losing the things we crave getting, what do I fear either losing or never getting? Identify the specific lust of the flesh. Anxious people “eagerly seek” the gifts more than the Giver. They bank treasure in the wrong place. What is preoccupying me, so that I pursue it with all my heart? Identify the object of your affections.