

517 How Can I Overcome Worry?

Life can be filled with so many worries and pressures. Many adults find it hard to get a good night's sleep, worried about keeping appointments, growing financial problems, declining health, or a host of family difficulties. One lady recently told me, "I just can't help worrying about things. I keep wondering what's going to happen to me." This lady believed in God, but there are some promises and blessings she was overlooking in her life. This doubt was leaving her anxious and upset. She had gotten into the habit of worrying about things she could not change—and life was miserable. What could she do?

The world in which Jesus lived was filled with heartaches and anxieties, just as today's world. He could see the hurts and problems people faced everyday. He knew about poverty and disease and grief. In his day, there were no hospitals, no social security, no fire houses, and no ambulances. Life was never easy. In the most well-known sermon ever preached Jesus devoted ten verses to the problem of worrying. In just a few verses he gave such a great comfort and reassurance to His followers that it is worth our time to listen closely to His wisdom.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:25-34, "For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, *as to* what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, *as to* what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a *single* hour to his life? And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these.

"But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, *will He* not much more *clothe* you? You of little faith! Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Jesus said, "Do not be worried about your life." Older versions say, "take no thought for your life," and suggest in our thinking today that we are to live without care or caution. But that is not the point. Jesus was cautioning against the kind of anxiety that forgets God, the kind of anxiety that sees no hope for tomorrow. Faith sees the help of God in tough times; it trusts that God will take care of us. Worry, on the other hand, is full of doubt and fear. Worry is doubt at work. It fears the worst and ignores the promises and the watching care of a loving Father in heaven.

Verse 25 asks, "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" If God our Father has given us life, sure we can trust him to provide the food and clothes we need to sustain life. Anyone who has given the extravagant gift will not be stingy or careless with the smaller gifts. In Romans 8:32, Paul said, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?"

In verse 26 Jesus speaks about the birds, how God feeds them. They don't worry about piling up goods for an unforeseen future; and yet their lives continue, because God feeds them. Jesus is not

saying that the birds do not work; He is saying that they do not find their security in things stored up but in God.

Jesus asked in verse 27, "And who of you by being worried can add a *single* hour to his life?" Other versions translate this, "which can add a cubit to his stature?" (that is, "eighteen inches to his height"). Either way, worry is pointless. It doesn't work. It doesn't help matters. Anxiety rather than helping with your problem causes nervousness, sleeplessness, and irritability. An anxious person often jumps the gun and does things hastily, which may cause more problems than he desired.

In verses 28-30, Jesus pointed to the flowers of the field—wild flowers that didn't last long. He said, "And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, *will He* not much more *clothe* you? You of little faith!" God takes care of His people. If he hasn't forgotten the wildflower, which was used to help start a fire, He won't forget you. You are worth far more.

Jesus speak of the worrier as a person of "little faith," little trust in His goodness and kindness. Jesus compares the worrier to the Gentiles, who don't know what God is like. He said, "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things." You can expect a pagan or an unbeliever not to know about God, but Jesus expects more out of His followers. When one knows God, one should not have to live in worry and anxiety about the necessities of life.

Jesus' prescription for the Christian, the believer, is to "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (Matt. 6:33-34). We must learn the art of living one day at a time. If we live each day as it comes, and do each task as it arises, then we'll have the strength and the grace of God to help us through each step. Let us handle the demands of each day as it comes, not worrying about the unknown things which may never happen. Worry is more about what we don't know than the One we do know.

Worry cannot change the past, however hard we may try. Instead of rehearsing in our hearts old failures, old hurts, old sins, and old injuries, we are better off to learn from our past. That way we will not make the same mistakes in the future.

Worry about the future is useless. The biggest troubles we have to face are usually those that never come. Our imagination may dream up things that never happen. Worry is a waste of effort and time, since the future that really happens is hardly ever as bad as the future of our fears. Don't let an over-active imagination keep you from living life of joy and peace, free from upset and worry.

Isaiah said Isa. 26:3, "The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, Because he trusts in You." Peace is the opposite of worry and doubt. A person at peace is unafraid. Paul gave in Philippians 4:4-9, seven principles to help us find peace: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle *spirit* be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, 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 comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds

in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."

First, rejoice in the Lord always. When your mind is on the Lord and His love for you, you won't be caught up in worrying over the future. You'll keep your trust and focus on the good God has done for you!

Second, cultivate a forbearing spirit—one that doesn't react hastily and negatively to everything that happens. Develop a sweet spirit of reasonableness that is understanding and gives others the benefit of the doubt.

Third, remember the Lord is near or "at hand." He will see and know everything that happens to you today. You can always pray to Him. He is not distant and unconcerned but very near to you and able to help you when you need Him.

Fourth, stop worrying about anything. Get out of the habit of getting upset about every unhappy event. Sometimes just stopping and looking at how you react to problems can help.

Fifth, in every circumstance pray. Pray with an attitude of thanksgiving. Tell God what you need. Don't hold it in. Let Him know. He is ready to listen and to help answer your requests. The result is that the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus. God will place a guard all around you to keep you secure and so that you might be at peace. God's help means that you can take control of your heart and mind. You don't have to be a slave of anxiety and doubt and fear. You can be at rest with God.

Sixth, decide now where you want your thoughts to live. We decide what we think about all day long. We make the choices that affect our happiness or our misery. Your emotional life will reflect what you choose to think about. Paul said in Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things." Some folks dwell on the ugly, the depressing, the sinful, the impure, the failures, and the critical. It is no wonder their attitudes and life is sour and pessimistic.

Seventh, practice doing God's will. Paul said, "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you." When people follow what they have learned and seen in the Word of God and Christianity, the result is going to be a peaceful relationship with God.

The righteous man can go to bed at night with peace in his heart, whereas the wicked man is always worried that his sins will be found out. He is always scared and hiding something. The loving person finds peace with others, whereas the hateful man's life is filled with strife and tension, fussing and fighting.

Solomon said in Proverbs 3:1-8, "My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments; For length of days and years of life And peace they will add to you. Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man. Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body And refreshment to your bones." The more we follow the will of God, the more we will find the peace and grace God gives.

When you are at peace with yourself, at peace with others, and at peace with God, you'll find little to worry about. The best way to peace is through listening to God and following His Word. Perhaps

one reason people are so uptight and anxious is that they have never found the peace God wants to give us. Paul said in Romans 5:1, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." It is through faith in Christ and obedience to His will that we enter the peace of God. Don't let another day go by without God's peace in your life. Come to the Lord. Obey the gospel and find God's wonderful peace.

All the water in the world However hard it tried, Could never, never sink a ship Unless it got inside. All the hardships of this world, Might wear you pretty thin, But they won't hurt you, one least bit Unless you let them in.

A question I ask people I counsel from time to time is "Who rules the ranch?" That is, who is in charge? We can make up our minds what we will think about and what we will ignore. The best thing we can do with worry is to set our minds on something else. The more we fix our focus on the Lord, the less we will worry about things that do not matter or may not happen.

Peter gave some marvelous advice about all the anxieties we carry around. He said in 1 Pet. 5:7, "casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you." If you let your worries burden you down, you'll always be overloaded and stressed out. But if you can learn to take them to the Lord and cast them on him—getting rid of them, you can learn what it means to live free. Occasionally people cast their burdens and anxieties on Jesus and then take them up again as if nothing had happened. Once you have put a matter in God's hands, trust Him enough to leave those problems there.

The true way to find God's help is to draw close to Him in faith, love, and obedience. If you want God as your Father, then obey Him as you would a Father. Many people want the joy and blessing of Christianity without any responsibility to God. They are deluding themselves. Relationships are always two-way. How close are you to God? Or are you afraid of Him? Distant to Him? Have you obeyed the gospel? Believe, trust, and love Him! Repent of your sins! Confess the name of Jesus and be baptized, immersed in water for forgiveness. He'll save you and make you His child.

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