

Applying Scripture to Life

Topic 11 – Worry

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Introduction

Life is difficult. The Scriptures tell us and experience demonstrates that diverse people in diverse life situations with diverse life experiences will undergo trouble in their lives (Job 5:7; 14:1). We have all undergone trouble to some degree; and we will in the future too.

Everyone knows that life is difficult, so people are often fearful and worried. Some people have developed a lifestyle of worrying. Others live with a carefree, “don’t worry, be happy” disposition.

There are an infinite number of things that people can be worried or anxious about: their own eternal destiny, paying their bills, feeding their family, getting or keeping a job, failure, change, success, rejection, being abandoned, loneliness, the unknown, the future, retirement, death, pain, accidents, health, your child’s future, your child’s spiritual welfare, personal relationships, pleasing people, and more. The list is endless.

A 2006 study found (this is an oft cited study by Dr. Walter Calvert for the NSF but I could not find the original citation) that 92% of things people worry about never come to pass or are petty and insignificant.

- 30% of our worries are about events in the past
- 40% of the things we worry about never happen
- 12% of our worries are unfounded health concerns
- 10% of our worries are over minor and trivial issues
- Only 8% of our worries are real, legitimate issues

Fear and worry are so commonplace even among believers that it has become acceptable. Jerry Bridges lists anxiety/worry as one of the “respectable sins”, sins we tolerate. Yet God has a lot to say about fear and worry.

❖ **Do you tolerate worry?**

Fear

Remember that “phobos” is the Greek word for fear. It refers first to flight, alarm, fright, or terror. This type of fear is connected with fear of the unknown, fear of the future, and fear of authorities. It speaks of the terror which seizes one when danger appears.

“Phobos” can also carry the meaning of respect of people and their position.

“Phobos” can also be used to describe someone who fears or pleases people instead of God.

“Phobos” can also refer to reverence, respect, honor, and reverential awe. It describes the attitude we should have toward our holy God.

There is godly fear and ungodly fear. Godliness is living with pervasive thoughts of God, His will, His glory, and dependence on Him. Ungodliness is living with little or no thought of God, His will, His glory, or dependence on Him. Godly fear is a fear (reverential awe) of God and a reasonable fear of danger or difficulty. Ungodly fears are unreasonable and irrational in light of our relationship with Christ and are not rooted in an abiding trust in God.

Worry

There are both Greek and Hebrew words that are translated worry or anxious or care. The Greek word which can mean care in the sense of anxious fear, worried, or troubled with cares. They can also mean caring for, providing for, or taking responsibility for someone or something. The context determines meaning.

Positively, the words are used by Paul referring to the concern for others.

³²But I want you to be free from **concern**. One who is unmarried is **concerned** about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; ³³but one who is married is **concerned** about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, (1 Cor 7:32-33)

²⁵so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same **care** for one another. (1 Cor 12:25)

²⁸Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of **concern** for all the churches. (2 Cor 11:28)

²⁰For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be **concerned** for your welfare. (Phil 2:20)

❖ **Do you exhibit godly concern for the welfare of others?**

Negatively, the words are used to refer to anxious fear or worry about:

Life's provision of food, drink, and clothing

²²And He said to His disciples, "For this reason I say to you, do not **worry** about your life, as to what you will eat; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. (Luke 12:22)

What tomorrow may bring

³²"So do not **worry** about tomorrow; for tomorrow will **care** for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matt 6:34)

The defense of the gospel

¹¹"When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not **worry** about how or what you are to speak in your defense, or what you are to say; (Luke 12:11)

The Hebrew word means "disquieting thoughts".

¹⁹When my **anxious thoughts** multiply within me, Your consolations delight my soul. (Psa 94:19)

²³Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my **anxious thoughts**; (Psa 139:23)

Worry has been called misplaced, ungodly concern (or fear) about provision, performance, or reputation (see for example Matt 6:25-34; 10:19; Luke 10:41; 12:11; 12:22-32). Worry dwells on and is preoccupied with some fear. Worry weighs down the heart and chokes out the Word of God.

²⁵**Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down, But a good word makes it glad.** (Prov 12:25)

³⁴"Be on guard, **so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life**, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap; (Luke 21:34)

²²"And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, **this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.** (Matt 13:22 see also Mark 4:19 and Luke 8:14)

❖ **In what ways have you experienced worry choking out fruitfulness?**

Worrying is a form of practical atheism because it leaves God out of the situation or thinks He is not strong enough or loving enough to deal with it.

Worry can control a person, other responsibilities may be neglected, and it is possible to lose hope and stop functioning.

The difference between concern and worry is that godly concern is focused on God's responsibilities for today, eternal goals, and other people. God, His will, His glory, and dependence on Him is the central focus.

Worry is ungodly concern which leaves God out. The focus is on what might happen, on difficulties, temporal matters, and self over others. God is not being trusted, thoughts are focused on changing the future and self and are unproductive.

Worry is a sin

God does not mince words. He commands us: "do not worry..." (Matt 6:34) and "be anxious for nothing" (Phil 4:6). If we choose to not obey His commands, that is sin.

Not only is worry a sin, but it can, in itself, be a symptom of other unrepented sins.

¹⁸For I confess my iniquity; **I am full of anxiety because of my sin.** (Psa 38:18)

❖ **Do you view worry as a sin?**

Worry is sin because it bows us to another master

The classic passage on worrying is in Matthew 6. This specific application is to physical provision (food and covering, 1 Tim 6:8). We normally begin the section in verse 25 with the command, "**For this reason I say to you, do not be worried** about your life..." But this verse begins with, "For this reason" (NASB) or "Therefore" (ESV) so we must look to what comes previously that prompted the command to not worry.

What comes previously is that believers cannot serve two masters; for either we will hate the one and love the other, or we will be devoted to one and despise the other. Believers cannot bow before other masters. When we bow before the Lord, there is no worry. When we worry, we are bowing to another master.

²⁴“**No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.** ²⁵“**For this reason I say to you, do not be worried** about your life, ... ²⁷And who of you by being worried can add a *single* hour to his life? ²⁸And **why are you worried** about ... You of little faith! ³¹**Do not worry then**, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ ³²For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. ³⁴“**So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.** (Matt 6:24-34)

❖ **Have you bowed to another master?**

Worry is sin because it does not trust God and calls Him a liar

God is faithful, fulfilling every promise. He is steadfast, unchanging, perfectly reliable, and utterly dependable. He is loving, good, and wise. He is sovereign. All things are under His rule and control; nothing happens without His direction or permission. Nothing takes Him by surprise. The purpose of His plan is His glory (Psa 19:1; Eph 1:4-6, 11-12; Rom 9:23; Rev 4:11). In working all things for His own glory, God causes all things to work together for the sanctifying good of His children (Rom 8:28-29).

In light of these truths, we should never worry. When we worry, we are not taking God at His word, we are not trusting Him. In essence, we are calling Him a liar.

❖ **Do you live in light of the truths that God is faithful and sovereign?**

Panic Attacks

Panic attacks are sudden, overwhelming, fearful reactions. The DSM-V describes panic attacks as “An abrupt surge of intense fear or intense discomfort that reaches a peak within minutes, and during which time four (or more) of the following symptoms occur (Note: The abrupt surge can occur from a calm state or an anxious state.): palpitations, pounding heart, or accelerated heart rate; sweating; trembling or shaking; sensations of shortness of breath or smothering; feelings of choking; chest pain or discomfort; nausea or abdominal distress; feeling dizzy, unsteady, light-headed, or faint; chills or heat sensations; numbness or tingling sensations; feelings of unreality or being detached from oneself; fear of losing control or “going crazy”; or fear of dying.

The episode may have an obvious trigger, but generally the person does not know what prompted it.

The word “attack” is misleading. While it describes the way someone feels during the episode, “attack” implies that the episode is something being done to them over which you have no control.

A panic episode is a physical response to out-of-control, misplaced, ungodly concern or worry over one, multiple, many, and/or enduring triggers.

Scripture tells us that the body and mind are connected. Our thinking and emotions can have an impact on the body.

¹How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered! ²How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit! ³**When I kept silent *about my sin*, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. ⁴For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away *as with the fever heat of summer*. Selah. ⁵I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord”; And You forgave the guilt of my sin. (Psa 32:1-5)**

¹O Lord, rebuke me not in Your wrath, And chasten me not in Your burning anger. ²**For Your arrows have sunk deep into me, And Your hand has pressed down on me. ³There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your indignation; There is no health in my bones because of my sin. ⁴For my iniquities are gone over my head; As a heavy burden they weigh too much for me. ⁵My wounds grow foul *and fester Because of my folly*. . . . ¹⁸For I confess my iniquity; I am full of anxiety because of my sin. (Psa 38:1-5, 18)**

❖ Have you experienced out-of-control fear?

Addressing Worry Biblically

Regardless of the severity of the worry, the steps to address it are the same.

1. Regardless of the circumstances, you must make a decision of the will that your highest purpose is to glorify God. Your desire to glorify God must be your greatest desire, your highest purpose, more important than anything.

❖ What is your most important and over-riding purpose?

2. Regardless of the circumstances, you must strive to walk in the Spirit.

¹⁶But I say, **walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.** . . . ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Gal 5:16, 22-23)

The usual, expected position of the believer is to be filled with (or controlled by) the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18-6:9). When a believer is submitted to God and his Word, the indwelling Holy Spirit produces Christ-like heart motives, attitudes, words, reactions, and relationships. Walking in the Spirit is a moment-by-moment decision to recognize, repent, and confess sin (not grieving the Spirit – Eph 4:30); yield your will to God’s moral will as set forth in His word (not quenching the Spirit – 1 Thess 5:19-20); and allow the word to richly dwell within you (Col 3:16). You are filled with the Spirit for power to live in a way that is honoring to God.

❖ Are you consistently walking in the Spirit?

3. Regardless of the circumstances, you must be actively involved in a local body.

²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; ²⁴and let us consider how to **stimulate one another** to love and good deeds, ²⁵not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but **encouraging one another**; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. (Heb 10:23-25)

The Christian life is not meant to be lived separate from a local body of believers. Believers are united in Christ and connected to one another. The body figure illustrates the diverse unity and interdependence that is present in the church. The body is made up of unique individuals who are united by the indwelling Holy Spirit. The local body is the major way that God brings love, edification, encouragement, admonition, and comfort to believers.

❖ **Are you actively involved in your local body?**

4. Specifics of addressing worry

- a. Ask God to reveal your anxious thoughts.

²³Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; ²⁴And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way. (Psa 139:23-24)

- b. Repent of the sin of worry, renew your mind with God's Word, and put on trust and peace.

¹⁸For I confess my iniquity; I am full of anxiety because of my sin (Psa 38:18)

- c. Cultivate a deep understanding of God's attributes, like faithfulness, sovereignty, and love and steadfast love, goodness, wisdom.

- d. Spend time having God talk to you through His Word

¹⁹When my anxious thoughts multiply within me, **Your consolations delight my soul.** (Psa 94:19)

- e. Spend time talking to God in prayer.

⁶Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:6-7)

- f. Dwell on the truth of the situation (from God's perspective) and God's character.

⁸Finally, 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. (Phil 4:8)

¹⁸There is no fear in love; **but perfect love casts out fear**, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. (1 John 4:18)

- g. Recognize that God provides enabling grace.

⁸Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. ⁹And **He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.”** Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor 12:8-10)

²Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; ³seeing that **His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness**, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. ⁴For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. (2 Pet 1:2-4)

- h. Recognize that worry fails to trust God.

³⁰But 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!** (Matt 6:30)

¹Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. (John 14:1)

- i. Recognize that worry is futile.

²⁷And who of you by being worried can add a *single* hour to his life? (Matt 6:27)

³⁴“So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matt 6:34)

- j. Recognize that God cares for you and desires for you to entrust your cares to Him.

⁷casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. (1 Pet 5:7)

²²**Cast your burden upon the Lord and He will sustain you;** He will never allow the righteous to be shaken. (Psa 55:22)

- k. Recognize that Jesus is with you now.

¹⁸And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; **and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**” (Matt 28:18-20)

Apply It

Yourself: The COVID pandemic has left you anxious about your health, relationships, work, etc. What truths from today’s study can be an encouragement for you? Where do you begin to address your anxiousness, then what?

Yourself: The industry in which you work has taken a down-turn during the last quarter and the outlook is not good for the rest of the year. Your company is already lean, and you are one of the most junior people in your department. Recently, your thoughts went to the reality that you may get laid off any day now. You lay awake at night anxious about your family's future. What truths from today's study can be an encouragement for you? Where do you begin to address your anxiousness, then what?

Someone Else: Your friend at church has confided in you that she is afraid of driving. Specifically, she is afraid to turn left across oncoming traffic. She goes way out of her way to avoid left turns which has resulted in her sometimes being late for appointments and work. In thinking about bringing Biblical care to your hurting friend, what is the first thing you need to know? What is the next thing you might share with her?

Someone Else: Your friend has told you that he is worried about his performance at work. He worries to the point that his performance is affected – a self-fulfilling behavior. He is additionally worried that he may lose his job over this. In thinking about bringing Biblical care to your hurting friend, what is the first thing you need to know? What is the next thing you might share with him?

Concluding Thoughts

Worry is misplaced, ungodly concern about the things of life. It leaves God out of your life and says that He is not strong enough or loving enough to deal with it. God is not being trusted, thoughts are focused on changing the future and self and are unproductive. Worry is a sin because God commands His children to not worry. When you worry you bow to another master and do not trust God and call Him a liar. Through your relationship with Christ, the indwelling Holy Spirit, and the powerful Word of God, you can live a life exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Additional Study

Read Philippians 4:4-9 and answer the following questions.

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! ⁵Let your gentle *spirit* be known to all men. The Lord is near. ⁶Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸Finally, 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. ⁹The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. (Phil 4:4-9)

1. How often are you supposed to rejoice (verse 4)?

Read James 1:2-4 – Do you consider difficulties as joy? What is the purpose of difficulties?

2. Instead of being anxious, what are you commanded to do (verse 6)?

3. What is the result of submitting to God and praying when anxious (verse 7)?

4. What types of things are you commanded to have your mind dwell on (verse 8)?

5. What types of things did the Philippians (and you) learn, receive, hear, and see in Paul (verse 9)?

6. What will be the result of practicing those things (verse 9)?

Additional Scripture to read, meditate on, and pray through: Psalm 23; 37; 46; 112