

“Don’t Worry”

1 Peter 5:7 says, “Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you.” I like the Good News Translation of this verse: “Throw all your worries on him, because he cares for you.” One of the world’s largest and most luxurious ships once advertised, “You are miles away from worry on the world’s fastest ship.” Do you think there is any cruise ship that can keep you miles away from worrying? I don’t think so!

Anybody here who never worries? I know, some people say they don’t worry about anything. But most of us – at least sometimes - get caught up in worrying about things. *What are the things you tend to worry about?* We can worry about money...grades...being accepted...losing our job...being too short, too ugly, too fat. We can worry about health...worry about the direction our country’s going...worry about children, parents, grandchildren, etc. etc. If worrying is your thing, here’s one thing you will never have to worry about: you never have to worry that you will run out of things to worry about!

The dictionary defines worry as “a troubled state of mind; distress; uneasiness.” *Worry* and *anxiety* are kissing cousins! With worry, we tend to worry about *specific things*, whereas anxiety tends to be *more generalized or diffused*.

Perhaps it’s good to remind ourselves that not all worry is bad! Sometimes it wouldn’t hurt us to worry a little bit more about some things! For instance, mom picks up after the kids, cleans the house, works full time, and in those exhausted moments when she feels like a martyr says to her family members, “You ought to be glad *somebody* worries about this house, or else it’d look like a pig pen!” Or dad says, “*Somebody* besides me ought to worry about how to cut expenses in this household, or our bank account is going to look like the national debt!” In counseling and family systems work, sometimes in a family you have one person over-functioning and being over-responsible, often worrying themselves to death, while other family members couldn’t care less. In a situation like that I often say to the worrier, “You know, there’s only so much worry allotted to every family, and you’ve grabbed so much of it that there’s none left for anyone else!”

On the eve of the French Revolution, King Louis XVI presided at the opening of the States General. A prominent bishop delivered an address in which he described the appalling condition of the French people, but the king fell asleep. While this bishop spoke with alarm about the French crisis, King Louis XVI snored away! Every period of history has its issues – and ours certainly does. Climate change. Global terrorism. The drug epidemic. The loss of privacy with cyber-spying, etc. We need people to be worried enough about the impact of these issues to do something! May God help the church not to sleep through the revolutions swirling around us! Worrying about the *right things*, if it produces positive action, can be a lifesaver!

But there’s a fine line between worry and concern that can lead us to constructive action, and the worry that gets us nowhere. ***Worry can wear us down: mentally, emotionally, physically.*** The noted physician, Dr. Charles Mayo, once said, “Worry affects the circulation, the heart, the glands, the whole nervous system, and profoundly affects (one’s) health.” There’s a lot of truth expressed when we say, “She’s worrying herself *sick* over that!”

Worry can eat away at us spiritually. Worrying and fretting can keep God’s Word from taking root in us and transforming us into an effective Christian! In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus said, “Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the *worries of this life*, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful” (Mark 4:18-19).

Worry and anxiety are things that characterize life today! But I believe Christ, and the Christian faith, offer an alternative to a life of worry and fretting. “*Throw all your worries on him, because he cares for you*” (1 Peter 5:7). Many of us (in our heads) realize how silly it is to worry, and we know if we have faith in God and follow Jesus, we shouldn’t worry so much. *But how?* Here are some ways (keeping in mind I’m as vulnerable to worrying as you are!

First, lean to trust God. There is no shortage of self-help advice on how to reduce tension, stress, and worry. Muscle relaxing exercises, deep breathing exercises, yoga, positive thinking, and the like. These can help, but they only take us so far. Jesus knew what worry can do to us, and He offered the only real solution to the problem of worry. It’s *faith – trusting God completely!* Listen to what He said. “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens, they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you – you of little faith!” (Luke 12:22-28). (Similar words of Jesus are also found in Matthew, chapter 6).

Jesus spoke of God’s care for the flowers, the grass. God cares for the ravens. Then let these words sink in: “How much more valuable you are than birds!” (Luke 12:24). Look back over your life – hasn’t God been faithful and dependable? Can any of us really say that God has been capricious or flighty or undependable? *Trust Him* to be the same in the future!

The cure for worry is to learn to trust God. Notice I say “*learn to trust*” – because trusting in God is something we can learn, develop, grow into. ***But how?***

First of all, we have to come to know God. We can *believe in* God, but not *know* God. We can go to church but not have a deep and intimate relationship with God. It’s much harder to trust God if we don’t know Him. *It’s difficult to trust a stranger, someone you don’t know.* Like if you’re driving your car, and someone is walking by the side of the road. You never saw that person before. You would be reluctant to pick up that individual, right? But if you see *me* walking, you wouldn’t hesitate to stop and ask if I want a ride. *Wouldn’t you???*

When we have a relationship with God and know He is kind, merciful, caring, compassionate, trustworthy, we can throw our worries on Him and find relief. *Remember, it’s through Jesus*

that we can have a personal relationship with our Creator!

Here's another ingredient for overcoming worry: ***We can reduce the amount of worry when we obey God and put God first.*** A lot of the things that cause us to worry are the result of our turning away from God. Christian psychologist, Gary Collins, says, "Anxiety as fret and worry comes because of a sinful turning from God. Instead of acknowledging His sovereignty and preeminence we have shifted the burdens of life onto ourselves and assumed that we alone can handle the problems we face. When (people turn) from God and (become their own) god increased anxiety is inevitable."

Jesus said if we *seek God first* we don't have to worry about having our needs met. If we continue reading from the 12th chapter of Luke: "And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well" (Luke 12:29-31). To seek first God's "kingdom" means doing His will, allowing Him to rule in our life and decisions.

One of the biggest causes of worry is that we are too attached to material things. Jesus understood that. That's why He said, if you want freedom from worry, don't put material things ahead of God. Lee Iacocca told of climbing up the ladder in the Ford Motor Company, and how he endured a period of terrible stress and worry putting up with the adolescent antics of Henry Ford II. After he was let go and went on to Chrysler, he was asked why he didn't leave Ford. He was honest enough to admit one reason was his greed for more money. He said his dad had warned him that if he made a million dollars he would want more. Lee was making close to that amount (remember, this was years ago!). He had all anybody could ask for, yet he put up with an enormous amount of worry and stress because he was greedy for more money. Put God first, and worry will lessen. Seek His will and not our own, and a lot of our worrying will dissipate.

If we put God first, this will also mean that we will be less focused on ourselves and more focused on other people. Living for God means being less self-focused. *A lot of our worry comes from self-centeredness.* We are too worried about ourselves! I think I'm less of a worrier now than when I was younger. One reason, I think, is that my job over many years has given me a great opportunity to forget myself and be more invested in others. In 2003 I had prostate cancer surgery. This was the most serious surgery I had ever had. I waited some months before the surgery was scheduled, so I had plenty of time to worry about it. But actually, I was so busy at the church, investing myself in other peoples' lives, that I didn't do a lot of worrying. Sure, it was in the back of my mind. But I had other things to focus on rather than just me! Now you don't have to be a professional minister to live a self-forgetful life. Love God. Care about people. And your worries will be minimized!

Then too, worry can be reduced when we develop the calm inside. The Apostle Paul offered ***prayer*** as an antidote to worry. "Do not worry 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"

(Philippians 4:6-7). Don't worry about *anything*! Pray over *everything*. Be thankful. And don't hesitate to let God know what you want! If we don't have a meaningful *prayer life*, we can be pulled in by every worry that comes down the pike!

Whether we worry or not is not determined by *outward circumstances*, but rather by *our response* to what is going on. It's an *inward thing*. Paul was *in prison* when he wrote those words "Don't worry"! Jesus was a stunning example of calmness under stress. His 3 years of ministry were filled with stress and danger. He had the fate of the whole human race on His shoulders. Yet He never seemed to be flustered or worried. But remember, He regularly *drew aside to pray* and be with the Father. Spend time in the presence of God. Calm down and let God be God in your life!

Then, where possible, reduce worry by dealing with the things that trouble us. If we're worrying about getting a bad grade on a test because we haven't studied much, well, spend more time studying! If a friend hasn't been in touch for a while, and you think he or she may be upset over something you said, contact that person and ask if anything's wrong! Don't waste energy worrying if there's something we can do to rectify the situation! That's kind of a no brainer, but we can easily forget this!

It's often been said that most of the stuff we worry about never materializes anyway! But what if it does? The lump we feared might be cancer, is cancer. The friend I was afraid might be mad at me, *is* ticked off at me. The job I feared I might lose, I do lose. Well, in the first place, our worrying didn't prevent it from happening, did it? Second, even if what we worried about does happen, if we know God and trust Him, He will see us through whatever we face.

Maybe you are wondering: But aren't some of us just more of a worrier by nature? "It's in my genes" we might think. Well, I don't know that there is a "worry" gene!. Or we say, "Worrying runs in my family!" *I do think some people have been conditioned to worry and be anxious on account of their early life experiences.* Maybe as an infant or child we didn't get the emotional warmth and affirmation that all youngsters need to be psychologically healthy. Maybe a deep hurt from our past when someone left us down or abandoned us has left us chronically anxious or stressed. Maybe our parents never modeled what it is to not worry. As a result, it's very difficult for us to relax and trust **God**. So, we may have to work harder at reducing worry. We might benefit from professional counseling in order to better understand the underlying *cause* of our being such a worrier. *But all of us, with God's help, can overcome worry!*

An English novelist named Anne Douglas Sedwick was in her 70's when she wrote this in a letter to a friend: "Now, added to everything else, I cannot breathe unless I am lying down. If I sit up my ribs collapse. Yet I cannot drink liquid food unless I am sitting up. Life is a (strange) struggle. Yet life is mine and beautiful to me. There is joy in knowing I lie in the hand of God." Anne had every reason to worry, but she felt the calm and peace of God inside. When you know that you lie in the hand of God, worry doesn't have to control you.

"Throw all your worries on him...", the Bible says. Why? "*Because he cares for you.*"

