

"Worrying About Tomorrow"

Some of us have no trouble finding things to worry about. We don't have to look far! One of the sources of worry is *what's going to happen in the future...* or at least what we *think* might happen in the future, and what lies ahead. What about our jobs? Will we have enough money in retirement? Will our children or grandchildren be ok? Will our health fail? Will we wind up being alone? What about the spread of terrorism in the world? And North Korea or Iran having nuclear weapons?

The Scripture text today is these words of Jesus: "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today" (Matthew 6:34). Jesus says, "Don't worry about tomorrow!"

You would think people committed to Jesus would worry a lot less than those who have little or no religious faith. Yet, in reality, many believers are no different than those without a relationship to the Lord: they worry just as much about the future, reach into the medicine cabinet for the same sedatives, fret over the same stuff that unbelievers fret over. How come? This shouldn't be, when Jesus says, "Don't worry about tomorrow."

Let's try to be clear on a couple of things. First, Jesus is not saying that we should not *prepare* for tomorrow. To bump along day to day, and not even think about the future, is stupid! Think of the young man or woman, maybe a Jr. or Sr. in high school, just goofing off, trying to have fun, with no thoughts of continuing their education after high school, or preparing for a certain job or career. Jesus is not recommending this. Or the family that spends every paycheck on frivolous things, without laying anything aside to cover for emergencies, or college education, or retirement - this is not a very smart way to live.

Jesus planned for the future: He made advance preparations so He would have a place to observe Passover and the Last Supper with His disciples - the upper room, the donkey He apparently rented or borrowed. There were times when Jesus would say, "My hour has not yet come". This suggests that He planned in advance for the day when He would openly and publicly tell people He was the Messiah. Jesus is not saying, "Do not *plan for* tomorrow."

Then too, Jesus is not saying, "Don't *care about* what happens tomorrow." If one has a son or daughter or grandchild with physical illness or mental illness, there is nothing wrong with *being concerned* that this child be ok and taken care of in the future. If you don't have a lot of money and have a home that will need a new roof or new heating system, it's normal to be concerned that you're going to have enough money to pay for these things. There's a fine line between *caring* about the future, and on the other hand, *worrying* about the future.

Then, I think it ought to be said that worry is *not always a bad thing*. As someone has said, if I meet a bear in the woods, I ought to be worried! If I'm driving down a steep hill and my brakes give out, that's something to worry about! Worry in the face of real danger is God's natural alarm system built into us that's meant to spur us to appropriate action when we're in danger.

But Jesus still says, "Do not worry about tomorrow" (Matthew 6:34).

I suppose we all realize how unproductive, and destructive worry can be! Jesus pointed this out. "Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?" (Matthew 6:27). Let me ask you this: If we worry a lot, is that going to help us live longer?

Actually, just the opposite is true! Worry tears us down. Worry can be a killer! Studies have shown that worriers overuse our health system (they go to the doctors more). Worrying can drain us emotionally. It can be passed onto our body and cause sleeplessness, high blood pressure, heart problems. The emotional part of the brain (the amygdala) is suppressed when we worry. However, the emotion kicks in later with gastrointestinal symptoms, fatigue, or rapid heart rate.

A dad was worried about his rebellious son. The father told his son, "Every time you act like that, you give me another gray hair!" The boy replied, Wow, Dad, you must have been a rotten kid—look at Grandpa!"

Worry is not just a drain on us emotionally, and physically, but also spiritually. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus said that the cares and worries of the world are one of the things that chokes the Word of God in us and hinders us from living an effective life for the Lord. "The seed that fell among the thorns represents others who hear God's word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life, the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things, so no fruit is produced" (Mark 4:18-19 NLT). We can't be at our best loving and serving God if we constantly worry! *To sum it up: Worry does us no good!*

But we know this, don't we! We know worry is bad for us, but that doesn't always keep us from worrying! So the question is, how can we stop worrying so much?

Now unfortunately, some of us are kind of "programmed" to be worriers. Scientists are discovering that some people have certain genes that make them more vulnerable to worry and anxiety. This is the so-called "worry gene". Others of us may have been more conditioned to worry because of our early years. Perhaps we had a mom or dad, or both, who were really anxiety prone. We saw our parents worrying about money or health or work. And this atmosphere of fretting and nervousness was what was modeled to us. And maybe now *you are* the worrier, carrying on the "worry torch" in your family!

Overprotective parents tend to produce children prone to worry. On the other hand, *parents who were not there for us emotionally or physically* often produce children who feel unsafe and tend to worry excessively.

But here's the thing: Yes, we may be more pre-conditioned to be a worrier because of what happened in our growing up years or because of our genetic makeup, but we don't have to be held captive to worry all our lives! God wants us to move beyond this!

So how do we overcome worry? It may be helpful if we look at this on two levels. Level number 1 is what I call the human, or psychological level.

There are certain things we can do (certain disciplines, practices) that can reduce worry. Likewise, there are things we can avoid in order to cut down on our worrying. If we go to counselor or psychologist, he or she can give you certain relaxation techniques, certain stress relieving practices, that can help you worry less. If you go to Barnes & Noble, the self-help section, you'll find all kinds of books on how not to worry. Remember the book, *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff*. If you Google "overcoming worry" or "how to reduce worry" you can find scads of article and web sites giving advice on how to free yourself of unnecessary worry.

Here's an approach one man took. J. Arthur Rank, an English executive, decided to do all his worrying on one day each week. He chose Wednesdays. When anything happened that gave him anxiety and annoyed his ulcer, he would write it down and put it in his worry box and forget about it until next Wednesday. The interesting thing was that on the following Wednesday when he opened his worry box, he found that most of the things that had disturbed him the past six days were already settled. It would have been useless to have worried about them!

Back in 1988 Bobby McFerrin wrote the song "Don't Worry, Be Happy" That peppy little ditty sort of captures the spirit of "let's just be more positive and be happy"! *So, there are all kinds of things we can do that can help us worry less But Level 1, the human, psychological level, while it can be helpful, can only take us so far!*

There is a deeper level, that gets at the root cause of worry and offers the genuine, lasting cure. And Jesus addresses that! Level 2 is what I call the godly, spiritual remedy for worry.

First of all, Jesus said we need to get our priorities straight! Look at verse 34: "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own." This verse begins with the word "so" or "therefore". So we have to look at the preceding verses to understand why Jesus says what He says. In the preceding verses, verses 19-21 Jesus says this: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Jesus says not to stockpile earthly treasures, because these are uncertain. Instead, we are to lay up treasures in heaven.

Jesus continues, "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth" (Matthew 6:24). We can't devote ourselves to both God and material things. God and money or wealth can't both be first in our life! More from Jesus: "Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?" (verse 25). Don't worry so much about material things like food and clothing. Life is more than this "stuff".

But instead, Jesus teaches, we are to do this: "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as

well" (Matthew 6:31-33). Seek first God's kingdom and righteousness. Put God, a relationship with God, doing God's will, above our desire for material things.

Frankly, one of the prime reasons people worry too much is that we put too much stock and emphasis on money and possessions. On Black Monday, October 19, 1987, when the Dow average plunged 508 points, at the request of the Pacific Stock Exchange, a suicide watch was placed on Golden Gate bridge in San Francisco. That same week in Miami, a long time investor who lost large sums in the stock market crash, walked into a local Merrill Lynch brokerage office and requested to see his broker and office manager. He opened his briefcase, took out a handgun, and shot and killed the two men and himself. A friend commented, "His entire life was devoted to the market and it collapsed around him."

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal" (Matthew 6:19). Want to cut down on worry? One huge step is to cut off the love affair many of us Americans have with "stuff" - back off from wanting more and more and more. Get our priorities straight!

Secondly, Jesus tells us to trust God as our heavenly Father to provide for us. Look again at what Jesus tells us: "Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (verse 33). Not the "these things" are food and clothing, life's necessities, not all our wants. If we can simplify our life, and strip down more to just wanting our basic needs, we have the assurance that God will provide these necessities *if* we seek Him and His will first!

Now if we're going to really, really ***trust*** God to provide, this assumes that we ***know God*** and ***have a relationship*** with God. Just sort of "believing there is a God" won't cut it. Some years ago my car broke down on the Willow Street Pike, just south of the bridge at Engleside. I had no cell phone at that time, so I walked to a nearby home to see if I could use someone's phone. I rang the door bell and an elderly man answered door. He was very hesitant to let me in, but finally did so. I was a stranger to him. I'm sure if I were a close friend, he would have let me in without pause. You can trust a friend, someone you know well.

Jesus came into the world so we can know God as a friend, as a child trusts a loving father. And when we come to *experience* God's mercy and kindness and faithfulness this can take lot of the worry out of life. Jesus talked about how the heavenly Father provides for His children: "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? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, 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, will he not much more clothe you - you of little faith?" (verses 26-30). God provides for birds. God will provide for us!

There is a poem that goes like this: "Said the robin to the sparrow, I should really like to know,

Why these anxious human beings rush around and worry so; Said the sparrow to the robin, I think it must be They have no heavenly Father such as cares for you and me."

Want Jesus' antidote for worry? Get our priorities straight (seek Him first, above material things); know and experience God as a loving heavenly Father who provides our needs.

And one more thing: ***take things one day at a time.*** You are probably thinking, "Oh, c'mon Harry, one day at a time! That's not new; we've heard that before." No, it's not new, but it's true. Jesus says, "so do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today" (Matthew 6:34).

Jesus is being kind of funny here. He says, "You have enough to worry about today without borrowing some of tomorrow's worries on top of that!" Think about it, most of what we fret over in regards to the future never materializes in the way we feared. Or if it does, our worrying about it didn't prevent it anyway. Deuteronomy 33:5 is a great verse from the Old Testament. It says, "As your days, so shall your strength be."

We can't change the *past*, so what's the use of worry about it? We can't control the *future*, so why sweat it so much? And God promises to provide what we need *today*. Isn't that good enough?

Day at a time. Day at a time. Day at a time!

Harry L. Kaufhold, Jr.
Community United Methodist Church
June 11, 2017