

WHAT CAN I DO WITH MY WORRY?

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The Serenity Prayer is a good place to start. Many have found peace of mind in the words, “God grant me serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

The Bible gives a basis for such a prayer. But it also gives so much more. The Scriptures tell us a great deal about the heart of the One who has asked us to bring our cares to Him.

In the following pages, author Dave Egner expresses sensitivity for the anxieties that wear us down, and a real basis for believing that there is a God who wants us to find our serenity, courage, and wisdom in Him.

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“I’M WORRIED!”

Gene and Jan were worried. Rumors had been circulating for months that the plant where Gene had worked for 27 years was going to cut back 25-30 percent in production. If this was true, layoffs on all levels, including Gene’s supervisory ranking, were certain. Now the news had leaked out that the cuts would occur at the end of the month.

Gene and Jan were overwhelmed by the uncertainty—bombarded with questions about the future. “If I lose my job, will we be able to make it? How can we keep up with the house payments? What are we going to do about health insurance? What kind of job can I get at 56 years old? Will Jan have to go back to work?” Gene became increasingly

quiet and withdrawn as the 31st approached. Jan was waking up in the middle of the night, and not able to get back to sleep. They were worried.

Gene and Jan are Christians. They attend church regularly and consider themselves spiritually mature. They believe that Christians shouldn’t worry. “God will take care of you,” their pastor said. They believed that and they prayed about it. But they were still worried.

A lot of us are like Gene and Jan. We worry. So do many Americans. Worry is “the number one mental health disorder in America” (*Worry-Free Living*, Minirth, Meier, Hawkins, p.17). For some, worry is linked to specific panic-inducing situations that result in dry mouth, shortness of breath, or uncontrollable tears. For others, worry is a chronic,

vague, never-ending fear that something terrible is about to happen to wreck everything. For others, it's the fear that people are not going to like them or will disapprove of how they're dressed or the way they talk.

One woman sought counsel because she was beside herself with worry about the salvation of her grown children. She woke up at night thinking about it. She examined her heart again and again to see if she really believed God could save them. This woman was crippled with worry, and she needed to do something about it.

As followers of Christ, we certainly aren't immune to worry. We are living under the same pressures of society that everyone else is. In addition, sometimes even our spiritual convictions can be a source of worry. We want

to be the right kind of Christian parent or spouse. We want to be a good witness to our neighbor. So we worry about it.

We may even worry because we see ourselves as worriers. We know that we shouldn't worry, but we just keep worrying. We don't know what to do.

***Believing you
shouldn't worry can
be something else
to worry about.***

The purpose of this booklet is to help us see, from a biblical and practical point of view, what we can do with our worry. By understanding what worry is, why we worry, and what the Bible has to say, we can turn our worry into spiritual growth.

WHAT IS WORRY?

Before we turn to the Bible to see what we can do with our worry, it might be helpful to answer a few basic questions about worry.

What is worry?

It's a feeling of uneasiness, apprehension, or dread. These feelings are usually related to negative thoughts of something that may happen in the future. "What will I do if my husband comes in upset and angry?" "If my daughter goes to a state college, will she be okay?" "If we go ahead and get this house, will we be able to make the payments?" "Will we survive the next earthquake?"

Worriers live in the future. They spend a disproportionate amount of time speculating on what might occur, and then fearing the worst.

The primary New Testament word for worry (*merimnao*) means "to be anxious, to be distracted, to have a divided mind." It's the word Jesus used when He said, "Do not worry about your life" (Mt. 6:25). And Paul used it when he

Worriers dwell in the "what if's" of life.

wrote, "Be anxious for nothing" (Phil. 4:6). People who worry are preoccupied or distracted. No matter what else they may be doing, one part of their mind is worrying.

Who worries?

Everyone! No person lives without some worry. A person who claims he doesn't have a care in the world is in a state of denial. Every person who takes

responsibility seriously can't help but feel a certain amount of worry. It's one reason things get done. Some of the greatest world leaders were worriers: Alexander the Great, George Washington, Winston Churchill.

Interestingly, many high achievers are worriers. They are driven by their worries about what might happen if they fall short. But people who appear to be laid-back worry too. They just don't show it. Yes, everyone worries.

What do we worry about? It's sometimes said that worry superimposes the future on the present. Worry is a preoccupation with the painful consequences of what might happen. Worries generally arise out of one of three categories.

1. Threats. You don't have to live in New York or Chicago to recognize the reality of the threat of crime.

Suppose you live in a high-crime area and you have to arrive home from work after dark. You worry about being mugged, and you feel great relief when you arrive home safely and bolt the door behind you. One reason people worry is that they are physically threatened.

Other people are threatened by what others think of them. They want to look good and do well at all times. When thrust into an unfamiliar or demanding situation, they worry about doing the right thing. Many of these people avoid taking risks to escape the possibility of facing disapproval.

Still others worry about the threat of abandonment. They need continual reassurance that their spouse or friends will not leave them.

2. Choices. Many people worry when they have to make a decision. They will do anything to avoid making

a wrong choice. This is true even when they are faced with two good options. For example, John was offered two teaching positions. One had better benefits; the other gave him better courses and the opportunity to coach baseball. He was worried about making the wrong choice and ending up unhappy.

3. Past Experiences. A third cause for worry comes out of the past. A young man may have trouble with male authority figures because of his relationship to his father or a bad incident with a teacher. He worries whenever he has to discuss something with his boss. He can't stand the threat of being humiliated again.

Worry, then, is a preoccupation with bad things that may happen. It's the fear that we'll be embarrassed, suffer pain, experience loss, or be inconvenienced. This leaves

us with a choice. We can choose to avoid the source of our worry. But this only increases the stress. Or we can face it, take appropriate action, and put it behind us.

Worry shifts the burden from God's strong shoulders to our weak shoulders.

What does the Bible say about worry? The Bible teaches that there are two kinds of worry: (1) a negative, harmful, crippling worry, and (2) a positive, beneficial concern. The same Greek word (*merimnao*) is used in the New Testament for each.

Negative worry in the Bible is a troubled fretting and anxiety. Jesus mentioned this kind of worry

six times in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 6). He commanded His followers not to worry about the everyday cares of life: food, clothing, shelter, or even the future. Paul told us to “be anxious for nothing” (Phil. 4:6). And Peter instructed his readers to cast their cares on God (1 Pet. 5:7). In this booklet, when we use the word *worry*, we usually have this negative, crippling kind of worry in mind.

But not all worry is bad. The Bible also speaks of a beneficial worry. In 2 Corinthians 11:28, Paul spoke of his “deep concern for all the churches.” The word translated *concern* here is the same Greek word used for *worry* in the previous references. Paul was worried about the believers, so he wrote to them.

Paul also told the believers in Philippi of his desire to send Timothy to them because he was

concerned about (same word) their welfare (Phil. 2:20). This was a good kind of worry that spurred Paul and Timothy into loving involvement for the sake of others. We will use the word *concern* for this positive kind of worry.

When am I worried too much? We have moved from a healthy concern to an oppressive, crippling worry when we:

- Can't sleep because we can't stop thinking about what might happen.
- Feel guilty whenever we relax.
- Are afraid of something all the time.
- Feel panic in certain situations.
- Refuse to look at our feelings.
- Blame others for everything.
- Have a vague fear of disaster.

WHY DO WE WORRY?

An incident in the life of the apostle Peter will help us answer this question. Do you remember the time the disciples were out in a boat in a storm? Jesus had sent them ahead while He went to a mountain to pray (Mt. 14:22-33). A strong wind swept across the Sea of Galilee. It was so powerful that the exhausted disciples could make no headway rowing into it. Then Jesus appeared, walking to them across the water. The disciples were terrified.

After Jesus identified Himself, Peter was skeptical. “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water” (v.28). When Jesus said “Come,” by faith Peter walked out on the water toward Him.

But then he looked around him. He saw the

power of the wind and the huge waves. He thought about the danger he was in and began to question whether he could survive in a situation like that. He began to sink. He cried out to Jesus, who reached out His hand and escorted Peter back to the boat.

We’re so much like Peter. His experience illustrates why we worry.

1. We worry because we’re vulnerable. As human beings, we are susceptible to many things. Disease may strike. The economy may change. We may get stranded by an automobile breakdown or a sudden airline strike. We could get hit by a drunk driver. We’re afraid someone may say cutting words or offer harsh criticisms that will wound us deeply.

We are frail, mortal, sensitive human beings. We are vulnerable physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

We can get hurt in many ways. Like Peter, we are merely human and capable of drowning. We worry because we are vulnerable.

2. We worry because we become aware of our vulnerability. Most of the time we feel relatively safe. We can make our home secure. We can drive a reliable car and keep it in good repair. We can get regular checkups. We can buy good insurance. We can maintain peaceful relationships. We take care of ourselves physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

But then something happens that makes us painfully aware of our vulnerability. We're like Peter when he saw the wind and was afraid. It could be an engine that begins to knock. Or one of our children is ill. Or there's pressure in our chest. Or we discover a mysterious lump. Or we hear rumors of a

layoff at work. Whatever it is, it forces us to see our weakness.

3. We worry because we distrust God.

Confronted with our vulnerability, we have a choice. We can turn our safety over to God and trust Him with our apprehensions. Or we can take our well-being into our own hands. That's what Peter did on the water. Confronted by his frailty, he lost faith in Jesus. Yet he knew he couldn't save himself.

Jesus' words to Peter are revealing. "O you of little faith," He said (v.31). Peter stopped trusting Jesus. When we no longer feel that we can trust Jesus with our lives, our feelings, or our future, we worry. And that is sin because we are taking responsibilities on ourselves that belong to the Lord. We are stubbornly refusing to place ourselves in His strong hands. No wonder we worry!

WHAT CAN WE DO WITH OUR WORRY?

Linda was a worrier. She's the first to admit it. She worried about her husband's job, the neighbor's dog, the children's lunches, the car's rattles, the family's insurance, the church's nursery, the roast they were having for dinner.

Linda was particularly concerned about the house being safe at night. She made sure that every window and door had a double lock. Every night before going to bed, Linda made a couple of circuits around the house to make certain that all the doors and windows were securely fastened. She knew she worried too much.

Linda is now free from her worry. Her release came as a result of a series of

choices. First, she looked at things differently. She began to see her feelings of vulnerability as an opportunity to grow, both emotionally and spiritually. She did that in two ways. She learned from the Bible how to handle her worry. And she took some practical steps to help her break free. Oh, she still locks the house—and she should. But she is no longer crippled by feelings of helplessness.

We too can get to the place where we can make our worry work for us. To turn our worry into opportunity, we can take the following four steps:

1. Turn Our Attention To God.
2. Trust Beyond Ourselves.
3. Talk To Someone Who Cares.
4. Throw Our Cares On The Lord.



Worriers have focused their eyes on the consequences of events that have not yet happened. They feel vulnerable and expect the worst. They take responsibility for things that are out of their control. But if they will turn to God, they will find in His character the answer to their vulnerability. God's character is best seen in His Word.

God Is In Charge.

The Bible teaches that nothing happens in this world that is beyond the knowledge and control of God. "The Lord has established His throne in

TURN OUR ATTENTION TO GOD

heaven, and His kingdom rules over all" (Ps. 103:19). He is God Almighty (Ps. 66:7). He is the sovereign Lord of all.

Worriers feel that things are out of control—that something terrible is about to happen and they can't stop it. When the questions raised by those feelings create anxiety, worriers need to remember three important truths about God.

1. God is everywhere (Ps. 139:7; Jer. 23:23-24). We can't get to a place where God is not. There is no place, no matter how alone we may feel, that God cannot be. He is everywhere!

2. God knows everything (Job 7:20; Ps. 33:13). He knows how afraid we are, how bad we feel, 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. He knows how everything is going to turn out. He knows our needs.

3. God is all-powerful (Gen. 17:1; 18:14; Mt. 19:26). Worriers feel that no one has the power to stop the bad things that might happen. Not even God, they think, can keep their daughter from getting pregnant or their son out of jail. But God has limitless power. The answer to the question, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:14) is no!

William Backus, in *The Good News About Worry*, wrote about his brother-in-law, an athlete who was in the hospital recovering from an angioplasty. The procedure was successful, but he remained in danger the next 24 hours. He was worried! As he lay there, he

said, "I'm an athlete. I've always made my body do whatever I wanted and my body responded. But when I tell myself I must stop being anxious and stressing myself, I can't." The more he told himself to control his anxiety, the worse it got.

Then it was as if God spoke to him. "Who's in charge here?" "You are," he answered meekly. And as that truth and commitment came to his mind, peace flooded his heart.

God Can Carry Our Burdens. The cares of life that weigh on us so heavily can be placed on the shoulders of God. He is more concerned than we are about our health, our children and grandchildren, our loved one's salvation, world peace. He 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

country. 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" (Ps. 55:22).

***"Cast your burden
on the Lord,
and He shall
sustain you."***

Psalm 55:22

But how do we give our burdens to God? How do we place them on His shoulders and leave them there? By acting on what we know. We know that He is an all-powerful, trustworthy God. When we worry, we hold back from trusting Him. We are putting ourselves in His place. We're saying we can do better. We need to turn it over to Him.

I was walking along a

rock-strewn beach. A little boy was trying to carry a sack of rocks he had collected. He couldn't keep up with his family. Once or twice he fell. He didn't have the strength to lug that big load. Then his big brother saw him. He went back, picked him and his sack of rocks up, and carried them both. That is what God is waiting to do with us once we hold our arms out to Him. "Commit your way to the Lord," the psalmist said, "trust also in Him" (37:5).

God Can Take Away Our Fear. Worry is how we express our fear of the future. We're afraid of the consequences of what lies ahead: What questions will appear on the exam? How will I do at the dentist? Will our city be hit by a tornado?

Worry began in Eden after Adam and Eve had sinned. They hid from God because they were afraid of the consequences of their

choice to eat the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:10). “I was afraid,” Adam said.

Knowing that God is a good God—that nothing evil can originate in Him—helps drive fear away. When we can say with David, “Good and upright is the Lord” (Ps. 25:8), we find assurance. When we are worried about the future, we can follow the example of the psalmist and “taste and see that the Lord is good” (34:8).

Accepting God’s love for us also helps drive fear away. If we are to have any fear, the Bible tells us, it is to be a fear of God (Dt. 10:12,20; 13:4). Yet to fear Him is to love Him and to accept and feel secure in His wonderful love for us. How much better it is to fear the Creator than anything He has created. How much better it is to fear One who loves you to the point of giving up His Son than to be afraid of the nameless,

faceless, powerless apprehensions of the future.

*How much better
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David knew God’s goodness and love by experience. That’s why he could tell us that even when he was in the darkest valleys of life, he feared no evil (Ps. 23:4). In Psalm 31 he wrote of terrible life experiences—being forsaken by his friends (vv.11-12) and attacked by his enemies (vv.13,15). Yet

he could say, “But as for me, I trust in You, O Lord” (v.14), and “My times are in Your hand” (v.15).

When we’re afraid, we can do something about it. Time after time the Bible tells us not to be afraid. Our responsibility, accepting the goodness and love of God, is to make the same choice David did. We must say, “Therefore we will not fear” (Ps. 46:2).

God Can Sustain

Us. In a context where he had spoken of war, famine, and evil men, David said that those who trust in God “shall be satisfied” (Ps. 37:19). The basic meaning here is that they will not tremble; they will not be shaken. In the midst of the legitimate concerns of life we need not quiver with fear. Why? Because God can sustain us by His power.

When we feel vulnerable, we become distracted by the concerns that are on our

minds. We’re like a father whose 3-year-old son is in the hospital fighting a dangerous infection. He goes to work while Mom stays by the bedside. But even while he works, part of his thinking is always in that hospital room with his little boy. Every mother who has seen her son go off to war knows that feeling. So does Dad when his daughter is on her first date or his teenage son is late getting back with the car.

God can sustain us during those worrisome times. David wrote, “Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you” (Ps. 55:22). The God who cannot be moved will keep us from being shaken by the worries and cares of life.

God Will Always Be With Us. Worry is a solitary burden. We tend to carry it alone. The more we worry, the more alone and helpless we feel. But as

children of God we are never alone. We will never be abandoned. David assured us of God's presence in Psalm 139, where he said that God knew everything about him before he was even born (vv.13-16), and that he could never escape God's Spirit (vv.7-12). Morning or night, land or sea, heaven or hades, God is there.

Yes, David knew of God's ever-present care. He wrote, "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me" (Ps. 27:10). Who among us didn't fear parental abandonment as children? Sometimes those terrible feelings return to us. It is then that we must remember the promise of God that He will always be with us.

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" (41:10).

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

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

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

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

The next time you start to be overcome by worry, turn to God and remember that (1) He is 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.



RUST BEYOND OURSELVES

living by faith. You're too concerned about food and clothing and things. Put Me and My kingdom first and you'll be all right."

Remember, the Lord had just been telling His followers to make choices that would lay up treasures in heaven, not on earth (6:19-24). We can almost hear the silent objections of the crowd, "Oh, sure. If I lived like He says—always thinking about heaven—I'd starve to death. A person's got to eat, you know." That's probably the reason Jesus began His teaching with the command, "Do not worry" (v.25).

Causes Of Worry (Mt. 6:25-32). Unless His followers stopped worrying about the cares of earth, they would never be free to store up treasures in heaven. Jesus said that worrying about the essential

The major teaching on worry in the New Testament was given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 6:25-34). In that passage He gave us the antidote to worry. He was speaking to devoutly religious people (like many of us) who were looking for the Messiah but were not ready for His coming. Jesus mentioned worry 6 times in these 10 verses. What He had to say speaks to us as we cope with our fast-paced, stress-filled, materialistic society.

Jesus said, in essence, "You are filled with worry because you aren't really

needs of life is unnecessary. If God takes care of the birds of the air and the flowers of the fields, He certainly will take care of His children.

We do have a responsibility to work and provide for the needs of ourselves and our families. The apostle Paul said, "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat" (2 Th. 3:10). Jesus wasn't teaching that we are to become passive recipients. His point was that we should not fret, worry, or be anxious about our needs.

Many of us, however, are worried about much more than meeting the essential needs of life. We want to be seen at the "in" restaurants, have a car a little better than our neighbors, build a house with a little more square footage, dress in the latest fashions, and many other things that our society views as important. We've

become so accustomed to our materialism that we worry about what will happen if we don't keep up.

Jesus said that all our worrying is unnecessary. He recognized it as a real problem, but a needless one. Birds have to eat, but they don't get migraines worrying about it. Flowers "wear clothes," but they don't have to be treated for ulcers. Why? Because their heavenly Father takes care of them.

Worry's Hidden Agenda (v.30). The underlying cause of worry is identified in Jesus' words, "O you of little faith." We're burdened down with care because we do not trust God. We don't really believe that He is running our world efficiently. We've stopped trusting Him to care for our needs, even though He promised that He would. We've shifted our eyes from heaven to earth. We're

trusting in ourselves instead of trusting in God. We've taken the responsibility for the future onto our own shoulders. We feel that we can't trust God with important matters like that any longer!

*Worry is unbelief
in disguise.
It comes down
to the fact
that we're not
trusting God.*

Jesus' Antidote For Worry (vv.33-34). Jesus said that worry boils down to a matter of priorities. We worry about food and clothing, and competing, and controlling the future, instead of concentrating on what is most important. "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,"

He said, "and all these things shall be added to you" (v.33). Exercise faith. Give priority to God and you'll lay up treasures in heaven.

When we listen to Jesus, we realize that getting rid of worry is a matter of choice. When we choose to trust God rather than ourselves, our worries will subside. The answer lies with us.

Are you obsessed with worry about having enough to eat? What you'll wear? If your house is big enough? Whether you've got the right car? If your retirement is secure? A lot of Christians in our world have learned from hard experience that those things aren't nearly as important as we think, and that God keeps His Word to provide. They've learned that the things that nourish faith are the most important, because in the real tough issues of life it is faith that they need the most.



TALK TO SOMEONE WHO CARES

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 minds through Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6-7).

In Paul's letter to the Philippians, we find an important alternative to worry. Instead of giving in to our vulnerability, we can take positive action that will help us to stop worrying.

Paul gave the believers in Philippi a specific command: "Be anxious for nothing" (4:6). It was the same command Jesus gave on the Galilean hillside (Mt. 6:25). Jesus went on to explain the futility of worry, but Paul told the Philippians that instead of worrying they were to pray.

*Be anxious for nothing,
but in everything by*

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

1. Prayer. The word Paul used here is 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 acknowledge God's greatness and give Him our adoration, devotion, and respect. Recognizing God as the sovereign Lord, we are to bring our worries to Him.

2. Supplication. The

second word Paul used in describing his alternative to worry is *supplication*. This refers to the expressing of our needs to God. These are our earnest requests, our desperate cries for help. These supplications can be for ourselves or for others.

When you are worried, 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 (Mt. 7:7-8).

3. Thanksgiving. The third word describing the prayers that are to replace our worry is *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 all 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 once we trust Him with our cares, we can thank Him for being the kind of God who loves us, who is keenly interested in our problems, and who has the power to answer our prayer.

Bring your vulnerabilities to the One who has the power to do something about them. When you wake up at night worried about your sister or your job or your little boy, *pray*. Train your mind to stop and redirect all the energy from worry, which is destructive, to prayer, which is constructive. Ask God to help, to intercede, to convict, to open a door, to work the kind of miraculous change only He can work.

When you're overwhelmed by the

frightening prospects of the future, *pray*. Express your apprehensions to the Lord. Turn them over to Him. While you're waiting for a traffic light and you're worrying about paying the bills, *pray*. Ask God to provide, then move on. God hears your prayers.

In an article in *Focal Point*, a publication of Denver Seminary, Paul Borden gave a good action suggestion for worriers. He recommended making a *worry list*. When you're worried about something, write it down. Perhaps it's the health of your aging mother, or replacing the refrigerator, or changing churches. Write it down. It will help you when you see that specific worry in black and white.

Next, turn that worry list into a *prayer list*. Pray about those things you are concerned about. Pray about them specifically.

You'll be pleased at how much that will help keep those worries from crippling and controlling you.

Bring your vulnerabilities to the One who has the power to do something about them.

Then Borden suggested that you turn that prayer list into an *action list*. As God gives you insight and confidence, do something about those cares. Even if you only do a little, you'll soon find that a paralyzing anxiety is replaced by a healthy, manageable concern for the responsibilities of life.

Are you worried? Pray. If you've done that, pray again. Use the energy of worry to pray instead.



THROW OUR CARES ON THE LORD

terms of our own happiness. We must be humble enough to accept what we receive from God's mighty hand.

2. Giving Our Worry To God. We are to put our helpless feelings of worry into those same all-powerful hands. We are to cast our cares on Him. We are to entrust the future to the One who cared enough for us to send His Son to die for us. But that goes against the philosophy of our day. "You don't need anyone but yourself," we're told. "You've got to watch out for number one, because nobody else will."

Have you been dragging around a big load of worries? You know, worries that you're too proud or ashamed to talk about? Give them to God. You've dragged them around long enough!

Peter offered an alternative to worry while writing to people undergoing intense persecution: "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 Pet. 5:6-7). Two steps are involved in this process.

1. Accepting What We Can't Change.

Instead of fuming and stewing, or avoiding reality by denying our worry, we are to humbly accept that these circumstances are part of our life. We don't have the right to dictate the

A BIBLICAL CASE STUDY OF A WORRIER

Doctor Luke gave us a valuable look at how Jesus helped a worrier in his account of the Lord's visit to the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (Lk. 10:38-42). As He and His disciples traveled, they stopped for a visit at Martha's invitation. I can envision the following scene.

Caring for the needs of the group was no small task. While Martha was busy in the kitchen with all the preparations (cutting up the vegetables for the salad, getting out the good china, preparing the main dish, getting the dessert ready), Mary was sitting idly at the feet of Jesus.

Things weren't coming together for Martha. All that work—and she wanted

everything to be perfect for the Master. She felt frustrated and helpless. "Distracted with much serving," she glanced into the living room, hoping Mary would come and help. Enthralled by the words of Jesus, Mary showed no signs of moving.

Finally, Martha could stand it no longer. She marched into the living room. "Lord," she demanded, hands on her hips, "do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?" Then she gave the Lord an order: "Tell her to help me" (v.40).

Perhaps you are a Martha—or you live with one. Jesus' patient, understanding response to Martha is a wonderful model for you. Note what He did.

First, He made her aware of her worry. "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and troubled about many things"

(v.41). I believe there was real tenderness in His voice as He repeated her name. He addressed the issue with Martha. He let her know she had a problem to be dealt with. There's nothing wrong with being a good hostess. There's nothing wrong with wanting things the very best. Jesus didn't judge Martha. He drew her attention to her worry.

Second, Jesus showed her that worry is a choice. Martha had chosen to become filled with anxiety over the preparations. Her choice had led her to criticize her sister, to imply that Jesus was insensitive, and to give Him an order. Without condemning Martha, Jesus pointed out that Mary had made a choice too (v.42).

Third, Jesus told Martha that the choice was between that which is earthly and temporary and that which is heavenly and eternal. "Mary

has chosen that good part," He told Martha, "which will not be taken away from her" (v.42). The meal would be forgotten, but the words of Jesus would stay in Mary's heart and bear fruit for eternity.

What if Martha had come and joined Mary? They would never have eaten, right? Wrong! They all could have helped. Or Jesus could have spoken a gourmet 7-course meal into existence.

I believe Martha learned from Jesus. He was again at their house for dinner a year or so later. The family was giving the dinner in Jesus' honor to celebrate the raising of Lazarus (Jn. 12:1-11). We are told simply, "Martha served" (v.2). She was still the worker, but this time she was not overwhelmed by the responsibility. I believe she learned to control her tendency to worry.

JOANIE'S STORY

The following story is taken from an interview with author Joanie Yoder, which was recorded for the RBC television program Day Of Discovery.

My life was filled with anxiety and worry, but I was unaware of it. I was able to cover it up, like a lot of people do, until I had an experience that caused me to hit rock bottom. It was then that I was forced to face my anxieties, my fears, my dread, my worries. Catherine Marshall once said that the greatest discovery we can make is to realize that our own strength is not enough. I experienced that discovery. I had nothing left of my own inner resources. I didn't seem to have the strength, physically or emotionally, to go on.

I had become agoraphobic, which is a dread of open spaces, a fear of going out. For me, it was a fear of going into the supermarket. It was so intense that I would panic and go into a sweat. I was afraid that I would go totally insane in front of people—or even worse, die.

So sometimes I would interrupt my shopping, shove my cart into a corner, and run home. As soon as I was in the house, I would have this sudden relief of being safe and secure again.

I thought I was the only person who felt like this. My eating habits changed, my sleep was erratic, I was trembly and shaky, and I was generally anxious about life and all its responsibilities. I couldn't face anything. I felt I was all washed up by the time I was in my early thirties.

There were underlying

reasons for my difficulty. As I look back now, I realize that there were three reasons for my inability to manage life. One was extreme immaturity. I was underdeveloped emotionally to handle responsibility. Second, I had developed a bitterness habit. I didn't really recognize it as such, because I felt I was always justified in feeling as I did. Mine was always a just cause. And then the third reason, which I think is common to all of us, was a tendency to be self-sufficient. I tried to do everything in my own strength. And when I realized that I couldn't do it on my own, I felt that I ought to be able to.

Those three factors had a crumbling effect. It led me toward a breakdown that I needed. I think it's a breakdown we all need. It wasn't a nervous

breakdown, but a breakdown of my self-sufficiency.

From my own experience, and also in observing other people who are in this painful situation of running out of their resources, one of the characteristics is a need to control—the need to control life, circumstances, people, and unwittingly, God—because we feel afraid of what might happen. We feel that if we can control things and make things go a certain way, we will be less afraid.

My problem was that I couldn't feel in control of my self-protection—protection from the things that I was afraid of. So I began to build a cocoon around myself. That cocoon became as small as the word implies. I had a tiny space in which I felt safe and secure—the four walls of my house. In fact, I so

cocooned my life that it contained a population of one—me.

During this time, I was a Christian. And even though I strongly believed in God, He had no scope in my life. I was terribly unhappy. And even worse, I felt that I had missed the unique purpose for which God had created me.

I had to hit rock bottom. I had to come to the end of myself before I could discover the sufficiency of Christ and allow Him to change me. God began to rehabilitate me according to what Paul described in Philippians 1:6, “That He who has begun a good work in you [which starts at conversion] will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.” The process doesn’t take 6 easy lessons or 6 months, but continues until “the day of Jesus Christ.”

Early on in my progress toward wholeness, God

showed me four disciplines, which still have a profound effect in my life: read, pray, trust, and obey. Read the Bible—something to feast on. Pray—Someone to feast with. This goes beyond the boundary of a little time of prayer. It goes out into the marketplace, out into our cars, out into our circumstances. Trust—trusting God for the things we cannot control. Releasing them, not into thin air but to God. Obey—God wants us to obey Him in the things we can control.

These four disciplines are very familiar. The whole idea of dependence on God is an obvious truth scripturally but an obscure truth experientially. We must actually practice them, not just know about them, talk about them, or believe fiercely about them. The blessing of being in a weakened condition and running out of our own

resources is that it helps motivate us to actually do the things that we already believe.

As I began to incorporate these disciplines into my daily living, I found that it cultivated an intimate relationship with Christ that developed confidence in Him. He began to prove His sufficiency to me at small levels. And as He continued to come through for me, I began to trust Him more and more.

The four disciplines of reading, praying, trusting, and obeying interacted with one another. This interaction meant that there was something for me to do. But as I did, it set God free to do the things that only He could do. So I began to find less and less reason for worry. It became superfluous. I began to realize that whatever He led me to undertake, even if it were something that

stretched me, He would come through for me.

God eventually led me out of the cocoon that I had built around myself with a population of one. He did this by involving me in the leadership of a neighborhood Bible study. I believe I was able to minister to the women in the group effectively because they realized I needed Christ as much as they did. So I wasn't a threat. I was an encouragement to their growth.

God then led my husband and me overseas. One day we met a drug addict on the London subway, and we brought him home to live with us. Through him, and a few others that we brought home to live with us, I had my moment of truth. Up until then I had felt somewhat apologetic that I had to depend on God for things that many people do

with very little effort. But through my involvement with these drug-dependent people, I realized that their cure, as well as mine, was not independence. The key was in being God-dependent.

Through my experience with drug addicts, I discovered that dependence on God was something for which we were created. I also learned that what had been effective in a crisis was effective all the time. So I found that I could offer to a drug-dependent person a radical, shocking remedy. They had been taught to get rid of all the dependencies in their lives. But I was able to show them that the answer was in moving from drug-dependence to God-dependence—not replacing drugs with God, but moving to the one dependence for which we were created.

How do you think people prefer to be won

to Christ, assuming for discussion's sake that they want to be won to Christ? Would they prefer to be won through strong people who look like they don't know what it is to be weak? Or would they prefer to be won through weak people who have discovered how to be strong?

I believe that without exception they would prefer the latter. Although we may think we are doing God's service and impressing people for God by coming across as strong people, we may be depriving them of the last hope they had that God might have something for them. This is because their reaction is not, "Oh, that's for me!" Instead they say, "I could never be like that." But if they see a weak person who has learned to be strong and is still learning to take that strength from God, they will be filled with hope. They

will say, “Wow! If that works for her, maybe there’s something in it for me.”

I really identify with the average person. This is not only a fact, it is also my heart’s desire. Except for the truth that we’re all unique creations, I’m very ordinary. Without Christ I would be a dead loss. In fact, I was introduced this way in a meeting once. They said, “This is Joanie, who without Christ would be a dead loss.” At one time, that kind of introduction would have appalled me. But God has brought me to the place in my life where He’s allowed me to be a spectacle of weakness so that I can go out and share with the world and testify to others what God can do in and through human weakness. So if He can do it in and through me, why not them?

Dependence on God is the theme of my life. My

story is about a woman who had nothing in herself but found everything she needed through a life of dependence on God. It’s not a sad state of affairs to have to depend on God—it’s God’s perfect design. The creature becomes his or her very best when depending on the Creator. I used to depend on God as a last resort. Now it’s the first thing I do!

The beginning of progress in my spiritual life was a rock-bottom experience. I didn’t look good. I didn’t feel good. But it was the most spiritual moment in my life. I hope this is an encouragement to others who are at that point. So often we think that to be spiritual we must always be on top. That’s not true. To be spiritual is to come to the place where there’s nothing of us and all of God.

THE GREATEST WORRY

Nothing makes us feel more helpless than the thought of dying. The end of life confronts us with the issue of what lies beyond. The Bible says it's either heaven or hell. And hell is definitely something to worry about!

Ask most people if they're going to heaven and they'll say, "I hope so" or "Maybe, if I don't blow it." If they are honest, they will admit that the thought of going to hell terrifies them.

But God said in the Bible that we can know beyond any doubt that we are on our way to heaven. And He told us why.

First, the requirements for heaven have been met for us by Christ. He lived a perfect life and then died on the cross to pay the penalty

for our sin. Then came the miracle we needed. Jesus rose from the dead as proof that God had accepted His sacrifice for us. There is nothing we can do; it's a miracle of grace God has already done.

Second, the way to heaven is not by works but by faith. Our response to the death of Christ and God's offer of love is to believe on Jesus. We can't lose it once we have it. Salvation is a free gift of grace that cares for our spiritual vulnerability.

Once we believe in the finished work of Christ on the cross, we don't have to worry that we'll lose our chance at heaven when we sin. God has accepted us in Christ. He could not write us off without writing off His own Son, and He would never do that! Trust in Christ, and eternity will be nothing to worry about!

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