

Jesus On (10):

Worry

Introduction

I googled the word "worry" and one of the things I ran across claimed to tell you why you shouldn't worry.

Here's what it said:

There are only two things to worry about, either you will remain healthy or you will get sick.

If you remain healthy, then there is nothing to worry about.

But if you get sick there are only two things to worry about, either you will get well or you will die.

If you get well, then there is nothing to worry about.

But if you die there are only two things to worry about, either there is an afterlife or there isn't an afterlife.

If there is an afterlife, then there is nothing to worry about.

But if there isn't an afterlife you won't know, so don't worry and be happy!

And a lot of people put comfort in that! But it's really bad theology. And when it comes to worry, we need good theology.

We need to know exactly what God would say to us, and for a very simple reason: We have a lot on our minds.

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I'll bet that if I were to take a survey, and ask, "Is there anything in your life, right now, that is worrying you?", I'll bet that more than 90% would say, "Yes."

Some of us are worried about our job. We're wondering if our company is going to have to let some people go, and if we might be one of them. Or maybe they're already letting people go and you're waiting to see if you're on that list.

Or maybe we've been let go, and we don't know what we're going to do, or when we'll be able to get another job.

Others of us are worried about our family. One of our kids is heading in a direction that is keeping us up at night.

One study found that parents, on average, worry 37 hours a week about their kids. That's like a full-time job!ⁱ

Some of us have health issues on our mind - the test reports didn't come back how we hoped. The mammogram, the colonoscopy, the sonogram, the x-ray, the blood work.

Some of us came in worried about our marriage. It's struggling to survive and we don't know what to do about it.

Maybe we're worried about money. Well, no *maybe* there, right?

I read a survey of what worries people the most, and the number one answer was getting old, but two of the top five had to do with finances.ⁱⁱ

One was financial or credit card debts, and the other had to do with retirement - worrying whether there is going to be enough.

Really - if you ran out and bought a Mega Millions or Powerball ticket last week, and thought about winning, what came to mind? No more worries, right? That it would solve all of your issues.

So what would Jesus say to us about worry? And not just about some of our worries, but all of our worries? And even worrying in general?

Let's find out.

We've been in a series through the Sermon on the Mount, the most famous message Jesus ever gave. And today we come to the part where He talks about worry.

So let's look at it. Here's what He said:

"... I tell you not to worry about everyday life - whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?

"And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?

"So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

"So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today." (Matthew 6:25-34, NLT)

So that's what Jesus said.

Now let's unpack it.

I. Don't Worry

Beginning with a look at the main thing Jesus said about worry. Because there was one main thing, one big idea, that He wanted to get across.

Are you ready for it? Don't worry! Stop it!

Let me read it again:

"... I tell you not to worry about everyday life." (Matthew 6:25, NLT)

The main thing Jesus wanted to say about worry is, "Don't."

Now some of you may be thinking, "Wait a minute. What do you mean, don't? That's like saying, 'Don't breathe.'"

"You can't HELP but worry. It's natural, it's normal and besides, what other choice is there? It's not like you can help it.

"Stuff happens. And when stuff happens, it creates worry. It causes worry. It forces you to worry. You can't just say 'don't.'"

But that's exactly where Jesus wants to stage an intervention. Because between stuff happening and worry, there is a choice. A decision.

And it really is whether or not to worry about it. To hold on to it, to cling to it, to carry it with you.

It reminds me of a story that John Haggai told about a woman who came home one day and found all five of her children huddled around something which obviously interested them all greatly.

As she got closer, she saw to her horror that they were playing with five baby skunks!

At the top of her voice, she screamed the only thing she could think of, "Children, RUN!"

And they all did! Each one grabbed a skunk and ran!

That's what we can do with our worry. No matter how much it is in our best interest to leave it alone, our natural instinct is to grab it and carry it with us.

Jesus says, "Don't do that." And then He gives three reasons why you should never need to.

II. Reason #1: Worry Does Nothing

Here's the first one: Worry accomplishing absolutely nothing.

Here's how Jesus put it:

"Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?"
(Matthew 6:27, NLT)

The answer is obviously, "No."

Jesus is saying, "Why would you spend time worrying about something when worry achieves nothing?"

It's absolutely impotent. It doesn't change anything. It's absolutely, totally, completely meaningless and unproductive to whatever it is that's going on.

Worry cures nothing, adds nothing, solves nothing, finances nothing, pays nothing, gains nothing, restores nothing, protects nothing and heals nothing.

There's only one thing worry does: Make things worse.

Worrying seems like a small thing, but it's not. It exacts a huge emotional toll. It can cripple your life.

And it does it by taking whatever it is you're worrying about, and amplifying it into something larger than it really is. It adds size and power and scope and weight.

I remember reading somewhere that worry in our life acts like a fog. Did you know that a dense fog, one that can cover seven city blocks a hundred feet deep, one that is dense enough to bring traffic to a crawl, stop airplanes from landing...

... I read that it is composed of less than one glass of water, divided into 60,000 million droplets.

In the right form, a few gallons of water can cripple an entire city.

That's how a seemingly small thing like worry can impact your life. It takes the everyday events of life and turns them into something so big that it becomes emotionally crippling. It so overwhelms you that it takes you out of solution mode and into a fetal position.

But that's not all. There's also a physical toll and we now know this with certainty.

Dr. Charles Mayo, of the famous Mayo clinic in Rochester, once wrote these words:

"Worry affects the circulation, the heart, the glands and the whole nervous system. I have never met a man or known a man to die of overwork, but I have known a lot who died of worry."

In the ancient Greek language, the word "worry" meant to be pulled apart in an unhealthy way over something.

And our English word "worry" originally came from an old German word which meant to "strangle" or "choke."

Jesus said, "That kind of strangulation is not good. It's not best, and that's why God doesn't want you to go through life doing it."

III. Reason #2: God Cares

But that's not the only reason Jesus gave for not worrying. Do you remember His second?

Let me read it again:

"Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are?"

"And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing... And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?"
(Matthew 6:26, 28-30, NLT)

If there is one central truth to all of the Bible, one key to what God is trying to communicate to you on a personal level, it is this: You matter to God.

God is not some harsh, capricious, mean, unfeeling Being who is removed from your life and doesn't care about what happens to you.

Jesus taught over and over again that you matter to God.

Which means that what you're going through - right now - matters to Him. He genuinely, passionately, lovingly, CARES. Whatever it is you may have been worrying about, God knows about.

Jesus says, "Look around. Look at all of creation. Look at birds, look at flowers - they are cared for.

"And you don't think God will care for you, the crown of all creation, His sons and daughters, the ones He created to be in a love-relationship with for all of eternity?"

"You think He's going to abandon you at your time of need? That His love, His care, His concern, will somehow vanish when circumstances have you crying out to Him like never before?"

When my son Jonathan was three years old, he went through a little stage where he has this fear that when we were in a mall or out at a restaurant, we might forget about him and accidentally leave him behind.

He had a little problem with his "L's," so when we were in a store, he'd reach up and tug on my hand and say, "Daddy, now don't yeave me."

And I'd say, "Buddy, you know I would never leave you."

And he'd say, "Why?"

And you know those are the big teaching moments that you have as a father. And in my fatherly tenderness and mercy, I would say,

"Well, because I would go to jail. I would gladly leave you if I could, but I can't. You're like an appendage that can't be surgically removed. So I'm stuck."

Actually, what I would say was:

"I would never leave you because you are my best little buddy and I love you. And Daddys don't leave their little boys."

Neither does your heavenly Daddy, which is why Jesus ties all of this back to faith.

Remember that last line we just read? Let me read it again. When it comes to worry Jesus said,

"Why do you have so little faith?" (Matthew 6:30, NLT)

And then He added this:

"So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers..." (Matthew 6:31-21, NLT)

So let's call worry what it is: Functional atheism.

You may believe in God - philosophically, intellectually - but giving in to worry shows that you don't live like it. You don't believe in God functionally.

And it's a slap in the face of the love and care and concern that God has for you.

It's like you're saying to God: "You aren't concerned. You don't love me. You don't care about me."

How would you like to hear all that from one of your kids? And even if they did say that to you in a moment of immaturity or anger, you know it wouldn't be true.

IV. Reason #3: Trust

Which brings up the third reason not to worry: God is trustworthy.

This is how Jesus closed out His teaching on worry:

"Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need." (Matthew 6:33, NLT)

Now there's several things in those final words that are worth noting:

First, we are to seek the Kingdom of God above all else.

Translation: put God first in everything. Put His agenda first, not yours.

Second, we are to live righteously.

Which simply means to live rightly, living in a way that tries to please God. Honor God. Reflect God.

Which means that there is nothing about trusting God to meet your needs that is passive on your end.

You are to be actively putting God first and following His principles and living how He wants you to live.

You should be actively trying to do everything that is right; everything that needs to be done.

Martin Luther once said that the way He did life was simple. He said, "I work as if it all depends on me, and I pray as if it all depends on God."

And then, and only then, comes the third thing: We will be given all that we need.

And if you know you'll be given what you need, what is there to worry about?

Now, having said that, let's go a little deeper into this trust business, and God giving us what we need.

Did you notice that nowhere does Jesus say that whatever it is that may have been causing you to worry will be taken away?

It's not that He can't, and it's not that He won't, it's just that this is not really the heart of what He is talking about. Much less what faith is concerned with.

Do you know what faith is - real faith?

If you have the kind of faith that Jesus is talking about here, it's not about trusting God when things are going well, when everything seems clear, when you have all that you need.

Faith is trusting God when things *aren't* going well, when everything isn't clear, and when you *don't* have all that you need.

It's saying, "God, I don't understand all that's going on. I'm scared. I'm confused. I don't know why things are like this right now, but I trust in the fact that you do. And I'm going to cling to that.

"So instead of worry, I'm going to pray to you. I'm going to give it all to you, trust it all to you.

"I'm in your hands. And there's no other place I'd rather be. And whatever happens, happens."

And you can pray that because what's the worst that could happen to you?

That you die?

What's so bad about that?

You're going to die someday anyway.

I remember going to Disney World with my youngest daughter Rachel when she was around eight years old.

And she rode her very first roller coaster. She was scared, nervous, but she was a trooper.

And as the coaster was making that slow climb up to the top - where the plunge happens that's designed to make you change your underwear - she started saying over and over,

"If I die, I go to heaven. If I die, I go to heaven. If I die, I go to heaven..."

She was right!

The worst thing in the world that could happen wasn't anything to worry about if you are a Christ follower.

Which is why all through the Bible, we're told to trust God with whatever is going on, and not to worry.

And you may say, "Well it's not me I'm worried about, it's the family that I'll leave behind!"

I was thinking this past week that if I were to die, I would be with God... and God would be with Susan. So why worry? We would both have God.

Here's a taste of what Scripture says:

"Give your worries to the Lord, and he will take care of you." (Psalm 55:22, NCV)

And then this one:

"Let him (God) have all your worries and cares, for he is always thinking about you and watching everything that concerns you." (I Peter 5:7, LB)

So this isn't about God eliminating everything from your life that could cause worry.

It means that no matter what happens in your life, you don't HAVE to worry.

Because God is in control.

You've got the ultimate insurance policy.

Now having an insurance policy doesn't prevent things from happening, does it? But it does give you a secure base from which you can FACE what happens.ⁱⁱⁱ

It means you can let go of the worry, because your entire life has been turned over to God, and you are placing your trust in Him.

You're letting His leadership, the decisions that flow from following His prescription for life, be your source of confidence.

So no matter what happens, there's a radical trust in God.

So let me read that last verse again:

"Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need." (Matthew 6:33, NLT)

Everything you need.

Not everything you want.

Not everything you desire.

Not everything you hope for.

Everything you need.

You won't be cured of every disease. You won't be kept from every accident. You won't be saved from dying - everyone will die eventually.

And those you love are in the same situation.

But no matter what you go through, not only do you not need to worry, but you will be given everything you need. The strength you need. The survival you need. The emotional stamina you need.

This is how Eugene Peterson paraphrased Jesus' words, and sadly Eugene passed away earlier this week:

"Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes." (Matthew 6:33-34, Msg)

The family surrounding Eugene in hospice said they had never seen anyone face death with such joy as he did. And do you know what his last words were right before he died? "Let's go!"

It also reminded me of another person - someone a lot of you know is a heroine of mine - named Corrie ten Boom.

After being a prisoner in Ravensbruck, the infamous concentration camp of Nazi Germany, Corrie traveled throughout the world, telling her story of suffering in the context of a faith in God.

For 33 years following Ravensbruck, she never had a permanent home. When she was 85 years old, some friends provided her with a home in California. It was a luxury she never dreamed she would have.

One day, as a friend was leaving her home, he said, "Corrie, hasn't God been good to give you this beautiful place?"

Do you know what she said? She didn't even pause.

"God was good when I was in Ravensbruck, too."^{iv}

That was her first thought. "God was so good to me in Ravensbruck."

One of the most difficult tasks I was ever called upon to perform was as a pastor of a church outside of Louisville, Kentucky, during my seminary years.

A friend, and member of the church, called and told me that the wife of his next door neighbor had just committed suicide. She was the mother of five girls. Her youngest daughter had found her.

They had no church; they had no pastor. He asked them if it would be all right if he called someone from his church to come.

They said, "Yes," so he called me.

When I arrived, I saw huddled in a corner of the house the five daughters with their father.

I thought to myself, "What am I doing here? What could I possibly say, what could I ever do, that would help at this moment?"

I went over to the family, introduced myself, and said the only words I could think of: "I just want you to know that I'm sorry. I'm so very, very sorry."

They were crying and I was crying. The girl who had found her mother looked up at me and said, "Would you pray for us?"

So I prayed. I don't remember a single word of that prayer.

But when I finished, I do remember what that little girl said. The little girl looked up at me and simply said, "God's here, isn't He?"

And I said, "Yes, He is."

She said, "I thought so. I could feel Him hugging me when you prayed. It's going to be all right, isn't it?"

And I said, "Yes, honey, it's going to be hard, but it's going to be all right."

And that was true. God was already meeting needs.

Conclusion

What are you worrying about right now?

And maybe, more importantly, why?

Isn't it time to stop? To turn it over to God?

There's an old story about a man who was tired and unable to sleep. He was worried about something, and it was keeping him up at night.

Suddenly, he saw someone enter into his bedroom and instinctively He knew who it was. It was God.

God turned to him and asked why he couldn't sleep. He confessed that he was worried over what was going on in his life.

And he told God about it.

Then God said, "Go to sleep, my son, and I'll sit up the rest of the night for you."

And He'll sit up the rest of the night for you, too.

Whatever it is you've been worrying about, don't.

You don't have to.

It doesn't solve anything.

It even makes things worse.

God is foolish over you and cares about you and is intimately aware of everything that is going on in your life.

Don't be a functional atheist. Have faith. Have trust.

Even in the midst of what you're going through. He'll give you what you need to get through it, no matter what happens.

It will be alright. Which is why it's been said that it is impossible to pray and worry at the same time.

So why don't we try that, right now?

Let's take some time to just pray about what is worrying you.

Let's give it to God - together, you and me.

So if you'll bow your heads with me, let's end in prayer together.

And I'll just lead you.

Guided prayer:

*Tell God (quietly/silently) what is worrying you.

*Tell Him you know He cares.

*Tell Him you trust Him with it, and that you are going to place it in His hands.

*Ask Him to give you whatever you need.

*Now thank Him that you don't have to worry about it anymore.

(Close in prayer)

ⁱ <https://nypost.com/2018/09/10/parents-spend-an-insane-amount-of-their-lives-worrying-about-their-kids/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.indy100.com/article/the-20-things-people-worry-about-the-most--xJVjF0DSox>

ⁱⁱⁱ Adapted from Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, p. 181.

^{iv} As cited by Billy Graham, *Hope for the Troubled Heart* (Dallas: Word, 1991), pp. 44-45.