

Lesson 6

WORRY

In Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus tells His disciples they are not to be characterized by worry and anxiety. Verse 25 says, “do not worry about your life” (NKJV). The New American Standard Version renders the phrase, “do not be anxious for your life,” while the King James Version says, “take no thought for your life.”

Nothing is wrong with thinking about the people and the things that are important in our life. Concern and preparation helps us avoid making mistakes, harming ourselves and our loved ones. Nothing is wrong with planning ahead. The sluggard is told to go to the ant and learn how to store up for the winter months (Prov. 6:6-8).

Jesus is not telling us it is wrong to think about our responsibilities, make plans for our future, or be concerned about our loved ones. Such would be reckless and irresponsible. Jesus is warning us against allowing these concerns to turn into anxiety and constant worrying.

The words “worry” and “anxious” are translated from the Greek word *merimnao*, which Strong defines as “to be anxious about.” Thayer adds it is “to be troubled with cares,” while Vine says it means “to have a distracting care.” Webster’s Dictionary defines the English word “worry” as “to feel distressed in the mind, be anxious, troubled, or uneasy.”

Some Christians go beyond thought and care to distress and despair. They stew and fret over things out of their control, thus losing their appetite and sleep. They do it so much it becomes a part of who they are. They are characterized as “worry warts” or “fretful mothers.” This is not the way God intends for His children to live. In Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus offers several good reasons for Christians not to be overcome with anxiety and distress. The Bible teaches there are things we can do to overcome the tendency to trouble ourselves with worries and cares.

What is wrong with worrying?

1. **Worrying is a sin** (Matt. 6:25, 31, 34). Three different times in this passage Jesus specifically commands us not to worry. When we worry, we disregard a direct command of the Lord, which is a sin. This command is as important and binding

When we give ourselves to **worrying**, we disregard a **direct command** of the Lord, which is a sin.

A **tendency to worry** is an indication we do not have the **basic elements** necessary to be **pleasing** to God.

as the prohibitions against lying, stealing, murder, adultery, blasphemy, etc.

2. **Worrying shows a lack of faith in God** (vv. 26, 28-30). Jesus says worry is the result of a lack of faith (v. 30). We must have faith in order to be pleasing unto God (Heb. 11:6). Worrying indicates we do not have the essential elements to be pleasing to God. We must trust Him to keep His promises. If our Heavenly Father feeds the birds and clothes the grass, can we not trust Him to look out for our well-being as His children (Matt. 7:9-11)? When we give ourselves to worry, we are telling God we do not think He can keep His promise and take care of us.
3. **Worrying accomplishes nothing** (v. 27). Worrying is like sitting in a rocking chair: it gives you something to do, but it does not take you anywhere. No one can add anything to his life by worrying about his life. Worry cannot add inches to our height or years to our life. In fact, just the opposite is true. Excessive worrying can impair our health and shorten our life.
4. **Worrying is what the Gentiles do** (vv. 31-32). When we worry, we are living more like a heathen than like a child of God. Those without the Lord have a reason to worry because they do not know or believe their Creator is watching out for them. They think they are on their own. We know we are not on our own. We have a Heavenly Father who watches out for us and takes care of us.
5. **Worrying distorts our priorities** (v. 33). Many things are important in our lives: the welfare of our family and loved ones, our health, the future of our country, etc. However, for the child of God, nothing should be more important than the kingdom of God. The time and energy we waste worrying about the things of life should be spent upon pursuing things related to the kingdom of God.
6. **Worry is a thief** (v. 34). Our English word “worry” is derived from an Old English word meaning “to strangle.” Worrying does just that—it strangles the life out of us. Worry immobilizes us by unsettling our minds with real or imagined problems. It distracts us, robbing us of our time, mental energy, sleep, peace, and joy. However, this thief can only steal from us if we cooperate.

Worry robs us of our rightful service to the Lord. Martha’s troubles and worries caused her to be distracted from what was really important (Luke 10:38-42). It robbed her of peace of mind and an opportunity to learn with her sister at the feet of Jesus. The Lord said the cares of the world choke

the word out of man's heart, thus rendering it unfruitful (Matt. 13:22).

How to Overcome Worry

Christians who have a problem with worrying should not allow it to remain a part of their character. We cannot excuse sin in our life by saying, "This is just the way I am." We can and must change, but it will require some effort. What can we do to overcome the sin of worry?

1. **Increase our faith.** If worry is an indication of a lack of faith on our part, then we must increase our faith. This is done by spending time reading and meditating upon God's word (Rom. 10:17).

Worry is also a lack of trust. What do we have to worry about if we believe God is both willing and able to care for us and provide for us? We need to develop a real trust in the God Who has proven His faithfulness, and take comfort in His promises (Rom. 8:32; 1 Cor. 10:13; Phil. 4:19).

2. **Prayer.** King Hezekiah did the right thing when a powerful enemy threatened his nation. He took the threatening letter Sennacherib had written and "spread it before the Lord" in prayer (2 Kings 19:14). The Lord granted Hezekiah and Jerusalem deliverance, not because of the king's military power, but because Hezekiah trusted in God to take care of the situation (v. 20).

The apostle Paul promises the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard our hearts and minds, causing us to be at rest and free from worry—but only after we take our worries to God in prayer (Phil. 4:6-7). The apostle Peter encourages us to cast all cares upon God, "for He cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:7)

3. **Lean on a friend.** The Bible tells us of the value of friends, and perhaps there is no time when a friend is needed more than when we are struggling with troubles and cares. Some people choose to handle their problems alone, but the Bible teaches we are to seek the help of friends during times of sorrow and suffering (Prov. 17:17; Eccl. 4:9-11).

The emotional weight of our problems is sometimes a burden we cannot bear alone. Our brethren are there to help us bear these burdens (Gal. 6:2). We can overcome worry by confiding in our brethren and asking for their prayers (James 5:16), knowing the "effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."

Worry is **unfitting** for a child of God. It is **unnecessary**, **unproductive**, and **unworthy** of our time.

4. Learn to live one day at a time. God taught the children of Israel to live one day at a time when they collected the manna in the wilderness. Jesus taught us to have this same daily dependence upon God (Matt. 6:11, 34). Will Rogers once said, "Worrying is like paying on a debt that may never come due." Today is not an opportunity to recall yesterday's failures or to worry about tomorrow's problems. It is a day to rejoice and be glad (Ps. 118:24).

5. Do the right thing. Only those who have done evil and have told lies have to worry about what they have said and done. If we do what is right and do it to the best of our ability, we have no reason to worry (Acts 24:16).

Worry is sometimes the result of a lack of preparation on our part. If we will live responsible lives and fulfill our obligations to the best of our ability, we will not have a reason to worry.

6. Learn to be content. Paul said he had learned to be content (Phil. 4:11-13). Some people worry about the things that can possibly happen to them: losing their job, losing their health, losing their loved ones, etc. We need to learn to enjoy what we have while we have it and learn to make the best of any situation in which we find ourselves. When things seem the worst, we need to remember the Lord can help us through it ("I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"). We can always strive to improve our situation, but this is never accomplished by worry. Some things in life can be changed for the better, but some things are out of our control. As one has said, "What cannot be cured has got to be endured."

7. Remember we cannot control other people. Some people worry about other people—what they will do or what will happen to them. There are some areas in our life in which we are responsible for others. Parents are responsible for their children. Employers are responsible for the livelihood of their employees. Governing officials are responsible to their constituents. All of us are responsible for the example we leave before others.

However, we also know we cannot control other people. We can only control ourselves (Rom. 12:18). We must learn to let people make their own decisions and, sometimes, suffer the consequences of those decisions. This can be especially difficult for parents, and thus many parents worry about their children. We love our children, but we should not give ourselves over to worrying about situations and people that are out of our control.

Conclusion

It seems few people are immune to the temptation to worry about things. Jesus tells us such worrying is unfitting for a child of God because it is what unbelievers do. As such, it is unnecessary, unproductive, and unworthy of our time.

Worst of all, the kind of worrying we have been discussing in this lesson is a sin. If you look within your heart and see you have a problem with worry, you need to get it out. It does not belong in the heart of a child of God. Work hard on overcoming it. The Lord will help you.

Questions

1. What is the difference between concern and excessive worrying? _____

2. Why is excessive worrying a sin? (Matt. 6:25, 31, 34) _____

3. How does worrying indicate a lack of faith in God? _____

4. Which is more important to God: birds and grass or His children? _____

5. Why would the Gentiles worry about obtaining their necessities? (Matt. 6:31-32) _____

6. What happened to the seed falling upon the thorny ground? (Matt. 13:22) _____

7. How can we increase our faith and trust in God? _____

8. When will the peace of God guard our hearts and lives? (Phil. 4:6-7) _____

9. What does it mean to cast all our care upon God? (1 Pet. 5:7) _____

10. What did Jonathan do for David? (1 Sam. 23:16) _____

11. How can learning to live one day at a time help us overcome worry and anxiety? _____

12. How can maintaining a clear conscience help us overcome worry and anxiety? _____

13. What had Paul learned to do? (Phil. 4:11) _____

Fill in the Blank

1. "But seek _____ the _____ and His _____, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt. 6:33).
2. "He who did not _____ His own Son, but delivered Him up for us _____, how shall He not with Him also freely _____ us _____ things?" (Rom. 8:32).
3. "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is _____, who will not allow you to be tempted _____ what you are able, but with the temptation will also _____, that you may be able to _____ it" (1 Cor. 10:13).
4. "And my God shall supply _____ your _____ according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19).
5. "But without _____ it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must _____ that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who _____ seek Him" (Heb. 11:6).
6. "Casting _____ your _____, for He cares for _____" (1 Pet. 5:7).
7. "This being so, I myself always strive to have a _____ toward God and men" (Acts 24:16).
8. "If it is _____, as much as depends on _____, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18).