

Dealing With Worry Biblically

We're looking at various common issues and emotions that people struggle with from a biblical point of view. Last week we looked at anger, and we'll be looking at depression, pressure, hurt, depression. Today we'll look at worry from a Biblical viewpoint. Once again, so much of this material comes from tracts produced by Bob Jones University Press.

As we said last week, there is usually so much nonsense that comes from the world when it comes to dealing with issues like this. Consider how the world encourages you to deal with worry: Take a hot bath, and let the steam relax your mind; take a holiday to forget your problems; think positively, like that wonderfully educational song, Don't Worry, Be Happy! Or how about getting some worry beads, and just running them through your fingers, that'll solve the problem. Maybe the solution is to put on calming music, or even resort to drugs and alcohol, to 'calm the nerves'. All of these things deal with the symptoms, but not the cause of worry. If we want to deal with worry biblically, then the key is not to seek to calm our worry, or re-direct our worry, but to think altogether differently.

Let's use an example. Take Susan. Susan is a professional worrier. She worries about her husband's job security. She worries about the bills that need to be paid. But her worrying goes further. Every new warning about a possible condition or medical disease sends her into a worry that she may be eating the wrong thing or taking the wrong thing. Her worrying paralyses her, sometimes she won't participate in activities with others because she is worried that she'll mess up, or that she'll embarrass her family or herself. Her worrying smothers her children and makes them claustrophobic. Susan even worries about her worrying! She knows she worries too much, and that in itself worries her! She worries that her worrying will cause her an ulcer.

If you can identify with Susan or even parts of Susan, you are like most people that struggle with worry. As we saw last week, the key is always to see God's perspective on the issue. With anger, we saw that if something does not make God angry, then we must learn to think correctly until we behave correctly. Remember Rom 12:2. So our transformation will only come when we begin to see life as He does, and that will only happen when we memorise and meditate on God's Word.

So what does the Bible say about worry and dealing with it? What's wrong with worry anyway? Well, interestingly, the Bible calls worry something interesting in the Bible. The Greek word literally means 'to divide'. The Bible is saying that sinful worry, divides our heart. It splits our allegiances and our dependences. Sinful worry is wrong because it makes us the double-minded man of James 1:8. A worrier is serving two masters. How?

Well consider:

- 1) Sinful worry causes you to depend on the wrong person.

When you worry, if you turn to the same friend or counselor to once again tell your story, you reveal that deep down your friend or counselor can help, even if it's just by listening. Nothing wrong with godly counsel, nothing wrong with a good friend to open your heart to, but if your first refuge is to tell someone all that you feel, you are revealing that that person is who you are depending on.

Likewise, if when you worry, you bottle it all up and run the worrying thoughts through your mind over and over, you reveal that you think you can solve the problem by turning it over and over in your mind, or that somewhere inside you is the solution. See, sinful worry causes you to depend on the wrong person, either others, or yourself.

Thus, sinful worry divides you in the sense that it divides your dependence from God to yourself or others.

2) Sinful worry causes you to have the wrong priorities

Worry is one of the best indicators of what is important to you. Whatever is most important to you, is what you think about the most. If financial security is the priority in your life, then job, salary, taxes, bills, debts will be the thing you worry about most. If personal appearance is most important to you then weight, fashion, hair, skin, and other people's reaction to you will be what you think about most. Most often, there is an underlying problem here, a problem of vanity, or covetousness, or pride. It has to do with idolatry, whatever you are trusting in, or relying on to make life work for you is your god, and more than likely it is the thing you will think about and worry about most. Wrong priorities cause sinful worry. It is a classic case of a *divided* heart, one that has the wrong priorities.

3) Sinful worry results from following wrong methods.

Often our worries may be legitimate, but they are the result of following the wrong master. For instance, we may worry over a wayward, rebellious child, but often it is the result of ignoring the Bible's many instructions on child training and seeking to raise them in our own wisdom, by what we think is best or by what we learnt from our parents. Thus we worry over their self-destructive behavior, but much of it is the fruit of faulty methods that we used. Or else we may be worrying over the financial mess we may be in, but a lot of it may be the result of blatantly ignoring the Bible's instructions regarding finance, choosing pragmatism over faith. In these cases, we worry, but we caused the problem. The solution then is to begin to address the problem from God's point of view, not continue to try and work it out our own way. Worry is truly a divided heart.

Worry truly divides us because whatever concern you might have, it will either drive you *to* God in prayer, or it will drive you *from* God to worry. You have to make the choice.

So how do I deal with worry?

First, make a list of the things you fret and worry about. List as many as you can. Try to list all the things that cause you to worry often. Remember that those things reveal your priorities. You think about them so often because they are important to you. Now, look at the list and ask, "which things here are priorities to God?" Which of the things you worry about are also important to God? The ones which God is also concerned about will have Scriptural instruction on them. For instance, concern over a child. God has volumes of instruction regarding child training in the Word.

God's priorities are addressed in the Word. It's simply our task to search them out. Find the passages that teach God's way of dealing with that legitimate concern. Write the passages next to those concerns.

Now, for your mind to be renewed, you are going to have to meditate on those Scriptures. You may say, "I'm not good at meditating!" That's incorrect, if you're a worrier, you are excellent at meditating! That's all worrying is: meditating on the wrong thoughts. It's taking one thought and turning it over and over in your mind, looking at it from every possible angle, thinking of all the possible implications, applications and solutions. Now because you do that without God, it has no profit. But when you do that over a verse in Scripture dealing with your legitimate concerns, you turn it over in your mind, think of all its possible implications, applications and solutions and the Holy Spirit will fill your mind with the peace of God. Yes, it takes some work to find the right Scriptures. If you can't find them, enlist the help of others more familiar with the Word than you; ask for Scriptures from your pastor or other godly counsel. At the end of the day, it is you who will make the choice to think about your legitimate concern in your own wisdom, or to think about it from God's point of view. One will bring unhappiness and anxiety, the other peace.

What do I do with the worries that are not God's worries? Confess them as sin and forsake them. If your worries are clearly not God's worries, then the problem is obviously not important enough to occupy time in your mind. It is the result of foolishness, selfishness or pride. Your worry if Gina will notice your shoes or not is not something worth occupying your mind. It is your flesh's desire for worship, and it needs to be confessed and forsaken. Worries that are clearly a result of wrong priorities must not be indulged at all, they must be seen as sin and forsaken. There, the worries are merely the symptoms of the real problem, idolatry, priorities out of the will of God. Don't try and deal with the symptom, deal with the problem, your need for approval, your desire for worship, your lust for something, your dependence on something other than God.

Having done that, what's next?

Well, Paul gives us the answer in Philippians 4:6-9. First, it's a command, Don't worry! To worry therefore is a sin. We have identified our legitimate concerns, we have Scripture to meditate on. We have confessed and forsaken wrong priorities and wrong worries. Notice Paul's next words.

Prayer and worry are light and darkness. When light comes, darkness disappears, where there is no light, darkness exists. You can't have both co-existing. You either pray or you worry; you can't do both. Prayer will drive worry from you, or worry will drive prayer from you. The chorus says, "Why worry, when you can pray?" We turn it around: "Why pray, when I can worry?" Paul says, don't worry, but pray with much thanksgiving. That's important. No thanksgiving in your prayer reveals you haven't accepted God's will for you in the situation, and you haven't yet trusted His power over the situation. Thanksgiving is really an issue of submission. I will only be thankful for something if I see myself as not deserving it in the first place. You have to be in a place of submission to God where you say, "I deserve nothing but hell, yet you have spared me. All things from your hand will work together for my good, I can love and trust you". Yes, it may be easier said than done. But half of prayer is that wrestle to get yourself into a place of accepting God's will and thanking Him for it. Prayer without thanksgiving can be nothing more than the angry request of an unbroken heart that wants God to remove the circumstance causing the anxiety. No, God wants an *inward* change *in* you before He'll work an *external* change *for* you.

And one of the marks of truly growing in the faith is the ability to just obey this command and give thanks for the situation as you commit it into His hands. Remember, don't go on your feelings. You don't have to be delighted over something to be thankful for it. Again, thankfulness is a submission issue. It's not about, "I'm really glad for this situation!" It's about, "God is my Lord, I accept all things from His hand as being better than what I deserve and part of a wise plan" If you wait for your feelings to guide you to say thank you, you'll never do it. Say thank you, and your emotions will tend to follow.

Notice Paul's next instructions v8. There Paul is now saying, 'think correctly' We've dealt with that. If you think incorrectly about your concerns, you will be guilty of sinful worry. If you will meditate on the right Scriptures regarding your concern, you will see God's viewpoint and v 7 will take place. Notice the kind of thoughts God wants you to have

- true, accurate
- honest, honourable or worthy
- just, appropriate
- pure, undefiled
- lovely, pleasing
- of good report, gracious, fair
- virtuous, excellence
- praiseworthy, commendable

Now, brooding, anxious thoughts obviously do not fit in here. The kind of thoughts Paul mentions here are not things which you can get one by one, they are by-products of meditating on the character of God. The verses you get to deal with your circumstance, meditating on them will give you these kind of thoughts.

Have you ever noticed how David did this in the Psalms? He starts by stating how scared and fearful He is. Then he will describe the nature of God, or His works, or His ways, and how they deal with his concerns. David almost always ends then by praising and rejoicing in God. He chose to meditate on God beyond the problem, not his problem beyond God. Peter says in I Pet 1:13: "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;". In those days, the long flowing clothes they wore needed to be girded up when preparing for battle or activity. Peter says, "Prepare your mind, no time for sloppy thinking!" Tighten it up. Paul says in 2 Cor 10:5: "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" Take every thought captive, catch each one, and if it does not pass the test of Philippians 4:8, then it is an impostor, a trespasser on the territory that belongs to Christ your mind, Catch it and refuse it entry in to your Lord's throne room. Think right, meditate on truth, not on your own wisdom.

Then, finally, Paul says in v 9: "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you." i.e., get on with life. Carry on, live, obey, move. Worry is like a rocking chair: it gives you something to do, but you don't get anywhere. Paul is saying, pray right, think right and now do right. Don't waste the precious time in your life by brooding, worrying over what you cannot change, thinking it through in your own

wisdom. How many hours have we wasted in a fruitless meditation in our own wisdom, and come to no lasting solution, nor any visible change in our behavior? Paul says, - you've learned, i.e. you have studied the Word for God's perspective on your concern. You have 'received' i.e. you agree that God's view on it is the right one (and until you believe it, you can't have peace'), now go and do. Get busy, get on with life. Don't sit and worry, carry out your daily responsibilities, live your life, enjoy your family, enjoy your friends, work, cook, clean, exercise. When it's time to sleep, sleep. Don't lie awake trying to solve your problems again. If you can't sleep, do it God's way. Pray with thanksgiving, meditate on the problem from God's point of view. Pretty soon, though you may wake often at first, your mind will be renewed to have the peace of God which allows for good, contented sleep. Ps 127:2 "*It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep.*"

Like the hymn says, "take your burden to His feet and leave it there". Our problem is we're not good at leaving. We come back and see how God is doing with our request. But 1 Pet 5:7 says: "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." Also Psalm 55:22. Prov 16:3. When you've prayed, and you're meditating on God's perspective, leave it there. Let Him sort it out. Don't try and take it back, as much as you are tempted to. Just leave it there. Give it to God and don't take it back.

Worry is not right for the child of God. It's a poor testimony to the world, for it looks like our God is powerless, weak and uninvolved when His children seem so nervous, tense and anxious. We need to see that our worry reveals a divided heart: one looking for solutions within or on others, but outside of God. A worrying heart is trying to solve problems my way. Worry has wrong priorities. When we forsake our ungodly priorities, we have made great progress. We must then pray right, think right and do right regarding our legitimate concerns, and we will be freeing ourselves from the tyranny and the stranglehold the worry has over us. "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:7