

WHY THINGS GO WRONG AND HOW TO PUT THEM RIGHT - Part ten

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What to do When You are Filled With Worry

This week we begin a section of our series on solving problems that is a bit different from all that has preceded. We're going to start looking at problems that don't lie directly in our outward circumstances, but rather, arise from somewhere **deep within**. In fact, many people - many **Christians** - have resigned themselves to merely coping with these painful, self-destructive responses to life because they are convinced by the counsel of this age that these inward battles are somehow **beyond God's help**, or **not particularly the kind of stuff He is interested in**.

But in any study of the Scriptural approach to solving problems these areas must be considered. The Bible won't allow us to pass these struggles off as merely **psychological**. They are **spiritual**. God is interested in the **whole person**. His Word has guidance and help for these issues that are so commonly treated as **beyond our control, and hence, beyond our responsibility**.

Worry. The Bible **does** address the subject. God in His wisdom has given us direction and help. But help will only come when the subject is addressed on **God's terms**. We must, first of all, allow **Him** to define worry, and then, after our minds have been enlightened by the truth, we must allow the Word of God to **shape our reaction** to the emotional responses we choose to make to life.

First of all, the Bible **forbids** worry. But this is just the start. This first step, while important, is fruitless taken alone. It will produce little more than condemnation. But the Bible also **defines** worry. Finally, the Bible tell us how to **displace** worry.

1) IT MAY SEEM OBVIOUS, BUT THE BIBLE FORBIDS WORRY, RECOGNIZING IT AS A SINFUL EXPRESSION OF UNBELIEF

This is the first step in dealing **Scripturally** with worry. Remember from last week's study, the importance of approaching **any** problem with a pure, Scripturally informed heart and mind set. The very first step toward solving any problem Scripturally, especially one as slippery as worry, is to make certain we are making a **Christian approach** to the problem. Nothing else will work without this.

Now, there is a problem we all have right at this point when we are dealing with a sin like worry. It has to do with the word I just used in that sentence - "a **sin** like worry..." Most of us feel worry is a trial for which we should be **pitied**, not a sin for which we should be **corrected**.

We instinctively think **worry** is pain enough without adding **guilt** to the mix. God should feel sorry for us, not blame us. So it's not easy for us to define worry as God does - as a **sin**. It seems unfair.

But we always get into trouble when we try to be more compassionate than God. He knows what's best for His children. Remember, **Father God defining worry as sin is the most hopeful thing we can hear**. If worry isn't sinful I'm left in the dark with my own tangled emotions.

But if worry **is** a sin, I can rest in the fact that God has already made abundant provision for both the **cleansing** and the **overcoming** of sin in all its forms. Suddenly, my worry is the very thing Jesus died and rose from the dead to free me from. The rich Biblical theology of redemption means there is a sure cure for all sin - including worry.

2) THE SCRIPTURES SHOW US WHY WORRY IS A SIN

Matthew 6:25-34 - "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? [26] Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? [27] And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? [28] And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, [29] yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. [30] But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? [31] Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' [32] For

the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. [33] But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. [34] “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

These are words every serious disciple should read carefully and repeatedly. They are the very best treatment of worry in God's Word. They are God's remedy for stress.

Essentially, worry is defined in terms of *who rules your life*. Worry is all about who *masters* you. Notice the first three words of **verse 25** - “*Therefore I tell you...*” Those words set up the entire teaching of the remaining verses in this chapter. Jesus says, “*Here’s the reason for this teaching. Here’s the cause of the trouble. Here’s what you need to pay attention to.*”

And those first three words of **verse 25** point us directly back to Jesus' words in **verse 24** - “*No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.*”

Worry comes from linking my life up with the wrong master. Whatever confession my lips make, my heart will reveal who is my true master. It will be revealed in the things I worry about. The outward *fruit* of worry reveals the inward *root* of my heart's attention.

Look at some of the *causes of worry* in these verses:

- a) *I will be filled with worry when I place the material above the spiritual* - **Matthew 6:25,26,31** - “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?...[26] Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?...[31] Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’

Now, none of us *admits* to putting the material above the spiritual. That just wouldn't be acceptable. But the real test isn't our *confession*. Here's the real test. If you couldn't make any money next week, or you couldn't read God's Word next week, which would you miss more? Do spiritual losses upset you as much as material ones? Do you feel worse when you can't go to church or when your investments tank?

I know that's a hard question. But questions like that have to at least get some consideration. In essence they will reveal the master of your life. If I make material gain my master, my life *will* be filled with worry. There is simply no way around it.

- b) *I will be filled with worry if I focus my life on the wrong day* - **Matthew 6:34** - “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

Remember, this is Jesus speaking. He is never wrong in His diagnosis. He says worry is frequently caused by trying to carry tomorrow's burden with today's strength. He says we have a tendency to attempt this. And He says it's sinful.

To try to live in tomorrow today is sinful because it trashes one of God's most precious gifts - the passing of life into our hands in *daily segments*. What a precious gift that is! It was God's idea to divide each twenty-four hour period into day and night. He set the sun and moon in their orbits. Time isn't the result of random events. God has designed *sequence* right into the fabric of His creation for a reason.

Living in today is one way of recognizing the preciousness of life. You only *have* today. Not one of us has tomorrow yet. And we may never get it. To grasp for it now is the height of arrogance and presumption.

Do you remember how James addressed this subject?

James 4:13-16 - “Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”— [14] yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your

life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. [15] Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." [16] As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil."

So again, remember where we are in our study. Worry *is* a sin. It's a sin because it is usually geared to the future. And the future isn't yours yet. The future *belongs* to God. You and I have no right to *grab it out of His Hand*. Our lives are designed to carry today's burden. We simply weren't designed to handle tomorrow's.

So worry comes from focusing our lives on the *material* over the *spiritual*. Worry also comes from living in *tomorrow* rather than *today*. It's not a sin to *plan*. And it's not a sin to *think and prepare* for tomorrow. But worry reaches too far. Worry *enters into* tomorrow like it's already today's possession.

- c) ***My life will be filled with worry if I fail to accept the things I cannot change - Matthew 6:27 - "And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?"***

This so accurately defines much of the sin of worry. It is such a *useless act*. In this way, it squanders God given strength and resource. Worry is such a sin because it *throws away today's opportunities*. We can miss the things we *can* do today by worrying about the things we *can't* do anything about.

This is the whole point of verse 34 - "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

There are battles to be fought today. There is progress of soul to be won today. There are those in need to be helped today. There is heaven to be pursued today. ***How foolish, given all of the eternal issues to be settled and sorted out every minute of this hour, to sit in a chair and plan how I can make my body one cubit (eighteen inches) taller!***

Such, Jesus says, are the common ingredients of worry. This list may not be exhaustive. But it certainly hits on enough of the contemporary expressions of worry to define it's *sinfulness*.

So, what are we to *do* with worry when it comes?

2) **WORRY CAN'T BE SWITCHED OFF. IT MUST BE DISPLACED WITH A SCRIPTURAL RESPONSE TO PRESENT NEEDS**

Have you ever had something that was absolutely vexing to your heart and mind, only to have some well intentioned Christian friend come up, and thinking they were offering the height of spiritual counsel, they said, "***Don't worry about it!***"

Does that ever help? If you felt you could simply *choose* not to worry about the situation you *would*. But that's precisely the problem. Worry always *feels* uncontrollable.

But let's look at this carefully. The Greek work for worry literally means, "***to rip or tear apart.***" Think about that for a minute. You can see the truth of that definition in the causes of worry we just looked at. ***In each case, there is a pulling in two directions:***

- * ***The pursuit of the material over the spiritual.*** Two kingdoms are at war. My soul was made only to be truly satisfied with God Himself. As I try to fill my life up, or secure it, with material things, I know that I can't *keep* any of them for long. I'm torn in two directions.
- * ***The attempt to carry tomorrow's burdens today.*** This uses up strength for today's task on an imaginary tomorrow I may never enter. My life is a blur between today and tomorrow. I'm torn in two directions.
- * ***The attempt to change things that can't be changed.*** Nothing is more certain to fill me with despair and uselessness than spending precious, God given time and energy on things that cannot be changed. This will sap time and energy from the things I *must* do to be fruitful. The resources of my life will be torn in two directions.

So what are the solutions? They make perfect sense when we see them with this Scriptural understanding of the sin of worry:

- a) **Recognize the sinful nature of worry.** There will be no freedom from *any* sin in my life until I **recognize, confess, and repent** of it. Remember the three steps we studied to getting out of a mess - **confession, belief, and renewed obedience.**

The first step of confession is crucial. This is not **negative**. It is Scriptural and brings healing and wholeness. Confessing worry as a sin means recognizing it is not something hopeless or beyond control.

- b) **Fill your life with prayer and the Word of God.** Remember where worry comes from. Our lives need something to re-orient them away from the **material concerns of this age**. Only Divine truth will pull your heart toward eternity and righteous priorities.

Philippians 4:6-9 - "...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. [7] And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [8] Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. [9] What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."

- c) **Focus your energies on present responsibilities.** Remember, it is **not** wrong to think about the future. What **is** sinful is to **worry** so much about the future that you fail to take care of the things **today** that will prepare your life for **tomorrow**. **Worry is legitimate concern gone sour.**

The writer of Proverbs praises the **ant** for its industriousness in **laying up store for future needs**. The point is simple. The ant doesn't **worry** about tomorrow. The ant **prepares** for tomorrow.

- d) **Focus your energies on the things you can do something about.** If you **can't** change it, pray about it and leave it with God. If you **can** change it, then set yourself to work at what you can do **today** - right now.
- e) **Keep active in serving the Body of Christ in ministry - regardless of how busy you think you are with other things.** God gives His peace and blessing to good and faithful **servants**, not good and faithful **students**. Keep active for Jesus.