

“DO NOT WORRY”
Scripture: Matthew 6:25-34
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I'd like to share with you one of my favorite passages of scripture from the Sermon on the Mount. It's Matthew chapter 6, verses 25 through 34. It is one of the great passages of the scripture that help us when we are tempted to give in to the worry habit in whatever area of our life that it seeks to get a grip. You know, it seems like there may be areas of your life you don't worry at all, but before you know it, something else is going to come up to worry about. A lot of times I will come back to this passage of scripture that helps us to know that God can help us and give us the power to break that worry habit and receive His power and receive His help. Jesus said it this way as He has been speaking about treasures in Heaven, as a lot of times people worry about money or anything that they need, for that matter. That's why He says:

25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

28"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

If you were to give up worrying for Lent, how would your life be different? Would there be more joy? Would there be more peace? Would Christ live in you in a greater way? What would it be like if you truly gave up worrying for Lent?

Some quotes about worry that I came across this week.

Worry is like a rocking chair; it gives you something to do but it doesn't get you anywhere.
Worry does not empty tomorrow of the sorrow; it empties today of its strength.

Winston Churchill said it this way: When I look back on all these worries, I remember the story of the old man who said on his deathbed he'd had a lot of trouble in his life in which most of the things had never happened.

I like what Alice Rice said: It ain't no use putting up your umbrella until it rains.

And then John Chapman says it this way: People get so in the habit of worry that if you save them from drowning and put them on the bank in the sun to dry, and give them with hot chocolate and muffins, they are going to worry about whether they are going to catch a cold.

Some people have it that bad. Louis Thomas says it this way in his excellent book about winning over your emotions: We are perhaps uniquely among the Earth's creatures the worrying animal. We worry away our lives, fearing the future, discontent with the present, unable to take in the idea of dying, unable to sit still.

In that same book Norman Wright talks about if you have ever been in a fog, one of the things he's pointing out, is that the actual amount of moisture is very little but it can do a lot of damage. You have to drive at a snail's pace and you don't know what the future holds.

And in a book called *Helping Worriers*, it says it this way: Worry is like that; it clouds up reality; it chills us to the bone. It blocks the warmth and the light of the sunshine. If we could see through the fog of worry and into the future we would see our problems in their true light.

What are those things that you worry about? Some people worry about aging. You know, I was doing all right with getting a little bit older until the AARP sent me a letter. I don't know how they found out I was getting ready to turn fifty and I just threw that thing in the trash. I'm just not quite ready to admit that I am old.

It reminds me of the Charge Conference that I went to. The superintendent asked the people what they were thankful for, which is not a bad thing to do at a Charge Conference. At that time I was in my early thirties and one, bless his soul, stood up and said, "We are so thankful to have a young preacher."

And I'll always remember this superintendent, who was fifty, fifty-one, said, "John, this will tell you something: either a young preacher or an old preacher; there are no middle-aged preachers. You are either young or you are old."

And so, I figure this is my last Sunday to be a young preacher. The only thing I know is I'm grayer; I don't see as well; I don't think I hear as well. I know I'm slower on the basketball court, but I do have experience. I hope that is one plus that you have.

But some of the things that we worry about are problems that need a solution. I mean, there are bills to be paid and you are not sure how it's going to happen. We worry about those. We worry about those problems that we have no control over. A lot of times you have a loved one who is very ill. We need to pray Reinhold Neibuhr's prayer about serenity — to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change those we can, and the true wisdom to know the difference.

And then a lot of times we worry about things that are minor problems, they are frustrations. They are appliances that don't work or just little things, but they do get under your skin and you worry about them.

How can God help you break the worry habit? Well, first of all, you look at the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus says, "Worry does not work, so don't do it." I know, easier said than done, but Jesus says, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life." When Jesus says, "Don't do it," He is not fuzzy about it; it's not a gray area. He really means, don't do it. And why is that? Well, because it's not effective; it's not good for you. In fact, it's bad for you. He uses the example of the birds of the air. He says, "Why do you worry about what you are going to eat or drink? Look at the birds of the air. They do not sew or reap or gather away in barns, and yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?"

Sometimes I can look back over my life and I know that I was worried, but sometimes I can't remember exactly what it was I was worried about. I remember, as a youth minister, I had my office over in the old building and remember very well walking down the hall one day and the birds were gathering out there. I

don't know if someone was feeding them but a lot of times there were birds there and a lot of times this passage would come to me about, you know, if the Lord is caring for these birds, He is going to take care of this situation that I'm worrying about. The old gospel hymn that you may have grown up singing:

*Why should the shadows come,
Why should my heart be lonely,
And long for heav'n and home,
When Jesus is my portion?
My constant Friend is He;
His eye is on the sparrow,
And I know He watches me,
His eye is on the sparrow,
And I know He watches me.
(And the chorus:)
I sing because I'm happy,
I sing because I'm free!
For His eye is on the sparrow,
And I know He watches me.*

Jesus also used the example of the lilies of the field. He said, "Why do you worry about clothes? Look at the lilies of the field. They neither toil nor spin, and yet Solomon in all his glory is not arrayed like one of these."

Solomon, I'm sure, had all the clothes that he wanted. I mean, Solomon was a very wise man, was a very, very wealthy man. In fact, he was Bill Gates, Howard Hughes-wealthy. When you read in Ecclesiastes, vanities of vanities, you know that Solomon's heart became divided toward the end of his life. More and more he paid attention to the foreign gods of his foreign wives and his heart was distracted away from God.

We don't worry because it won't do us any good. It was reported in World War I that planes were new and pilots were a little bit nervous about getting in the planes, so there was a saying that went around like this:

When you are in the air you will be either flying straight or turning over. If you are flying straight, there is no cause for worry. If you are turning over, one of two things is true: you will either right the plane or fall. If you right the plane, there is no cause for worry, and if you fall, one of two things is certain: you will be injured slightly or injured seriously. If you are injured slightly, there is no cause for worry. If you are injured seriously, one of two things will happen: you will either die or recover. If you recover, there is no cause for worry, and if you die, well, you can't worry anyway.

Most people want better than that. They really want to know. "I don't want to keep worrying, but what can I do about it?" Well, we know it's not good for us; that doesn't take a whole lot of convincing. But what Jesus says is that we need to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Or another way to put it is, if we will focus on doing what God wants us to — His will — put the focus on Him, then that makes such a difference. Or as E. Stanley Jones, a great missionary to India, said it this way — *that we gaze at our problems, we dwell on our problems, and we glance at Jesus*. That's backward. We need to gaze and dwell upon the Lord Jesus and glance at our problems. That doesn't mean that we don't, I mean, Jesus doesn't say, "Don't worry about your life; everything's going to be fine." No. But He said, "Don't do it because you are using up energy that needs to be put, very much, into solving the problem, with God's help."

I remember, there again, sometimes you look back on your life, maybe you can remember very well, but certainly I can remember the feeling. I had a little church where we had a little conflict. I look back now and it wasn't all that bad, but it sure seemed that bad at the time. I had two churches and I remember being very conscious of the energy that it took to worry on the way over there. It was about a fifteen minute drive and of course in those days Liz would give me a few pointers on how the sermon could be better as we were going between churches. I had one rule: you had to tell me at least one thing that you liked about it and then you can tell me how you can help me with it. And she was generally pretty much on target about it and it was better the second time. But I remember that it takes a lot of energy. And I said, "Lord, I just need to focus on preaching and leading worship; I don't want to worry about it today." And He would come through and He would help me. When we put our focus on Him and His Kingdom, it makes a difference. The problem is still there, but it's not quite so bad.

Jesus said, "The Kingdom is like a sower that goes out to sow good seed and some falls along the path, some on rocky ground. Some, the soil is pretty good, but the thorns choke it out and for others, it is very good soil. That soil with the thorns," what that is, He says, "the worries and the cares of life choke out the Word."

Think about just the truth that God loves you, will take care of you. Do you ever notice how worry will shut that out? I mean, just when you think that, Well, God really loves me, and sometimes into worship and oh, it is wonderful, but it's not long before a worry comes up, a problem comes up, and we forget about what we sang about in church and the truth we heard of God's love.

The wife of Martin Luther, the Great Reformer, came down to breakfast one day and she was dressed in black. He thought that was kind of unusual and he asked her who had died. She said, "God." He said, "Don't be ridiculous." She said, "Well, that's the way you are living right now." And Martin Luther had been so discouraged and so despondent about some of the attacks and persecution he was going through because of the Reformation, his wife wanted a dramatic way of saying, "Listen, God will not abandon you. He is with you."

When we put our focus on Jesus, what a difference it makes. Jesus, after preaching, had withdrawn, which He did from time to time, even though they wanted to take Him to be the King. And so the Disciples are in a boat. Matthew, chapter 14, says Jesus is walking on the water. You know, they had never seen anybody walk on the water and they are a little bit worried about this; they think it is a ghost, and then finally they realize it is the Lord. And Peter said, "Lord, if it's really you, let me come to you." Jesus said, "Fine." So Peter gets out of the boat and he actually walks on the water. But then he begins to look around. He begins to see these waves and the storm and he begins to sink and he says, "Lord, save me." He reaches out to Jesus, which is always the right thing to do when you are sinking. He said, "Peter, why did you take your eyes off of me?" But at least Peter knew, when he got back in the boat, what it was like to walk on the water. He knew what it was like to truly put his faith in Jesus Christ.

One of the best ways I know to deal with worry in my life is to, once again, put my focus on doing what God has called me to do and trust Him to take care of those other things, that I'll do my part, but I can believe that God will do His part.

And third, we stop worrying and we start praying. Jesus says, "Don't worry about your life." What rather we need to do is pray about our life. We need to trust God with our lives. In Matthew, chapter 6, verse 34, it says it this way:

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Have you ever noticed sometimes that we worry about the future a lot? And oftentimes what we need to be reminded as we pray that the Lord is really the only one who knows the future, and He holds the future. Why not live each day to the fullest and trust the future to Almighty God?

Norman Wright talks about in a Sunday School class, giving people the assignment to combat worry is to take Philippians, chapter 4, verse 4, which says:

Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say: rejoice! Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything, by prayer, with supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

“Now, write that down. Write it in whatever translation, version of the Bible you like. Write it down on a card, and,” he said, “now, every time you are tempted to worry, pull it out and read it.” So, one woman took him up on it and said, “You know, Monday I pulled that card out twenty times before the day was over. But you know, by Friday, I only pulled it out three times. There really is hope that this worry habit that I have can actually start going away.”

When we start praying and asking God to help us with the worry, I find in my life that the joy comes back. There is a peace that comes back. There is a God-given confidence that, whatever it is that you are concerned about, that most of all, you are not by yourself. As the Apostle Paul said:

If God be for us, who can be against us? For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Oftentimes, what our Lord does is give us endurance to hang in there and come through that trial that we are worried about. And as it comes to pass, we know that, once again, God has been with us.

Grace Crowell said it this way:

This too, will pass, O heart, say it over and over. Out of your deepest sorry, out of your grief. No hurt can last forever. Perhaps tomorrow will bring relief. This too will pass. It will spend itself, its fury. It will die as the wind dies. . . .

Let us pray. *Our Lord, You know our hearts. You know those things that we lose sleep over, those things that we, in our honest times, come to You and tell You that bother us. And Lord, we admit that oftentimes it is a struggle — whether to worry or to pray, whether to give in to despair or to trust in You. So our Lord, we pray that You would help us to hang in and be willing to struggle in our faith, O Lord, not to worry about our life but to trust You with our lives. Help us to know we are coming to the One who has created the heavens and the earth, created the One that has given us our lives, the One that has redeemed us through Jesus Christ, His death upon the cross, our Risen Lord, and also the One that will give to us eternal life. Our Lord, thank You for this hope we have. Amen.*