Worry Versus Focus

September 6, 2015

Luke 12:22-31

Have you heard what people are saying about worry?

“To what are you prone

When all’s said and done?

Tis the end of the story

When all we can do is worry?”

Worry might be compared to your choosing to carry a load of firewood too heavy for you. While God intends for you to carry just one piece of wood today, you decide to carry both yesterday’s and tomorrow’s.

 “We can easily manage if we will only take, each day, the burden appointed to it. But the load will be too heavy for us if we carry yesterday’s burden over again today, and then add the burden of the morrow before we are required to bear it.” [John Newton].

Finances, health, job, my children, my parents, the future, the opinions of others, GMO’s, crime, achieving my goals, and getting old. These are what most people thinks they need to worry about.

Nineteenth century Pastor Henry Ward Beecher said this in one of his sermons on worry. “Every tomorrow has two handles. We can take hold of it with the handle of anxiety or the handle of faith.” [Rev. Henry Ward Beecher, Litchfield, CT].

“A day of worry is more exhausting than a day of work.”

[Nineteenth Century attorney John Lubbock].

“Said the robin to the sparrow

I would really like to know

Why these anxious human beings

Rush about and worry so.”

Said the sparrow to the robin

“Friend I think that it must be,

That they have no Heavenly Father,

Such as cares for you and me.”

[“Overheard In An Orchard” by Elizabeth Cheney].

Two business executives meet at for lunch. Gene asks “How’s your health?” Ed said, "I feel great! My ulcers are gone. And I don’t have a care in the world!" Gene says, "How did that happen?"

Ed said, "Well, you know my doctor told me my ulcers were caused from worrying. So, I hired myself a professional worrier. Whenever something worrisome comes up, I turn it over to him, and he does all my worrying for me!"

Gene says, "Wow, I’d like to hire someone like that! How much does he charge?" Ed says "One hundred thousand dollars!" Gene asked, "How in the world can you afford $100,000?" Ed says, "I don’t know. I let him worry about that!" [Found on http://benwitherington.blogspot.com].

So, here are the rules regarding worry.

* If something bad can happen, then it is your responsibility to worry about it.
* Do not accept any uncertainty - you must know everything for sure.
* Treat every negative thought as if it was true.
* Anything bad that could happen in your life is a reflection of who you are as a person.
* Any and every failure is unacceptable.
* Always question yourself, especially your decisions.

[Found in “How To Overcome Your Worries” by Dr. Robert L. Leahy on [www.cognitivetherapynyc.com](http://www.cognitivetherapynyc.com)

 What is it? “Worry is a thin stream of fear trickling through the mind. If encouraged, it cuts a channel into which all other thoughts are drained.” – Arthur Somers Roche [mystery novel writer].

“The reason why worry kills more people than work is that more people worry than work.” [Robert Frost]

Today’s topic is as up-to-date as it was on the day the first sermon was preached about it. Please open your Bible with me to the Gospel of Matthew at chapter six.

What I want to say today is this. Worry is a real. It’s a serious problem. And I hope that what I say in today’s sermon will help you solve your problem with worry.

I’ve titled today’s sermon “Worry Versus Focus” Shall we pray?

God usually takes us a very different way than the way we would choose when He wants to accomplish His purposes with us. And when we fill up that way with worry, we frustrate those purposes.

Now, of all the people you’d like to hear from on this subject, wouldn’t you like to hear from Jesus first? With all there is to say about worry, I’ve decided to limit myself to the words of Jesus. As I read today, see if Jesus’ words aren’t a help to your worrying.

Matthew 6:25 *“Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? (26) Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?*

*(27) Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? (28) And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: (29) And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. (30) Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?*

*(31) Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (32) (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.”*

Now, I’m sure you noticed that the word “worry” isn’t found here. But, the idea is certainly there. Let me begin here. The Old English word “worry” comes from the German “wurgen” which means “to seize by the throat, to bind, to strangle, or even, to choke.”

Today, we’d say “worry is the result of what we allow to cause mental distress or trouble.”

“The beginning of anxiety is the end of faith, and the beginning of true faith is the end of anxiety.” George Muller

The Greek NT uses the word μεριμνάω (merimnao) which means “divided” or “pulled apart.” This is the word Jesus uses here. So “to worry” means “to have a divided mind,” “to be pulled apart,” “to be anxious,” “to be distracted.”

Now, look with me at the phrase Jesus uses over and over again in these few verses. It’s the Old English phrase “take no thought.” Matthew 6:25 *“Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?”*

What Jesus is not saying is this. He’s not saying “Do not think.” Actually the Apostle Paul says a very similar thing to the Philippians. In Philippians 4:6 we hear the Apostle Paul saying *“Be careful (anxious) for nothing.”* The best way to take these words is like this. “Stop being worried and anxious.”

It’s one thing for someone to say to you “Don’t worry; things will turn out alright.” It’s something entirely different if I say “Stop being worried; period.” Psychologists and psychiatrists and all the self-help books in the world aren’t going to do anything for you if you’ve allowed yourself to be filled with worry. But hearing the Son of God say to you “stop it” is a whole lot more effective.

So, “take no thought” means “Stop letting your concerns overwhelm you because these things can very easily take precedence over your trust in your Father’s care.”

The LORD Jesus knows your heart. And He wants for you to have a mind that is at peace. He knows the things that destroy and diminish your trust in Him. And He knows the things that develop and maintain a loss of trust in His Father. He also knows the damage that takes place when you allow worry to run amok in your mind and heart and how it always ruins your day. And, of course, He knows that the one who draws near as a little child and who’s willing to listen when He warns them about a particular sin. So, because Jesus commands us to not worry, this must be a sin in your heart.

Somebody put it like this. “The worry which wears out the mind wears out the body along with it. Worry affects a man's judgment, lessens his powers of decision, and renders him progressively incapable of dealing with life.” (The Gospel of Matthew, William Barclay, Vol. 1, p. 263).

Jesus not only knows every man’s heart. He knows the exact things that affect your heart. And when He speaks on this subject, He speaks as though this is a common problem in the human race. And it is common.

In today’s Bible lesson, we find four reasons why we shouldn’t worry. Here they are.

First, God is the Source and Supply for your life. Look at how He puts it in His sermon in verse twenty-five. (25) *“Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? (26) Behold [look at] the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?”*

“Behold the fowls of the air.” When you and I here in the United States read these words, we might not connect with them like the people who heard Jesus speak did. In the land of Israel in the LORD’s day for sure, there were lots of birds. Actually Israel’s geographical situation has made the entire country a divine migration track for no less than 230 species of birds. They could easily see millions and millions of birds at various times throughout the year.

So, everyone who heard Jesus referring to the birds that day knew very well the point He was making: that if millions and millions of birds can live quite well in this world. And every single one of them is cared for by their Heavenly Father; then can’t you?

Now, we all need food, drink, and clothing. Your Heavenly Father knows that. After all, He created you with these needs. And, since He knows these things, what good will it do to worry as though he can’t or won’t supply them?

Jesus says “compare yourself to them.” Go outside today and pay attention to the birds. In CT; we’ve got about 280 species that are native to our state. Do they sow? Do they reap? Do they store grain in their barns? Do they have a place to live? Do they work like you and me? No, yet, your Father feeds them.

And folks, if your Heavenly Father so carefully manages the birds who can’t sow, who can’t reap or store their food, isn’t it a fact of life that He also carefully watches over and perfectly provides for you? You see; your Father is the Source and Supply for your life.

Now, what is the best answer to your worries? Let me say it in just one word: focus. God has so made you that you are able to truly only focus on one thing at a time. If you invest your thoughts and energy into worry, then you have no room to focus on trusting God.

You do know, don’t you that you’re a whole lot better than birds. Here’s how Jesus says it in another place. Luke 12:24 *“Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?”*

The answer is “A whole lot better.” It’s almost as if Jesus is implying that when you worry about the basic needs of your life; things like food and shelter; then you’ve put yourself lower than the birds.

And here’s why. Birds live in the present. Birds take care of the present. Yes, they plan and work for the future. But they live well in the present. Human beings have a tendency to worry today about what will or will not happen tomorrow. Try being a bird for a day. At least, try being a bird in the sense of simply getting your work done, taking care of today’s basic needs, and leaving the future to the LORD Who made you.

Worry takes your focus away from the LORD and puts it on you and what you can or cannot do about your life.

Here’s the way one wise man put it. When you worry you project the way *you* see things in the future to be. And God isn’t in your equation [C.S. Lewis]. And when you leave God out of your equation, you magnify unbelief. You increase your own unbelief. After all, think about it; God can handle the future as well as He has the past; can’t He?

Folks, birds eat and sleep. They have a place of shelter. And, unlike the squirrel, they generally don’t store their food. So, Jesus is making this powerful point here. Worry is simply a concern over the future; an undue concern because you are leaving your Heavenly Father out of your picture. Why else would you worry if you really knew that God was the Source of your life?

Jesus has already taught you to focus. He said “you pray give us our daily bread.” So why are you worrying about whether you’ll have food and clothing and shelter and a job for tomorrow? Instead, focus on the One Who is your Source and your Supply. Do you have to worry today? You are a whole lot better than the birds.

First, then, God is the Source and Supply for your life.

Second, God designed and made you; verse twenty-seven. Matthew 6:27 *“Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?” ”Which of you by worrying over anything can add one cubit to his stature?”*

First Jesus says a word about your basic needs. Second, He says a word about your design. He is the Designer of your life. Now, if, when you read the words of Jesus, you remember that He is the Creator of the universe and your personal Creator, you’ll see a whole lot more of what He means. You see, as Creator, He is also your Designer. And He has designed, for example, your height.

It almost seems silly to imagine anyone worrying about how he’ll be able to add a cubit to his height. A cubit, by the way, is about eighteen inches. I can almost see a person worrying about being just an inch or two taller or even an inch or two shorter. But, why would Jesus ask this question “Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?”

Here’s why. Worry is like trying to imagine yourself a foot and a half taller than you are. In modern words, it’s a huge waste of your mind’s energy. There isn’t a single positive reason for you to worry just as there isn’t a single good reason for you to concern yourself with adding to your height. Someone has said that it verges on the ridiculous. You might as well be asking Him to re-design your DNA and re-engineer your entire body. Someone wisely described it as “useless worry.”

And the LORD’s answer is the same when you forget who your Designer is. Again, focus. Keep your heart filled with the truth that He is all He said He is. Now, imagine, for just a moment, that you are so worried about things that you have no real control over that you can’t or won’t take responsibility for the things you *do* have control over. In other words, when you worry, you might as well worry about how you can possibly add eighteen inches to your height. Again “useless worry.” Focus, take care of the responsibilities at hand and let God quote unquote “worry” about your height.

First, God is the Source and Supply for your life.

Second, God is the Designer of your person.

Third, God is your Provider. Look with me at verse twenty-eight. Matthew 6:28 *“And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: (29) And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. (30) Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?*

*(31) Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (32) (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.”*

Let me zero in, for just one moment on these words of Jesus; the “lilies of the field.” The lilies of the field are, actually, “scarlet poppies. From my research, I found that they bloom just after a spring rain. And they bloom for just one day. Then, their heads fall off and the plant is then used to fuel their ovens. But in that one day, they carpet the hillside in a beautiful and rich texture, greater than that even of a king in his regalia. According to Jesus, there is nothing so rich in color as the lily of the field when it is in bloom.

And if all this glory is given to flowers that appear for one mere day, think about how much more glory God has given to the crown of His creation and how much more care – Psalm 8.

Psalm 8:3 *“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; (4) What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? (5) For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and* ***hast crowned him with glory and honour****.”*

Now, when has Jesus ever compared you to the Gentiles; especially to Gentiles who fell they have no need to look to God for His provision; who live life without submitting their hearts to Him? This is it. Gentiles who live in unbelief are what He compares you who spent so much energy worrying to here.

You see, as a child of God, you have a Father in Heaven Who watches over you. Your life is in His hand and He always provides. He knows what you have need of long before you do. So, what makes you think that He won’t take care of your needs?

Folks, if He’s crowned the lilies of the field with such great glory and beauty; and if He wonderfully cares for each one of those lilies; what makes you think that He can’t or won’t provide for you who have been “crowned with glory and honor” and who are just one step below the angels? The Creator must take care of His creatures. He’s obligated to. Out of love for you He will because He is your Provider.

Now, it’s true that you can definitely, even as a child of God be consumed by your concern for the things that affect your body and this life. But, says Jesus, if you choose to live life with those worries, you will not profit. If anything, you’ll be living just like the unbelievers around you.

So, God has provided a better way for you to live in this “care-filled” world. Here it is; verse thirty-three.

First, God is the Source and Supply for your life.

Second, God is the Designer of your person.

Third, God is your Provider.

Fourth, what you care about most is what controls you. The final words of Jesus here are these. Matthew 6:33 *“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (34) Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”*

The words of Matthew 6:33 are a blanket promise. And God makes this promise to those who decide to unhook themselves from the worry and over concern for the things of this life. His promise is to supply all these things to you.

Now, mentally, you might even agree with these basic premises of life: God is the Source of all you have. God is your Designer. And God is your Provider. Yet, do you really believe it.

But, we all know the practical reality that we do live in time. We do live in a material world. We do have needs. We do have cares for things and people in *this* realm. But the bigger picture is this. When you choose to put the cares of eternal things, the things of God, and the things of His Kingdom ahead of the earthly things, He makes this bold promise to you. “All these things shall be added (supplied) to you.”

So, in order to eliminate or certainly to reduce the worry in your life, Jesus directs us to the way that works. He knows that what you care about is what controls you. When you care about the things of this world, they must control you. But the very same thing is true when you put your heart and mind on the things of His Kingdom.

The term “take no thought” implies that, even though there are daily cares, money matters, the needs you have for food and shelter; these cares are subordinate to the “cares,” if you will, of something else; the kingdom of God. Jesus says first comes the “cares” of the kingdom. First must be the sense that your heart and life are entwined with God and eternity. Then, secondarily, there must be with the “cares” of this life and time.

So, today is the day to make a choice regarding what you care most about. Do you care most for the things that have to do with your body and this life? Or do you care most for the things of His Kingdom.

Listen again to Jesus and make your choice. Matthew 6:33 *“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteous-ness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (34) Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”*

Where else will you find a more encouraging promise when it comes to all of your needs being met? This is the LORD Himself making you a promise that He must fulfill. It’s like this. You put His Kingdom first. He’ll take care of the things that pertain to this world. You trust. He supplies.

The Apostle Paul said it like this. Philippians 4:19 *“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”*

You see, He is the Source of your life. He’s the Designer of your person. And He’s your Provider.

INVITATION Now, it might be that you have only for the first time, heard of this Person, the Holy Spirit. It might be you have never become one of His children. So, there is no assurance in your heart that you are saved. Maybe today is the first time you’ve realized that Jesus Christ came to the earth to die to pay the penalty for *your* sins. Today, if you will repent of your sins and put your trust on Christ for eternal life, you will immediately receive the Holy Spirit. And He will give you the assurance of your being a child of God.

What is holding you back from the free salvation that He offers? *“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*

Will you repent today and be saved? Here’s a simple, but wonderful prayer that is yours to pray.

Salvation Prayer

“LORD, I admit that I am a sinner and in need of your grace. I believe that You sent Your Son to the Cross to die for me. Please forgive me of all my sins and make me Your child. Thank you.”

There’s a wonderful Christian hymn titled “You Are My All In All.” Please find it with me in your hymnal. It’s Hymn # 583 and sing it with me.