

“Winning Over Worry” part 2

Matthew 6:25-34

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Folks, I have realized that 90% of the things I worry about don't happen, which seems to indicate that worrying really does work. No, that is not the case. We cannot improve or change our circumstances one bit by worrying. And the stress and anxiety that our worrying creates in our lives is, well, not very fun.

Friends, this is part two of a sermon entitled “Winning Over Worry.” I hope you were here last Sunday or had a chance to listen to the sermon on the livestream. If not, here is a quick summary of what we talked about:

Jesus tells us we should not worry or be anxious. We should not do so because we should instead be trusting God. Worry also doesn't make sense because it is unnecessary. Our heavenly Father is always taking care of us. And worry is unproductive, it doesn't accomplish anything. Worrying cannot change the past, present or future.

We also talked about how even though we don't need to worry, we should still plan and work to meet our needs, and we still should be concerned about the welfare of others. Nor does the reality that God cares for us mean we will escape all trouble in life. I would like that, but it doesn't happen.

So, that is what Jesus teaches in Matthew 6:25-34. But... how does this text and knowing these things help us stop worrying and avoid anxiety? I think most of us would say, “I know I should not worry; I wish I didn't worry so much, but I still worry.” Well, let's pause and pray that through His word and by His Spirit the Lord would help us win this battle with worry.

Okay, a couple of preliminary statements.

#1 – Jesus' focus, and mine, is on what we referred to last week as sinful worry. This is when we make a choice to think about, to focus on, fears concerning the future. It involves dwelling on a lot of hypothetical “what if's” and reflects a lack of trust in God and His purposes. I am not talking about the appropriate concern you should feel as you make plans to solve problems for yourself and

others. And I am not really talking about deep rooted anxieties and physical symptoms, such as panic attacks. Those are not really choices that someone makes.

Now there are a number of different factors that contribute to these things, and I am convinced sinful worry is one of them. So, my belief is that if you can avoid worrying, if you can keep your mind from dwelling of fears about the future, you will stop feeding that deeper anxiety, you will weaken it and by God's grace you will eventually find freedom. So, I think no matter where you are on the anxiety continuum, Jesus' teaching applies to you, and you can benefit from heeding His words.

#2 – I want to say something about anti-anxiety medications. They are increasingly popular. An estimate is that about 25% of women and 15% of men are taking or have taken some type of medication for anxiety or depression. Folks, it is a bit more complicated than “If you want to stop worrying you need to take this pill,” or “If you would only quit worrying you won't have to take a pill.” I think there are too many people on these medications, but also believe there are some individuals who truly do benefit from them. There is no sanctification through medication but sometimes a pill can put you in a better position to make the right, God-honoring choice.

Okay, let's review what Jesus says, **Matthew 6:31-34 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.** In other words, Jesus says don't worry. It is wrong. So, what can we do to better obey this command?

#1 Ask God for forgiveness. Jesus has set the bar very high. He essentially says, “Don't worry, ever.” That is not an easy command to obey. Even during this past week, almost everyone in this

room has failed to follow Jesus' instructions. I know I have failed more than once, more than twice.

Perhaps after hearing the sermon last Sunday, you felt a bit guilty. You probably should have. It is a sin to worry. Though, some level of concern is appropriate, being worried or anxious clearly goes against what Jesus tells us to do. Yet, wallowing in guilt doesn't help someone overcome worry. Worrying that God is angry with you for being a worrier doesn't make you worry less. The Lord doesn't want you to be knocking your head against the wall thinking, "Oh what a terrible person I am." Rather, He desires that you turn to Jesus and experience His free and full forgiveness.

When Jesus died on the cross almost 2000 years ago, He didn't just die for ax murderers and drug dealers. He died for worriers. And friends, if you know that is who you are sometimes, what you need to do is turn to Jesus. As God enables, you need to stop trusting in yourself, stop thinking your worry is no big deal, and put your faith in what Jesus has done for you. When you do that, God will completely forgive you for being a worrier. And according to the Bible, you are then a true Christian.

But many, probably not all, true Christians still worry sometimes. In fact, you might be very good at worrying. Yet, when you do that, it is a sin, a sin against God. It is a failure to trust Him. When you do that, you need to follow the instructions of **I John 1:9 If we confess our sins** (including our worrying), **God is faithful and just** (because of Jesus) **to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

#2 – Ask for God's help. Once you have experienced God's forgiveness for being a worrier, then you need to ask the Lord to help you overcome this sinful habit. Maybe you have been thinking, "Okay, I guess I have been worrying about some things, but from now on I will not worry anymore, never again."

Right? No, worry is not an easy trap from which to escape. You cannot do it on your own. "Lord, help me not to worry about his," or "Lord, help me to stop worrying and trust you in this situation," is a prayer that should often come out of your mouth.

It is also good to ask others to pray for you. No, others cannot fight the battle with worry for you, but they can encourage through their prayers and through reminders to trust God instead of worry. You don't have to put a billboard up with a photo of yourself and the words, "Joe Smith is a worrier." But it is good for your close Christians friends to know about your struggles with worry, so they can pray for you and encourage you.

#3 – Reflect on God's sovereignty. Do that often. In our text, this seems to be what Jesus sees as our best weapon against worry. He says, "Look at the birds and flowers. Think about how God cares for them. He takes care of you too."

Friends, you can trust your heavenly Father, because He is in control. He is the sovereign of the universe. Not a sparrow (Matthew 10:29) falls to the ground apart from His will. He will not allow anything to happen in your life, that cannot ultimately be used for His glory and for your ultimate good. That is true for every believer in Jesus.

Thus, there is no need to worry. Even if your worst nightmare comes true. Even if you flunk the math test tomorrow, even if the doctor says the biopsy shows cancer, even if a tornado blows down your house, even if you get laid off from your job, even if your car breaks down half way to Minneapolis, even if your spouse dies before you do, even if you die before your spouse, even in those situations, God will still be in control and He will still be accomplishing His purposes.

For that reason, we don't have to worry. Oh, I don't mean to make it sound easy. Trials and tragedies are not fun. I would prefer to never have to experience any. Yet, one of the most basic teachings of the Bible is summed up by the Babbie Mason song that says, "God is too wise to be mistaken, He is too good to be unkind. So, when you don't understand, when you cannot see His plans, when you cannot trace His hand, don't worry, but instead trust in heart."

Trust His sovereign goodness. When you are tempted to worry, it can be helpful to turn to some of the passages in the Bible to remind us of God's sovereignty. Read Ephesian 1 and be reminded that as a believer in Jesus you were chosen by God before the foundations of the world. Read the last

part of Romans 8 and be reminded that God will work all things together for your good, your ultimate good, and that nothing will ever be able to separate you from the love of God through Jesus Christ.

Then go back to Genesis and read the story of Joseph, especially chapters 45 and 50, and be reminded how even when other people intend to harm us, God will take those actions and use them for His glory and our ultimate good.

#4 – Reflect of God’s promises. **Psalm 94:19** says, **When the cares of my heart are many** (that sounds like worry), **your consolations cheer my soul.** Now, the Lord has a variety of ways that He consoles or comforts us, but #1 are what the apostle Peter calls the great precious promises of His word. I have already mentioned some of them which involve His sovereignty . In every situation He is working to accomplish His purposes, which He promises always includes His glory and our ultimate good. But there are many other promises as well.

One of my favorites is: **Hebrews 13:5b, 6 he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”** Another great promise is **Psalm 84:11 For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.** Or **Psalm 34:10 The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.** Or **Psalm 16:11 You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.**

Oh, friends, when the cares of your heart are many, reflect on the comforting truths that God speaks to us through His work. **Proverbs 12:25 “Anxiety in a man’s heart weight him down, but a good word makes him glad.”** You want those good words to fill your mind. You might want to develop a list of verses or passages that you find particularly encouraging, on which you can focus when you are tempted to worry. If you need some help with that, give me or one of the other pastors a call. We would be glad to help.

#5 – Pray about the things you are worried about. **Philippians 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made know to God.** In other words, instead of worrying, *pray*. **Philippians 4:7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.** That peace of God will help you not worry. We see a similar thought in **1 Peter 5:6,7 “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.**

Friends, whatever your concerns are, finances, health, relationships, your children, these are all things with which the Lord can be trusted. As you pray, you give those concerns to the Lord, and you don’t have to worry.

#6 – Focus on following Jesus. If you find yourself worried about something or some things, try to focus on what you know the Lord wants you to do, or on things you know He wants you to be thinking about. Jesus calls that seeking God’s kingdom. **Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you as well.**

That is where our focus needs to be. In fact, if you focus your life on seeking God’s kingdom, an acting, thinking, and feeling in ways that please Him, you probably won’t have a lot of time to worry. In the midst of World War 2, Winston Churchill was asked if he worried about his immense responsibility as Prime Minister of Great Britian. He replied, “I am too busy. I have no time to worry.”

Friends, we live in a world that often seems crazy, chaotic, and corrupt. The secular philosophies that dominate American culture leave people empty, confused, and lonely. Those of us committed to honoring the Lord and serving hurting people are never going to run out of things to do. There will always be a spouse to encourage, children to love, a neighbor to visit, a committee on which to serve. Those who are seeking first the kingdom of God have another focus besides worrying.

Those who focus on following the Lord also avoid some of the “idols” which can provide an environment for worrying to grow and flourish. No, by idols I don’t mean statues of wood or stone to which people bow down. I mean focusing your life on something where it doesn’t belong, on something other than God and His kingdom.

For example, some people have financial success as an idol. That matters more to them than anything else. Yet, when the focus of your life is making and saving money there are lots of things you can worry about. Will the stock market go up or down? Yet, it will. But you don’t know which it will do, so you worry. For some, the most important thing is not the Lord, but being accepted or admired by people, so they worry about what other people think about them.

Really, whenever you are worried about something, it may very well indicate that thing is simply too important to you. It is an idol.

Now, people do a lot of worrying about their health. That seems only natural. But many of us have kind of made good health an idol, thinking that is what makes life worthwhile. Yet, numerous folks in this room with health problems still find life worthwhile.

If you are worried about who is going to win the election this fall, politics may be too important to you. Yes, you should certainly be backing and voting for candidates who support Biblical values. Yet, you also need to remember that whoever is in the White House, God will still be on His throne. And it is ultimately He who determines who wins each election.

Friends, keep your focus on the Lord, and not on other things, and you will do a lot less worrying.

#7 – As you seek to win over worry, strive to live one day at a time. Remember what Jesus says, Matthew 6:34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Friends, we do not and cannot know what tomorrow will bring. Yes, it is good to make plans, but there is no reason to be worrying about them.

I love the scene in “Annie Hall,” where a 12-year-old Woody Allen is worried that the universe is

expanding and will come apart. He teacher tells him, “The universe may be expanding, but Manhattan isn’t, so do your homework.”

The Lord tells us, don’t worry about the universe expanding, or a giant asteroid hitting the earth, or a hundred other possible catastrophes that might happen, if the Lord wills. Do your homework. Do what the Lord has called you to do today.

Years ago, baseball manager, Casy Stengel, would tell his great New York Yankees team, “Remember boys, we play ‘em one game at a time.” Likewise, I encourage you, “Live ‘em one day at a time.” We really need to do that, because that’s how they come, one day at a time. We need to drill that truth into our minds. You might want to write out what Jesus says on an index card and stick in on your refrigerator. **Matthew 6:34 There fore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.**

#8 – Utilize other resources that can help you battle worry and anxiety. If you are worried that the first seven things I have mentioned are not going to be enough to help you overcome worry, there are some other things you can do. You can do some reading. A good little booklet is “Overcoming Anxiety Relief for Worried People,” by David Powlinson. If you want to tackle a bigger book, Louie Giglio’s “Winning the War on Worry” might be a good one to check out.

And, last, but not least, Brittany Hagsten, our Church counselor will be leading a four-week class on “A Biblical Perspective on Anxiety” starting next Sunday. That will be at 10:45 in room 302. You can sign up for that if you are interested.

Friends, may the Lord help you to not waste your life worrying but living with confidence, as by His grace you seek trust and follow Jesus each day.