

What, Me Worry?

Let's do a quick self-assessment. Because this is a self-assessment, you don't need to raise your hands, but as I run through this checklist, please grade yourself, decide where you fall on this scale compared to where you'd like to be or where you think you should be.

Scale is:

- Doing great, I can show other people how to do this
- Pretty good, I'd raise my hand if we were doing that
- Needs improvement, I'm glad we're not raising our hands

Question 1: I have some kind of communication with God every day.

Question 2: I've been an example that I hope someone noticed this week and I would be glad to see a clip of it when I'm watching the highlights with the Lord later.

Question 3: I've read my Bible every day this week, or I've read from the Bible at least once this week.

Question 4: I have not worried about anything this week and I hardly ever worry.

We are the most amazing things God made. While we're going through a day filled with complex challenges that no other creature's mind could figure out, we're able to think about even more complex and non-concrete things that we believe. It's like the best juggler that ever lived, tossing up one thing after another until the air is filled with every different thing, how we feel about politics, our favorite books, and shows and web sites and all the rationale for why those are our favorites – ready in case anyone asks, and all the collections of memories and the things we've learned any one of which might be so valuable to someone that doesn't have that experience.

We're juggling more knowledge and wisdom than any computer, in fact more than all the computers in the world right now – not more data, we have knowledge what data becomes when you put it all together.

We walk around juggling all that in the air as we do all the things we do and while we're juggling all that, we are also keeping track of where we are – how well we're doing and we know the things we aren't doing very well.

There are a lot of things, that a lot of us struggle with, but one of the things that I believe almost everyone would grade themselves hard on is the last question.

Do we even know one person that really doesn't experience worry? A person who isn't concerned about tomorrow?

Someone who has really nailed the guidance from Luke 12?

Luke 12: 22-26 - New International Version (NIV)

Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?"

I don't believe that I know anyone that is able to do this. I know for sure that I am doing really poorly at it. Really poorly.

In fact, for me it's to the point where I often, not sometimes, but often - feel that I'm carrying worries for every person that I care about in a big sack on my back.

When I was a boy, my brother and I had these cowboy action figures. They were twelve inches tall and made with quality that none of today's action figures are. They came in a long and skinny box and each one came with accessories, like the hat and vest, gun belt and rifle. With the people we love unfortunately, one of the accessories included with every action figure is worry. You want people around you to love, great, here's their assortment of worry-accessories.

I can easily list a worry, or list of worries even for every single person that I love.

Including me. I have worries for myself too. Am I investing my time well? Am I doing the right thing? I should not eat that. I should do this but I am tired and want to watch TV.

I can compensate though by worrying about what I should have been doing while I watched TV and worry is like WiFi, I can connect to it from anywhere no matter what I'm doing.

Let's take a few minutes to share some of your worries at your table. Let's see if every table could list the top three kinds of things you worry about.

<Five minutes>

Here's a saying that we've probably all heard.

Corrie ten Boom said, "Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow; it empties today of its strength."

We've all heard this, and we've probably even said something along those lines before. It's close to what we read in Matthew.

Matthew 6: 34

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

But however well we're doing with the other instructions in the Bible, I think almost everyone is failing these instructions.

When the Bible gives us instructions, I think it's helpful to look at them from two perspectives.

The inward perspective, if we follow God's instructions can we see how they would improve us.

The outward perspective, if we follow God's instructions can we understand how they would reach others with God's message.

Let's read some of God's guidance and consider the inward and outward benefit of living without worry.

Matthew 6: 25-34 New International Version (NIV)

“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 than food, and the body more than clothes? 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? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 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—you of little faith? 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.

These instructions could easily be misinterpreted couldn't they? Without the Holy Spirit's clarity in our thoughts, we might read this and decide that God wants us to live without working to provide a home for ourselves, or clothes, or food and just pick manna up from the ground like a bird does.

We might take our shoes off and go stand outside in the sun like flowers and just soak up everything we need.

We know there are a lot of people who are almost doing that, who expect to eat without work. We struggle as a society trying to invest people in their own future.

Are we the ones who are wrong? Are we supposed to be socialists and hippies?

I think we can easily look at those people and decide that's not what God intends for us. The question is - couldn't they look at us and claim we weren't living by God's instruction when we're worrying about tomorrow and running after life's essentials and even life's non-essential comforts?

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.

We should focus on His kingdom and trust in His righteousness. It is a gift to us.

Does that mean we shouldn't expect to work and still receive the gift?

How hard should we expect to work for it?

2 Corinthians 9: 6-15

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written:

“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor;
their righteousness endures forever.”

Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Maybe it helps to consider another gift that God has given us, Jesus' sacrifice.

Does Jesus' sacrifice save everyone?

Are people saved without doing anything on their side? No, even God's greatest gift requires something from us.

Romans 10: 9 New International Version (NIV)

If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

If everyone around us sees our heart's worries written all over our face and hear worry from our mouths, will they believe we have anything better than they have?

They should see thankfulness and God's grace on us instead, but we're often weighed down by worry and it shows.

This is from a book called "Worry-Free Living"

In other words, "Never borrow from the future. If you live in dread of what may happen and it doesn't happen, you have worried in vain. Even if it does happen, you have to worry twice. Worry is the interest paid to those who borrow trouble."

I like that last part especially, "Worry is the interest paid to those who borrow trouble". Let tomorrow worry about tomorrow.

We fool ourselves into thinking that in a way worry is just planning. I fool myself this way.

Planning is about anticipating tomorrow's needs and working on them, not about worrying on them.

I read a great description that compared worry to trying to leap a whole flight of stairs, when what we really need to do is just climb one step at a time.

Procrastinating makes us worry more too. When there's something we can do today to prepare for tomorrow, it takes away some of our worry. We just need to keep the separation of worry and work for tomorrow and the best possible way to do that is to keep God's mission first in our mind. God's plan has direction and we can walk in the confidence that He has a plan and nothing will stand in its way.

Luke 12: 26

Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?

One suggestion I found is that if you're struggling to keep the worry out of your heart and it keeps wedging out the happiness and peace, you might try setting aside a specific time each day that you will totally give yourself over to the worry, a few minutes where you just bring those worries to the forefront and talk to God about them.

If you can discipline yourself to do that, I think that it might help. I think the exercise does help us understand that worry eats into our focus on the moment. When we draw it out of our day and into a time of its own, we can recognize how much it is taking from the full enjoyment of the rest of the day.

There is one good thing that worry does. It reminds us who is in charge and when we're really worried, when we're afraid of what might happen, God gets our attention in a way that we hardly ever give Him when we're standing in the field soaking up the sunshine.

2 Corinthians 12: 1-10 New International Version (NIV)

I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell. I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Is your worry like Paul's thorn? Is it a reminder of God's power, made perfect in our weakness?

Philippians 4: 6-7 New International Version (NIV)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 3:15 New International Version (NIV)

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Close in prayer

Here's a great article on worry that I found in preparation of this lesson.

https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-6weary-worry#P471_119619