

Worry
Rev. Blair W. Schultz
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Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on...For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you (Matthew 6:25,32-33).

The author, Ted Schroder writes¹ that when he was growing up in sheep country he became aware from an early age that dogs were not to be around sheep unless they were trained. Dogs, as you know, like to chase things, and if they see sheep, they try to catch them. Dogs, in fact, worry sheep. They can even worry sheep to death. “The word ‘worry’ comes from an Old English word *wyrgan* which means to kill by strangulation. *Wyrgan* describes what dogs do to their prey when they catch them.” Eventually, “worry” came to be applied to something people do to themselves.

Schroder continues, “In a sense, ‘worry’, or ‘worry anxiety’, means caring too much about something so that you become obsessed about it.” Jesus addresses worry in today’s Gospel. He tells us that “Worry is a preoccupation with the things money can buy, e.g. food and clothes, and the need to secure enough of it to take care of yourself. [But] Jesus said that life is more important than food and clothes. Human life is more valuable than the birds of the air. Worry cannot add a single hour to your...life, or increase your...size. Jesus said, ‘Live in the present. Worry about tomorrow when it comes. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Take each day as it comes. Don’t double your trouble by worrying about it twice. It may never happen.’”

This, of course, is easier said than done. “How do we avoid worrying about the future and what may happen to us? [Well,] we have to get our thinking right by getting our cares and concerns into perspective. This was the problem Martha had when Jesus came to visit. She complained to Him that her sister, Mary, wasn’t helping out.” *Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her to help me.* Jesus answered her, *Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.* (Luke 10:40–42, ESV) “Martha got

¹ Ted Schroder, “Emotions and the Gospel: Worry”, Virtuosity@episcopalians.org, August 29, 2003. All quotes are from this source unless otherwise noted.

things out of perspective. She [was] so busy she was not able to enjoy the present moment to be with Jesus. She was [so] concerned with how her hospitality would look to her guests that she neglected the values of the kingdom of heaven...”

Martha was wrong to worry. Worry is just plain wrong for anyone. But for the Christian, it is more than just wrong. Oswald Chambers wrote, “It is not only wrong to worry, it is infidelity, because worrying means that we do not think that God can look after the practical details of our lives.”² Chambers also wrote that we must never allow ourselves to think that Jesus “does not understand our particular circumstances. Jesus Christ,” he writes, “knows our circumstances better than we do.”³ St. Augustine tells us the same thing. “You know what you want,” he wrote, “but [Jesus] knows what is good for you.”⁴ When we worry, we are in effect, saying, “I will not trust where I cannot see.”⁵ Chambers writes, “That is where infidelity begins.” And, “the only cure for infidelity is obedience to the Spirit.”⁶

So worrying is wrong because for the Christian it shows a lack of faith in God. On top of that, worry is worthless. “A study of what people worry about is illuminating. Forty percent of our worries are about things that never happen. Thirty percent of people’s worries concern things that are in the past, that can’t be changed by worry. Twelve percent of our worries are needless about our health. Ten percent of our worries are petty, miscellaneous worries that are not worth worrying about. That leaves eight percent for real legitimate concerns. (Norman Wright, *An Answer To Worry & Anxiety*, p.24.)” But even with legitimate concerns, how many times have they turned out not to be as bad as you thought they would?

St. Paul tells us that even with legitimate concerns; we should not give in to worry. Instead of worrying about legitimate concerns, we should pray about them with thanksgiving, and think about our blessings. *Do not be anxious about anything*, St. Paul writes, *but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God... Whatever is true, whatever*

² Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, Classic Ed., (Barbour Publishing, Uhrichsville, OH., ?), p. May 23rd.

³ *Ibid.*, p. January 27th.

⁴ C. D. Hudson, J. A. Sharrer, & L. Vanker, *Day by Day with the Early Church Fathers*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1999), p. 264.

⁵ Chambers, p. May 23rd.

⁶ *Ibid.*

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 (Philippians 4:6,8, ESV). In other words, when you are tempted to worry, pray to God and think about the good things God has given you.

“Prayer is a key to dealing with our cares. God wants us to tell him about our cares and concerns.” St. Peter urges us to cast all of our cares on God “*because he cares for you*” (1 Peter 5:7, ESV). But Schroeder writes, “we have to be sure that we do not turn prayer into another obsessive worry session. Prayer is taking our cares to God and leaving them there, not worrying them to death, and calling it prayer. When we think we are praying we are often talking to ourselves about our problems. This self-talk needs to be interrupted. All too often it reinforces the negative. Such self-talk needs to be corrected.”

“Dr Archibald Hart, in *Overcoming Anxiety*, [writes that there are] three major thinking errors that we need to avoid: 1) Catastrophizing. This is a tendency...to react to every danger or difficulty with a response that perceives total disaster as the outcome. The more of a worrier [you] are, the more [you] will tend to catastrophize, and this feeds [your] anxiety. 2) Exaggeration. When you exaggerate, you don’t necessarily imagine the worst, but you do emphasize the negative. It raises your anxiety when you least expect it. 3) Overgeneralizing. Because we have a problem with one thing we tend to think that we will fail at everything.”

Instead of worrying, we should focus on our blessings, giving thanks for all that God has given us. We should fill our imaginations with all that is positive and worthwhile. We should enjoy what we have rather than being obsessed with what we don’t have, or what we fear.

When we pray with thanksgiving, and think about positive things, then St. Paul says, *the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).*

“This peace of God is confidence in the love of God despite the circumstances of life... This biblical promise of peace is not a promise of unruffled serenity. It is, rather, the promise that, no matter what happens, deep down in our souls there can be the sustaining confidence that God is in control and in the end He will make everything work out for good.” (Dr. Vernon Grounds in *Emotional Problems and the Gospel*, p.33)”

“Chronic worry can be very much like an addiction—we come to depend on it and we can’t stop doing it. As a bad habit, [for some] it can be as debilitating as alcohol.” So here are some things you can do to overcome worry:

1) “Admit that you are a worrier and that you are powerless to overcome

worry on your own strength.” 2) “Believe that God, through Christ, is able to help you overcome your worry.” Believe what St. Paul wrote in *Philippians*, “*can do all things through [Christ] who strengthens me*” (*Philippians* 4:13, ESV). “This includes controlling your thinking and eliminating wasteful worry.” 3) “Turn your life over to God. Present your body (including your mind) ‘*as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service*’ (*Romans* 12:1, ESV). This will help to renew your mind, and give it peace.” 4) “Spend part of each day strengthening your personal relationship with God. Do this through prayer and quiet meditation on his Word, and maintain an attitude of continual trust in his protection. Pray for daily strength and the courage to take each day one moment at a time.” 5) “At the end of each day, take a few minutes to review the accomplishments of your day. Thank God for each worry you deflected and for every fear [that] did not [get] a foothold in your mind. Remember each moment of comfort you received and every word of encouragement God gave you through the day. Thank him for every friend who passed your way and encouraged you, for each shoulder you cried on or ear that listened. Count each of these blessings, and thank God for them. Then go to sleep knowing that tomorrow’s challenges and concerns will be lighter to bear and easier to master. (Dr. Archibald Hart in *Overcoming Anxiety*, pp.29-31)”

Another thing you can do is to put God first in your life. That is what Jesus tells us in today’s Gospel. He tells us that if we put God first in our lives, everything else will fall into place. *Seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.* But often we don’t do that, Fr. Andrew wrote, “So often we put ourselves first, and our friends second, and God a very bad third. If we put God first, and others second, and ourselves a very bad third, that will be the true order.”⁷ He continues, “Because [if] we have sought first of all our Father and His will and His righteousness, [then] we [will] receive the greatest gifts of life from His hands with His benediction.”⁸

In today’s Gospel, Jesus tells us to “‘Take no thought for your life.’ ‘Be careful about one thing only,’ [He says], ‘your relationship to Me.’ Common sense shouts loud and says, ‘That is absurd, I must consider how I am going to live, I must consider what I am going to eat and drink.’ Jesus says you must not.”⁹ This

⁷ Rev. Fr. Andrew, S.D.C., *Meditations for Every Day*, (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co. Ltd., 1957), p. 296.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Chambers, p. January 27.

doesn't mean that we are not to plan for the future. Oswald Chambers writes, "Jesus is not saying that the man who takes thought for nothing is blessed—that man is a fool...[rather] Jesus is saying that the great care of...life is to put [our] relationship to God first, and everything else second."¹⁰

When we worry, we strangle ourselves emotionally and spiritually. How do we stop worry? By putting God first in our lives, and by praying that He will give us the strength to overcome our fears. And you know what? If we do that, He will!

Let us pray.

For Freedom From Anxiety

O most loving Father, who wiltest us to give thanks for all things, to dread nothing but the loss of thee, and to cast all our cares on thee, who carest for us; preserve us from faithless fears and worldly anxieties, and grant that no clouds of this mortal life may hide from us the light of that love which is immortal, and which thou hast manifested unto us in thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Sources:

Andrew, S.D.C., Rev. Fr. *Meditations for Every Day*. London: A. R. Mowbray & Co. Ltd., 1957.

Chambers, Oswald, *My Utmost for His Highest*, The Classic Edition. Barbour Publishing, Uhrichsville, OH., ?.

Schroder, Ted. "Emotions and the Gospel: Worry". Virtuosity@episcopal.org. August 29, 2003.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. May 21st.