

THE THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS SERIES

WORRY

The Joy Stealer



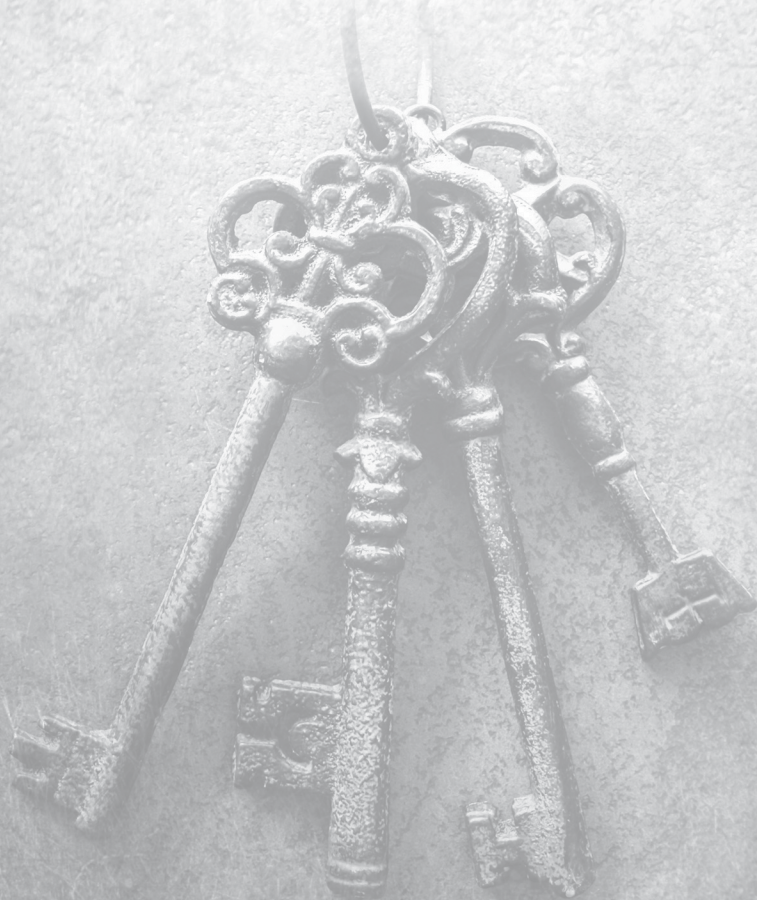
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INTRODUCTION

When I was growing up, Charles Lake was my Louisiana uncle who married my Aunt Swann . . . which made her “Swann Lake” (that’s true!). He was fun to be with because he had a Santa-size tummy that jiggled when he laughed. He would also let me sit on his lap, but better yet, he would let me comb his hair to the right . . . to the left . . . to the back . . . to the front. For whatever reason, he expressed kindness toward *me*.

One surprising day, my uncle called 9-year-old me in Dallas, saying, “I want you to come to Shreveport because I want to take you fishing.” (*Me? By myself? How exciting!*) I remember boarding a bus in Dallas and for three solid hours, I was filled with joyful anticipation.

After arriving, Uncle Charlie informed me we would be getting up early for our fishing expedition. We arose at 3:00 a.m. and headed toward the Lake of the Pines.

Oh, I had been fishing before. A couple of times, my year-older brother and I walked down to White Rock Lake carrying our cane fishing poles and small chunks of hot dogs to use as bait on our hooks. Yet, to be candid, I never got a nibble—not once. (Apparently, fish don’t love hot dogs as much as kids do.) Nevertheless, we thought we were fishing, and we had fun trying.

But my uncle Charlie knew a whole lot about fishing. In fact, that very day he handed me my own rod and reel and his first words of instruction were, “You need to learn to cast your line.” Then he explained that fish especially like to swim in and out of trees, roots, and stumps.

However, the first time I tried to “cast my line,” it only went a few feet. Then Uncle Charlie said, “Make an arc!” and he showed me how to flick my wrist and stop the reel. So, over and over again, with each cast, my line traveled out farther and farther toward the trees.

Before Uncle Charlie cast his line, he’d say, “I’m going to send my fly . . . *there*.” He’d point to a particular place . . . and “Splash!” The line would land at the precise spot he picked—every time. I thought, *How did he do that?*

Then I discovered the secret to casting the line is the small metal

weight attached to the line, close to the bait.

His next instruction was, “Reel your line back in . . . v-e-r-y slowly.” After several hours of casting and reeling, I had the hang of it. In fact, I was plumb proud because I learned to arc my line and direct my cast—what a delight! Especially when we caught one fish after another, after another.

Centuries ago, a fisherman named Peter wrote these words, “*Cast all of your cares upon [Jesus] for He cares for you.*” (The apostle Peter was one of the closest friends of Jesus, the Savior.) The Bible recorded these words in 1 Peter 5:7. The word for “cast” in Greek literally means “to throw upon, to deposit once and for all.” That’s exactly what we need to do—cast the weight of our worry, not keeping our cares close to us. Peter knew and we also need to know *where* we are to be casting our cares—on Jesus.

But notice: nowhere in the Bible does it say, “Reel your worries back in!” Yet in truth, that’s what we typically do. If we do cast our cares on the Lord . . . most often we reel the weight back in. Because this is unbiblical, we need to change. So, if we want to be biblical, we *must* change! In real life, our care (our worries, our burdens, our weights) can be very heavy—though often unseen by others.

Think of the last time you carried a burden that was bruising—even heart breaking. Jesus understands just how heavy your weights are and He says, “*Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest*” (Matthew 11:28.)

The next time a wearisome worry weighs you down, cast that worry—that distracting care—and leave it with the Lord. Make a commitment to give every burden to the Lord— everything that could keep you in a state of distress. In truth, you cannot avoid having weights in your life, but you can avoid having them weigh you down.

Therefore, in the future, cast your cares on the Lord and leave them there. When you do your part, look what part the Lord promises: “*Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you*” (Psalm 55:22). Even in Old Testament times, if you cast your burdens on the Lord, His promise was to strengthen you, support you, sustain you. And still, this is His promise to you today.

June Hunt

Founder, Hope for the Heart

WORRY

The Joy Stealer

Jesus says *don't* . . . but we do it anyway.

And because we do, we become tense and troubled. Multiple times Jesus says clearly . . . specifically . . . unequivocally, “*Do not worry about your life*”¹ . . . meaning, do not worry about *anything* in your life.

Not anything? . . . Is that even possible?

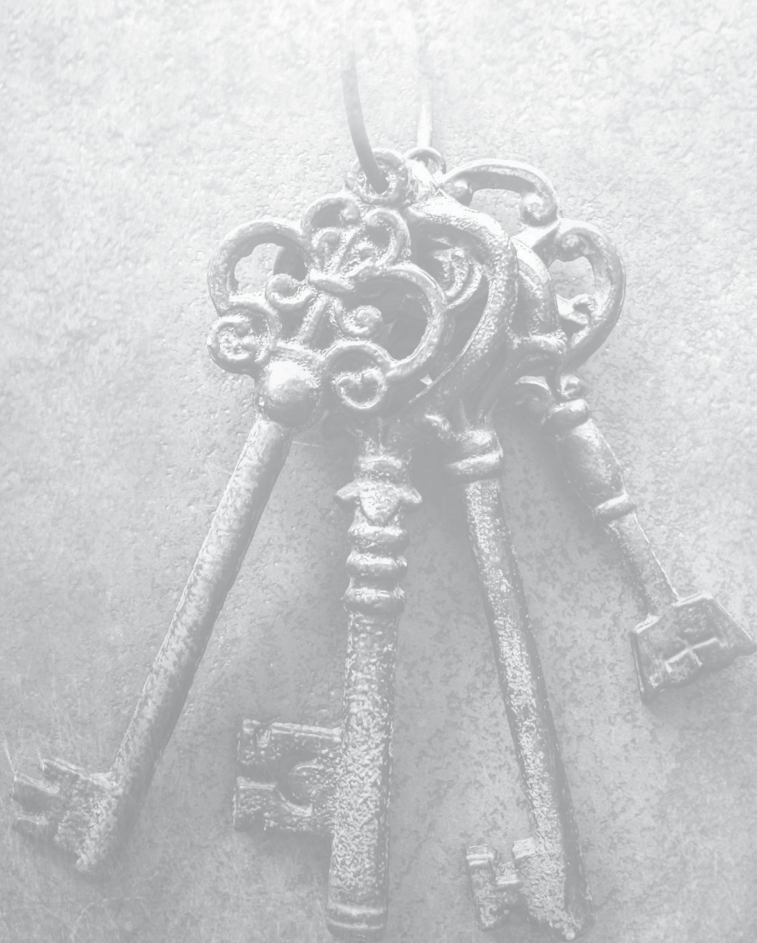
When we worry, we allow our irreplaceable time to waste away. Worrying about the length of your life will not add one day to your life. Spending an entire night stressing over a problem won't usher in a solution any more than an afternoon of fretting over your finances will fix them.

For some, worry seems as natural as blinking. Many assume that being worry-free is merely wishful thinking. That is, until we experience firsthand just how personal God is and how faithful He is to meet our deepest inner needs.

Jesus reasons with us: If God faithfully provides food for the birds, won't He much more provide for you—especially since you have far more value? Knowing just how much worry *wears* you down, Jesus lovingly reminds you . . .

“Do not worry.”
(LUKE 12:22)

DEFINITIONS



*“Worry gets in the way
of faith and reveals
a lack of trust in God.”*



You've seen them . . . you've met them . . . you know them. Maybe you are one of them: the worriers.

Worriers don't fully relax. They don't let their guard down. At night, they toss and turn, regretting today and dreading tomorrow. Worriers are convinced that around every corner calamity lurks just waiting to pounce.

Worriers fear they won't have sufficient funds *for the future*. Or they won't meet someone else's expectations . . . *ever!* They fret about what people *will think*—or worse—what people *will say*, especially about them. And if they aren't worrying about something, they agonize over the thought that they have somehow missed something to worry about!

Like a merry-go-round on an outdoor playground, 'round and 'round and 'round they go in a tiring attempt to control everything in their lives. Yet the truth remains: Worrying will never make you "merry," nor can it enhance your present life or even prepare you for the future.

Jesus pinpoints this truth:

*"Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?
 . . . Don't worry about tomorrow,
 for tomorrow will bring its own worries.
 Today's trouble is enough for today."
 (MATTHEW 6:27, 34 NLT)*

What Is Worry?

Whether you find yourself in a frustrating situation, or facing an unknown future, worrying can seem so normal, so typical, so logical. However, we need to ask ourselves two simple, but sensible, questions: "How has worrying helped me in the past?" And, "How will worrying help me in the future?" Our master teacher Jesus makes His point clear:

*“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’
or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’”*

(MATTHEW 6:31)

Worrying is useless, pointless, worthless. And more so, to live in a constant state of angst is absolutely exhausting. So what do you need to know about worry?

Worry is *mental distress*² primarily over a negative possibility in the future.

- Worry is a state of mind, a way of thinking, a mental habit.³
- Worry is a preoccupation with something bad that may happen, may not happen, or *cannot* happen.

“My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught” (PSALM 55:2).

Worry in English is derived from the Old German word *wurgen*, meaning “to strangle or choke.”⁴

- Worry is a thief that steals joy and strangles faith.
- Worry is a destroyer when it chokes the Word of God from us, keeping our lives from bearing fruit.

Jesus says, *“The worries of this life . . . come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful”* (MARK 4:19).

Worry divides the mind between what is motivating and demotivating, what is constructive and destructive.

- Worry in the New Testament is the Greek word *merimnao*, meaning to worry anxiously, to be distracted by—literally to have a divided mind.⁵
- The Greek word *merimnao* comes from two words: *merizo*, “to draw in different directions, to divide,”⁶ and *nous*, “the mind.”⁷

The worrier can be compared to *“a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways”* (JAMES 1:8).

The Brain and Worry Systems

Question: “How does worry impact the brain?”

Answer: Your body has been created by God with a “physical defense system” that is ready to be activated when you are in danger.

Consider how this defense system works within your brain.

- Like pushing the gas pedal in a car, worry can activate the body’s nervous system to release adrenaline and cortisol (stress hormones) that produce a “fight” or “flight” response.
- If you are in danger, this survival system will pump adrenaline into parts of your body to prepare you either for fight or flight—to move toward or to move away from the danger with increased strength and speed. If you are not in danger, but just worried, the release of adrenaline can compromise your rational, calm thinking because adrenaline signals the body to move blood out of the brain and into the major muscle groups (primarily the legs) where adrenaline may be needed more.

Excessive worry causes a distress signal to be sent to the brain’s “command center” (the hypothalamus).

- The “*traffic cop*” portion of the brain (the amygdala), in concert with the brain’s command center (hypothalamus) directs the “taxi cabs” (carrying adrenaline and cortisol) to bypass the thinking center (the cortex) and instead to go straight to the *emotional center* (the limbic system).
- The *reward/pleasure center* (the nucleus accumbens) welcomes the “feel good” chemical (dopamine) and creates a growing desire for more (even though the situation causing the worry is not necessarily a healthy or positive source).

Excessive worry activates the physical defense system quickly, before the brain's visual centers can fully process what is happening.

- The brain is basically saying, “Don’t think about what’s happening—just feel it and react to it.”
- The more often this process occurs, the more easily traveled the brain’s superhighway (neural pathway in the brain) becomes where adrenaline and dopamine create an unhealthy craving for more of the same. This well-worn pathway can create a rut over time, requiring greater effort to get out of the rut than it does to steer around one.

Excessive worry initiates your physical defense system with a flood of adrenaline, thus shutting down your rational thinking. Therefore, you need strategies to calm your body, soul, and spirit.

- Use practical strategies to engage your brain, such as affirmations of truth, meditation, memorization, music, prayer, Scripture reading, relaxation, singing, worship, and other activities.
- Personalize a passage of Scripture, writing it out and repeating it three times a day.
 - EXAMPLE: Isaiah 26:3 speaks of God’s will for our minds: “*You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.*”
 - Write and repeat: “Thank you, Lord, that you will keep me in perfect peace because I’m entrusting myself to you.”

What Are the Wearying “What-Ifs” of Worry?

Where is your focus? Is it on your future—the unknown events in your life yet to occur? Is it on your past—on the frequently rehearsed painful events that have shaped your life? Or is it on your faithful God—how He has been your sufficiency in the past, and how He will be your provider in the future?

You can replace your fretful worry with faith. Jesus illustrates this by asking you to observe how God’s caregiving extends even to clothing grassy fields with wild flowers. . . .

*“Consider how the wild flowers grow.
They do not labor or spin.
Yet I tell you, 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,
how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith!”*
(LUKE 12:27–28)

The Wearying “What-Ifs” of Worry

It’s been said that life is a “meteor shower of what-ifs.”⁸ If you are a worrier, you likely spend a great deal of time wondering about the “what-ifs”—what may or may not happen. Then, worrying about the worst, you get caught up in speculating . . .

“**What if** . . . I don’t finish _____?”

“**What if** . . . I lose my _____?”

“**What if** . . . I don’t have enough money for _____?”

“**What if** . . . I fail at _____?”

- “**What if** . . . I don’t know what to do about _____?”
- “**What if** . . . I can’t meet the expectations of _____?”
- “**What if** . . . I have a bad _____?”
- “**What if** . . . I don’t have enough time for _____?”
- “**What if** . . . I get too stressed out about _____?”
- “**What if** . . . I make a mistake or do it wrong?”
- “**What if** . . . I make a fool of myself?”
- “**What if** . . . I never meet my soulmate?”
- “**What if** . . . I find out someone I love has been hurt?”
- “**What if** . . . I am rejected?”
- “**What if** . . . I become seriously ill?”
- “**What if** . . . I can’t take care of myself?”
- “**What if** . . . I end up all alone?”
- “**What if** . . . I run out of options?”

These speculative, often fatalistic, “what-ifs” can paralyze your present and obscure your future. Your mind cannot be consumed with worry about future possibilities and solve present-day problems at the same time.

Instead of worrying about the negative “what-ifs” . . . you can make a conscious decision not to be distracted, distressed, or distraught with worry. *What if* instead, you put your trust in God and placed your confidence in Him as Psalm 91:1–2 suggests?

*“Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the LORD,
‘He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust.’”*

What Makes People Worry?

In September 1988, American musician Bobby McFerrin released what eventually became a popular hit song. All around the world people were humming the catchy little tune. And once a tune is embedded in the musical memory of someone’s mind, it is there to stay. The song? “Don’t Worry, Be Happy.”⁹ The lyrics struck a chord in many a music lover with, “In every life we have some trouble. When you worry you make it double. Don’t worry, be happy. . . . Be happy now.”¹⁰ While highlighting the problem with worry, this catchy lyrical sentiment is easier to sing than it is to live.

Most of us experience worry to one degree or another—at one time or another. In fact, worry is a condition of mind that lurks behind much of our thinking. Worry negatively conditions how we respond to life in countless ways, often limiting us and what God can do through us.

Jesus warns . . .

*“Watch out! Don’t let your hearts be dulled
 . . . by the worries of this life.”*
 (LUKE 21:34 NLT)

What Worries?

People worry over a myriad of issues. And fear is a common denominator in the worry equation. Some of the most common reasons people worry include fears like these:¹¹

- Being evaluated
- Change
- Disappointing others
- Disapproval
- Dying and death
- Failure
- Injury or illness

Intimacy
Loss of control
Loss of job/security
Loss of love/loved one
Pain and suffering
Phobias (germs)/panic attacks
Poverty/loss of finances
Threats to a child's health or happiness
Unknown future

Fear vs. Worry

Question: “What is the difference between fear and worry?”

Answer: Fear is an *emotional* reaction to a perceived, *present* danger. Whereas worry is *mental distress* over a possible, undesired happening in the *future*.

Fear focuses on *present events* and is energizing when it propels a person to action in a way that removes or lessens real danger.

Worry is distracting and can lead to distress, despair, and even depression and anxiety. In addition, worry is unproductive because it projects problems and unknown future events.

Fear sees a threat. Worry imagines one.¹²

The Lord offers these comforting words to those overwhelmed with worry . . .

“Call on me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you, and you will honor me.”

(PSALM 50:15)

What Is Concern?

Carrie found out that the company she's working for is downsizing and her job is being eliminated. Her manager feels terrible about it . . . as does Carrie, a single mom with two elementary-age children with bills to pay and mouths to feed. And without an income, a problem for her family will loom large. However, instead of worrying about what *might* happen if she fails to find employment, Carrie immediately jumps into action. She updates her resume, looks and applies for job openings. She watches job boards and networks with family, friends, and former coworkers. She stays active and positive while looking for a new job. Carrie expresses appropriate concern over losing her job, which spurs her to take action as she manages the consequences of her job loss.

Concern lives in the moment without ignoring the realities of life. Concern sees problems and challenges for what they are, yet keeps moving forward. *Worry*, on the other hand, sees the problems and challenges but gets stuck in them. Therefore, moving forward doesn't happen.

This means you can decide. Will you get stuck in the web of worry . . . or will you move forward with confident concern, knowing God has a wonderful plan for your life that will be sovereignly fulfilled as you trust in Him?

*“Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.”*
(PROVERBS 3:5–6)

Concern engages your attention, interest, and care, and even affects your sense of well-being.¹³

Concern comes from the late 15th century Medieval Latin word *concernere*, meaning “to affect the interest of, be of importance to.”¹⁴

Concern demonstrates your personal maturity and growth. When you have concern, you have the ability to see reality, feel empathy and compassion, and care about others.¹⁵

Concern propels you to act constructively—such as seeing a doctor when you are ill or getting help from a mechanic when your car makes strange sounds. Active concern is productive.

The apostle Paul shows appropriate *concern* for the church in Philippi when he writes . . .

“Only one thing concerns me: Be sure that you live in a way that brings honor to the Good News of Christ.”

(PHILIPPIANS 1:27 NCV)

Worry vs. Anxiety

Question: “How do I know if I’m dealing with worry or anxiety?”

Answer: People often use the words “worry” and “anxiety” interchangeably. However, there are key differences between the two:

Worry is typically understood to be a *mental* process—ruminating on “what-if” scenarios that may or may not come to fruition in the future. It is often anticipating an outcome, attempting to solve a problem, or avoiding a deeper issue.

- Worry is not an emotion or a feeling—like joy, anger, or love. However, worry can reveal a hidden fear.
- Worry is not an emotion, but it can lead to feeling anxious.

Anxiety is a present physiological feeling, usually an emotional response to a current or possible future threat (real or perceived).

- Anxiety becomes problematic when it is excessive or persistent (with individual episodes extending six months or more) known as Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD).¹⁶
- Excessive, obsessive worry can *lead* to anxiety. Likewise, stress can lead to worry or anxiety. Anxiety can also make an appearance all on its own.

Like David, we can implore God,

*“Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Savior,
and my hope is in you all day long.”*
(PSALM 25:5)

What Thought Distortions Result from Worry?

The woes of worry are many. And several are seen in the distorted thought patterns worry can manufacture in our minds. Worry erects an imaginary wall against danger, but it has no substance to protect or prevent what we fear. Such is not the case with the Lord, whose faithfulness to His people fills the pages of Scripture.

*“The faithful love of the LORD never ends!
His mercies never cease.
Great is his faithfulness;
his mercies begin afresh each morning.”*
(LAMENTATIONS 3:22–23 NLT)

Worrisome Thought Distortions¹⁷

Mind reading—You think you know what people think without knowledge of their thoughts: “He thinks I’m nothing.”

Fortune-telling—You try to predict the future with a certainty that things will get worse or that danger lies ahead: “I’ll fail that test.” “We won’t get the loan.”

Catastrophizing or negative filter—You dwell on the negatives and think that what has happened or will happen will be the worst-case scenario: “My life will be over if I fail.”

Labeling and personalizing—You assign negative attributes and blame to yourself and others: “I’m unlovable, so of course our marriage failed.” “He’s a terrible person.”

Discounting positives—You dismiss any positives you or others achieve or attain as trivial: “That’s what friends are supposed to do, so it doesn’t matter when she’s nice.” “That project was a piece of cake, so it doesn’t count.”

Overgeneralizing—You perceive a global pattern of negatives on the basis of a single incident: “This has happened to me before. I’m not surprised because I’m a failure at a lot of things.”

All-or-nothing thinking—You view events or people in all-or-nothing terms: “Everyone rejects me.” “That will be a total waste of time.”

Shoulds—You interpret events based on how you think they should be rather than focusing on what is: “I should pass that test. If I don’t, then I’m an absolute failure.”

Blaming—You focus on another person as the source of your issues and refuse to take responsibility for changing yourself: “She’s to blame for how I feel now.” “My parents are the reason I have all these problems.”

Unfair comparisons—You interpret events by unrealistic standards, focusing on others who do better than you and finding yourself inferior in the comparison: “He’s smarter than I am.” “Other people are better than me.”

Regret orientation—You focus on the regret that you could have done better in the past, rather than concentrate on what you can do better now: “I would have gotten a better job if I had tried.” “I wish I hadn’t said that.”

Emotional reasoning—Your negative feelings guide your view of reality: “I feel depressed, so I’m certain we’re headed for divorce.”

Judgment focus—You see people and events in terms of “good” and “bad” or “superior” and “inferior,” instead of just describing, accepting, or understanding reality: “I didn’t do well in school, so I won’t get a good job.” “Look at how successful he is. I’ll never be that much of a success.”

*“Pay careful attention to your own work,
for then you will get the satisfaction of a job well done,
and you won’t need to compare yourself to anyone else.”*

(GALATIANS 6:4 NLT)

What Is the Spectrum of Concern?

Worry can lead to obsession, depression, and anxiety when we perceive the situation we’re in to be precarious. In fact, many people find themselves walking the tightrope from tension to terror . . . from unrest to paralyzing anxiety. When we find ourselves walking this tense tightrope, we must turn our focus from our fears to the Lord who is with us in the midst of our distress. Then we will find ourselves walking in the Spirit where there is peace and calm.

We can then say with assurance . . .

“Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life.”

(PSALM 138:7)

The Spectrum of Concern



The spectrum of concern can range from careless apathy to appropriate concern. But beyond concern lies the woes of worry and anxiety—from mild or moderate to severe and severely debilitating. Depending on the degree, worry can seem somewhat manageable or reach a level so severe it interferes with daily life and makes living a moment-to-moment struggle.

People experiencing only a small measure of worry might ignore feelings of apprehension or even avoid situations that make them uncomfortable. Others who experience a stronger sense of worry that leads to anxiety might address the situation causing the angst, yet resent being in that position and fear dealing with a similar situation in the future.¹⁸

Most people experience some times of periodic worry—but not everyone experiences worry in the same way or to the same degree. We need to recognize when concern descends into worry and use it as a motivation to trust in the Lord all the more. To the trouble-hearted, Jesus says . . .

*“Do not let your hearts be troubled.
You believe in God; believe also in me.”*

(JOHN 14:1)

Types of Worry

Mild to Moderate Worry—normal fear generates concern, but slips into worry when . . .

- It becomes repetitive.
- It becomes extensive and pervasive.
- It can motivate, but often undermines momentum.
- It prevents us from fully trusting, living dependently on the Lord.

Notice that the psalmist, who put these words to music, turned his focus to the Lord when feeling distraught . . .

*“When I worried about many things,
your assuring words soothed my soul.”*

(PSALM 94:19 GW)

Severe worry is when we become emotionally stuck and are unable to cope with a past or present problem. It inhibits us from moving forward into the future with confidence.¹⁹

Severe worry—abnormal fearful obsession is more profound and problematic when . . .

- It makes concentration difficult.
- It causes forgetfulness.
- It hinders normal functioning.
- It blocks communication with others.

Notice that Solomon, known as the wisest man on earth, said . . .

“Banish anxiety from your heart.”

(ECCLESIASTES 11:10)

What Are Four Characterizations of the Spectrum of Concern?

Imagine four siblings. They have grown up in the same home, gone to the same schools, and have been raised by the same parents. They all work together for the same family business and all encounter the same crisis—their father (who runs the family business) has been diagnosed with cancer.

But observe how their thinking differs as they share the same stresses and strains.

One adopts a “Why worry?” mind-set and seems unconcerned. Her older brother looks for ways to take charge and gain control. Their oldest sister struggles with constant worry and a world of “what-ifs.” And the fourth sibling proves to be level-headed and wise, expressing just the right balance of care and concern.

Each of the four needs to remember . . .

“The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble.

He cares for those who trust in him.”

(NAHUM 1:7)

Carefree Connie generally seems worry-free and stress-free but often comes across as uncaring and irresponsible. Connie thinks:

— “I live by ‘*don’t worry, be happy*’.”

— “This isn’t my problem.”

— “Why worry? It’ll work out somehow.”

— “Yes, I’ve said I care . . . but I need to do what I think is best for me.”

“Since God has allowed us to be happy, we will not worry too much about how short life is” (ECCLESIASTES 5:20 GNT).

Controlling Travis seeks stability when he feels out of control. Travis thinks:

- “I have to take control.”
- “If I don’t take care of this, no one will.”
- “If I don’t handle this, everything will go wrong.”
- “I can’t let this happen. Everyone depends on me.”

“I am the LORD All-Powerful. So don’t depend on your own power or strength, but on my Spirit” (ZECHARIAH 4:6 CEV).

Consumed Susan is paralyzed by constant worry. Susan thinks:

- “I can’t help but worry all the time.”
- “This is going to be bad. I know it won’t end well.”
- “Why does this always happen to me?”
- “There’s no way out. I can’t do anything but worry.”

“You work and worry your way through life, and what do you have to show for it?” (ECCLESIASTES 2:22 GNT).

Concerned Chris handles worry in a planned and intentional way; it moves him to appropriate action. Chris thinks:

- “I will entrust my life to the Lord to take care of me and what concerns me.”
- “God doesn’t want me consumed with worry, so I’m praying and seeking His guidance.”
- “Instead of worrying, I’m going to seek wise counsel and experienced advice.”
- “I’m concerned about you, so I want to know how you’re doing and how I can help.”

“Be careful to do what the LORD your God has commanded you; do not turn aside to the right or to the left” (DEUTERONOMY 5:32).

Sin or Not?

Question: “Is worry a sin?”

Answer: Yes, Scripture clearly shows that worry runs contrary to God’s plan for us.²⁰

- **Worry** is not just a problem of the mind (mental), it is also a problem of the heart (spiritual) because it involves relying on someone or something rather than on God.
- **Worry** gets in the way of faith and reveals a lack of trust in God.
- **Worry** can take on a life of its own and become an “enemy within,” distracting you with its relentless flow of bothersome thoughts.
- **Worry** fools you into thinking that it is directed at solving problems, but it never delivers a solution.
- **Worry** is a failure to trust God, thus we need God’s grace and truth when we worry.

“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”
(JOHN 8:32).

You may feel that you’ll never be able to overcome the habit of worrying. But nothing is too hard for God. Realize, Jesus died for you on the cross and rose again. In doing so, He overcame death. Therefore, He can help you conquer your worrisome thoughts. Next time worry pays you a visit, don’t answer the door. Instead, choose to “set your mind” on the myriad of ways God has seen you through actual difficulties (not imagined ones), and let your heart be filled with gratitude for all the times He’s protected and provided for you.

*“I will praise you, LORD, with all my heart;
I will tell of all the marvelous things you have done.”*

(PSALM 9:1 NLT)

What Is God's Heart on Worry?

When we worry, our minds get an unnecessary workout. We run through all the possible outcomes to our situation. We jump to conclusions before getting all the facts. We weigh ourselves down with all the “what-ifs.”

Truly, worrying is an exercise in futility. Worry leads to fear and stress instead of faith and rest.

Realize, when Jesus talked about worry, He redirected our focus onto God. He wants us to understand that our worries don't change the character of God. Ultimately, grasping God's character changes how we handle our worries. Perhaps the most poignant phrase Jesus said to worriers is: “. . . *your heavenly Father knows . . .*” (Matthew 6:32).

God knows what's going on in your life. He cares about what's happening. He loves you. While worry will steal your joy, the Lord gives it. He wants every worried heart to look to Him for help and find joy.

*“I prayed to the LORD, and he answered me.
He freed me from all my fears.
Those who look to him for help
will be radiant with joy.”
(PSALM 34:4–5 NLT)*

God wants you to remember that He is good and gracious and cares about you with compassion.

“The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made” (PSALM 145:8–9).

God wants you to remember He promises to meet your needs.

“The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame” (ISAIAH 58:11).

God wants you not to live in a state of worry.

“Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (MATTHEW 6:34).

God wants you to trust Him when you’re worried—to have faith and not fear.

“When I am afraid, I put my trust in you” (PSALM 56:3).

God wants to be close to you when worries break your heart.

“The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed” (PSALM 34:18 NLT).

God wants you to look to Him when you’re filled with worry.

“When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy” (PSALM 94:19).

God wants you to look to His Word when you’re tempted to worry.

“As pressure and stress bear down on me, I find joy in your commands” (PSALM 119:143 NLT).

God wants you to give Him all your worries because He cares for you.

“Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you” (1 PETER 5:7 NLT).

God wants you to encourage others when they are worried.

“Encourage one another and build each other up” (1 THESSALONIANS 5:11).

God wants you to talk with Him about everything that’s worrying you, and thank Him for how He will use the trials in your life.

“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus” (PHILIPPIANS 4:6–7 NLT).

Elmer Thomas²¹
United States Senator from Oklahoma

He's age 15, long, and lanky. With just 118 pounds stretched over his six-foot, two-inch frame, Elmer Thomas is a prime target for being bullied. Despite being tall, he has no strength and proves to be no match for other boys who tease him unmercifully. Consumed by worry, Elmer is so self-conscious he dreads meeting anyone.

Growing up on a rural farm, Elmer secludes himself from most people except his family. Each and every day he laments his tall, thin, weak body. Intense worry, fear, and humiliation become his constant companions.

His mother recognizes her son's pain. She encourages him to get an education, knowing that his poor physical stamina will not sustain a life of hard physical labor.

To pay his own way to college, Elmer hunts and traps small animals in the winter and sells their hides in the spring. Taking these proceeds, he buys two small pigs and fattens them up before selling them at a profit. This money gets him to college and covers his room and board.

He wears ill-fitting hand-me-downs, including shoes loosely held together with stretched out elastic. He lingers in his room as much to avoid other students as to study. His deepest desire is to own clothes that fit—clothes that aren't as equally embarrassing as his gangly stature.

Ultimately, four events will give Elmer the needed confidence to begin erasing his feelings of inferiority.

1. Just eight weeks after Elmer enters college, he takes an exam which certifies him to teach third-grade. A certificate—good for only six months—is the first evidence someone other than his mother has faith in him.

2. A country school board in Happy Hollow, Indiana, hires him to teach—another affirmation of faith in him.
3. With his first paycheck, Elmer buys his first store-bought clothes—a suit he isn't ashamed to wear. Not even having a million dollars could replace the thrill of wearing his first suit.
4. The most pivotal moment of his life occurs at the Putnam County Fair. At the urging of his mother, Elmer enters a public-speaking contest.

The mere idea of speaking in public seems absurd. Elmer doesn't have the courage to talk to one person, let alone to a crowd! But his mother's faith inspires him.

Elmer memorizes flowery, flowing words and recites his speech at least a hundred times—to a captive audience of trees and cows. Indeed, his mother bursts with pride when Elmer receives first prize. As the crowd cheers, he can scarce believe it. The very boys who ridiculed him are now shouting for him. “We knew you could do it!” His mother wraps her arms around him and breaks down in tears.

Looking back, Elmer sees winning this contest as his turning point. Imagine the joy when the newspaper runs a front page story about Elmer, predicting a great future for the young man.

This victory gives Elmer tremendous courage to wipe away his worries. He continues his education, both studying and teaching. To cover his expenses, he waits tables, mows lawns, keeps books, hauls gravel, fixes furnaces, and in the summer farms the fields.

At the age of 19, he gives 28 speeches urging people to vote. The excitement of stumping for a candidate lights a fire in his own heart to enter politics. Studying law and public speaking, Elmer goes on to represent the university in debates, winning several speaking contests, and becoming editor-in-chief of both the college annual and the university paper.

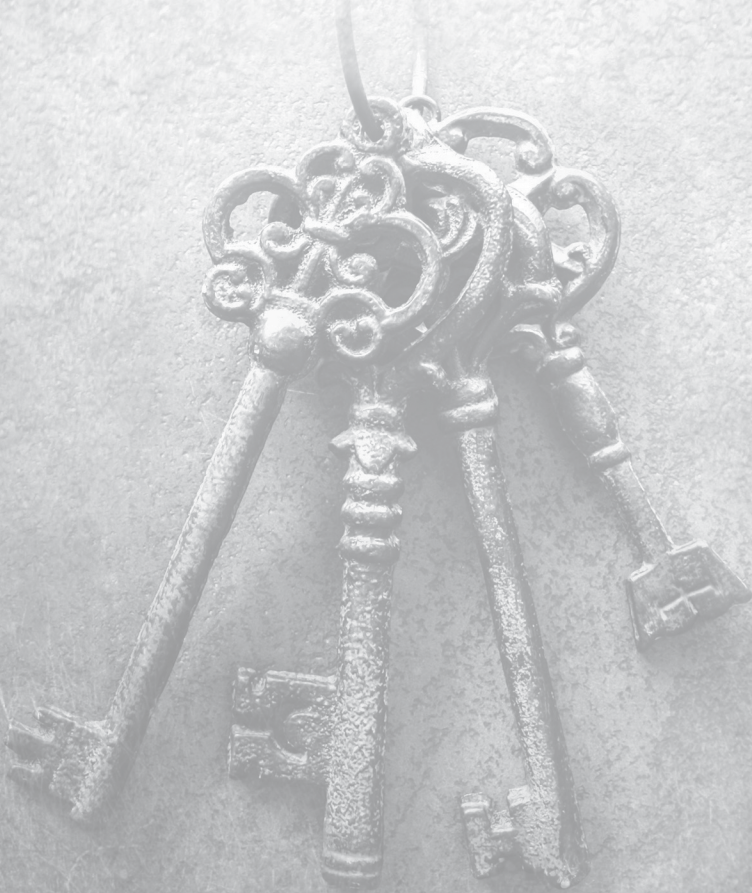
After receiving his degree, he ventures to Oklahoma where he opens a law office, serves in the State Senate, later in the U. S. Congress, and finally as a U.S. Senator for more than 20 years.

Elmer Thomas shares the story of conquering his worries, shyness, and feelings of inferiority in Dale Carnegie's book, *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* as a means of offering courage to anyone else struggling with the same issues. And, as a side note: Elmer Thomas, once so ashamed of his ill-fitting clothes, is later voted the best-dressed man in the United States Senate!

*"I tell you, do not worry about your life,
what you will eat; or about your body,
what you will wear.
... God clothes the grass of the field,
which is here today, and tomorrow
is thrown into the fire,
how much more will he clothe you."
(LUKE 12:22, 28)*



CHARACTERISTICS



*“Realize, the cycle
of worry is a
downward spiral,
spinning in circles
until anything good
is strangled by the
choking grasp
of ‘what-ifs.’”*



They feel insecure about so many things. He worries about his wife. She worries about the kids. He worries about his job. She worries about their friends. He worries about their health. She worries about their home.

He worries, “Did I leave the house unlocked?” She worries, “Did I forget to turn off the stove?” He worries about the bills, the schools, the car. She worries about how they look, how they dress, and who they impress. And at times, they even worry about being worried!

Whether it’s politics, popularity, or performance, people feel insecure under the weight of all their worry. If only they understood the love the Lord has for them, they could rest from their worries. For these words in Scripture reassure . . .

*“Let the beloved of the LORD rest secure in him,
for he shields him all day long,
and the one the LORD loves rests
between his shoulders.”*
(DEUTERONOMY 33:12)

What Characterizes Common Webs of Worry?

Worry can work its way into your life like an unwanted visitor. This intruder will fill your mind with endless echoes of “*What if . . . What if . . . What if?*”

Worry weaves webs that trap and tangle up your thoughts. It steals your sleep, stifles your joy, and preys on your peace.

The Bible recounts David’s plea for relief, mercy, and joy, followed by his acknowledgment of God’s provision.

*“Give me relief from my distress;
have mercy on me and hear my prayer. . . .
Fill my heart with joy . . .
In peace I will lie down and sleep,
for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety.”*
(PSALM 4:1, 7–8)

12 Mental Webs of Worry

Place a check mark (✓) beside the questions that you would answer Yes . . .

- Do you consistently worry over disappointing others?
- Do you fret over your future?
- Do you obsess over the possibility of bad news?
- Do you struggle to enjoy life, assuming something will go wrong?
- Do you become distraught when unjust people succeed?
- Do you become stressed out by thoughts of making a mistake?
- Do you obsess over thoughts of death or dying?
- Do you become preoccupied over every little thing?
- Do you become frequently distracted by worry?
- Do you become hyper-alert, constantly contemplating danger?
- Do you have difficulty concentrating?
- Do you have difficulty with remembering?

Those who experience continual worry can understand the words of Job,

“When I think about this, I am terrified.”
(JOB 21:6)

12 Physical Webs of Worry

Place a check mark (✓) beside the questions that you would answer Yes . . .

- Do you have difficulty sleeping?
- Do you have an increased/decreased appetite?
- Do you have changes in your blood pressure or blood sugar?
- Do you have muscle tension/backaches?
- Do you have a rapid heartbeat or dizziness?
- Do you experience shortness of breath?
- Do you find it hard to relax?
- Do you perspire excessively?
- Do you experience nausea/stomach discomfort?
- Do you often sigh heavily?
- Do you have frequent headaches?
- Do you experience increased fatigue?

Consider these words of wise King Solomon . . .

*“All their days their work is grief and pain;
even at night their minds do not rest.”*

(ECCLESIASTES 2:23)

12 Behavioral Webs of Worry

Place a check mark (✓) beside the questions that you would answer Yes . . .

- Do you find yourself being unusually fidgety?
- Do you engage in foot tapping or nail biting?

- Do you find yourself being irritable?
- Do you act jumpy and on edge?
- Do you think you are overly talkative?
- Do you notice your voice quivering?
- Do you often find yourself staring into space?
- Do you escape through alcohol, pornography, or other addictions?
- Do you frequently blame others for your actions or behaviors?
- Do you experience your body trembling or twitching unexpectedly?
- Do you slip back into childish ways of coping?
- Do you find it difficult to make decisions?

If you answered *Yes* to several of these questions, you will identify with these words from the psalmist:

*“Relieve the troubles of my heart
and free me from my anguish.”*
(PSALM 25:17)

12 Spiritual Webs of Worry

Place a check mark (✓) beside the questions that you would answer *Yes* . . .

- Do you worry about your spiritual destiny?
- Do you fear being judged by God?
- Do you worry about your salvation?
- Do you think you’re not doing enough for God?
- Do you question the goodness of God?
- Do you obsess over what will happen after you die?
- Do you have a reduced desire to pray or read Scripture?

- Do you feel bitter toward God when He seems silent?
- Do you have a diminished interest in church and other Christian gatherings?
- Do you blame God for letting bad things happen?
- Do you believe you need to be perfect to protect your salvation?
- Do you primarily put faith in yourself instead of in God?

If you answered *Yes* to any of these questions, listen to the words of Jesus . . .

*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,
and I will give you rest.*

*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.*

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

(MATTHEW 11:28–30)

What Characterizes Four Siblings on the Spectrum of Concern?

Let’s return to our example of four siblings—Connie, Travis, Susan, and Chris—who are dealing with the aftermath of their father’s cancer diagnosis. Dad is sick and Mom is focused on caregiving. The four brothers and sisters are dealing with the emotional upheaval of their father’s illness and also struggling with an additional issue—a downturn in the family business.

Dad built the business and much of its reputation rests on his involvement. His children now have the responsibility of providing for their employees, suppliers, and their individual families. So when facing possible layoffs to keep the business afloat, how do each of the siblings respond?

*“Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you;
he will never let the righteous be shaken.”*

(PSALM 55:22)

Carefree Connie:

- Feels on a typically shallow level
“I don’t really care what happens. I can’t do anything about it, so it doesn’t matter to me.”
- Feelings come across as apathetic
“If you want to worry, that’s your problem.”
- Appears uncaring, unconcerned
“I couldn’t care less.”
- Denies worrying
“I never worry about anything *ever*.”
- Avoids responsibilities
“It’s not my job to worry.”
- Remains silent about concerns
“What worry?”

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?’ The expert in the law replied, ‘The one who had mercy on him.’ Jesus told him, ‘Go and do likewise’” (LUKE 10:36–37).

Controlling Travis

- Feels out of control
“If I’m not in charge, I feel out of control.”
- Feels insecure
“I’m afraid of what will happen if I don’t take charge.”
- Fears losing control, may internalize worry
“If I don’t know what’s going on, I worry about what will happen.”
- Worry leads to excessive work, busyness
“The only way I don’t worry about something getting done is to oversee everything myself.”

- Rationalizes behavior as planning for possible outcomes
“I’m not worrying. I’m taking care of issues before they can become problems.”
- Plans or analyzes, remains hypervigilant
“I’m always watching to analyze every situation, think through every possible result, and try to plan ahead what I might do or what I want someone else to do.”

Jesus said, “*Martha, Martha . . . you are worried and upset about many things*” (LUKE 10:41).

Consumed Susan

- Feels irritable or depressed
“Worrying takes up so much energy, I feel angry, exhausted, and depressed.”
- Feels helpless, has a victim mentality
“If anything bad is going to happen, it will always happen to me.”
- Paralyzed by worry, feels “stuck”
“I worry all the time. I don’t know what to do, which makes me worry even more.”
- Imagination runs wild with possible outcomes, worst-case scenarios, and disproportionately catastrophic thinking that develops into panic
“When I hear about terrible things happening, I’m sure it will happen to me or someone I love.”
- Lacks sleep, develops depression, has a negative outlook
“I can’t stop worrying, so I don’t sleep. I’m left feeling depressed and I don’t have any hope.”
- Vents about worries constantly or experiences intense internalization
“When I try to talk to people about my worries, they don’t want to listen. No one cares about me anymore.”

“We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself” (2 CORINTHIANS 1:8).

Concerned Chris

- Feels appropriate care and concern
“This situation concerns me.”
- Sensitive and perceptive, aware of the needs of others
“I can see that my loved ones are struggling with a problem.”
- Prays regularly
“Before I do anything else, I’m going to pray.”
- Remembers and rests in God’s promises when worried
“I’m not going to worry because I know God is in control.”
- Takes proactive steps about legitimate concerns
“Based on what I read in the Bible, I know God would want me to do what I can to help.”
- Reaches out to others to offer help when concerned
“I will offer to come alongside my family and friends during this difficult time.”

“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair” (2 CORINTHIANS 4:8).

What Are Symptoms of Worry?²²

Few people acknowledge that they wrestle with worry. But to find someone who doesn’t deal with worry in some way or on some level would be extremely rare.

Many dedicated and conscientious people who appear to “have it all together” can be susceptible to worry and thus become overworked and overwhelmed. Some may say, “You have nothing to worry about—your life is great!” That statement may seem true on the surface, but worry is an invisible, internal mental mechanism that entraps. Yet the Bible says . . .

*“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous.
Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged,
for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”*
(JOSHUA 1:9)

If you habitually worry, you might justify your negative mind-set with these thoughts . . .

“I worry so nothing bad will happen.”

“I feel better when I worry.”

“I worry because I care!”

“Worrying gives me something to do.”

“Everyone worries. It’s not a big deal.”

“It’s the way God made me.”

“I can’t stop worrying.”

“I worry when I’m around negative people.”

“I don’t want to worry, but I can’t help it.”

“Worrying isn’t the worst thing to do.”

“Worrying doesn’t hurt anyone.”

“I worry that I’m the only one who worries.”

Joy Stealing

Question: “In what ways does worry steal joy?”

Answer: Trying to maintain control in situations and circumstances over which you have no control is exhausting. If your thoughts, your energy, your days, your nights, and your heart are filled with worry, where is there room for joy in your life? If you’re always worried about what’s yet to come, how can you experience joy in the here and now?

Jesus doesn't want you to live your life consumed by worrying about what might or might not happen. He promises to take care of you and meet all of your needs. When you empty your life of the woes of worry, you have ample space for the joy of the Lord—joy found in His presence, His promises, and His peace.

"I was very worried. But your comfort brought me joy."

(PSALM 94:19 NIV)

What Differentiates Destructive Worry from Constructive Concern?

Sometimes only a fine line seems to separate worry and concern. But these close cousins are polar opposites in terms of the results each brings. There is a world of difference between *destructive worry* and *constructive concern*.

Worry divides your mind and prevents productivity. Concern, on the other hand, is a legitimate response to situations that signal danger or a call to preventative action. But be careful—*unchecked concern* can quickly turn into a *runaway worry train!* Faith is needed to “put on the brakes” . . . faith in the Lord that He will provide what He promises. *Food to eat . . . water to drink . . . clothes to wear.* Jesus assures us . . .

"Your Father knows that you need them."

(LUKE 12:30)

Destructive Worry vs. Constructive Concern²³

Worry	Concern
Promotes inaction	Prompts action
Disrupts a plan	Puts a plan together
Feels out of control	Takes control where possible
Ignores or blocks reality	Demonstrates the ability to see reality
Distracts from the problem	Focuses on the problem
Shows self-absorbed, selfish tendencies	Feels empathy or compassion
Is destructive, unhealthy, misplaced	Is constructive, healthy, focused
Remains immature; stunts growth	Produces maturity and growth

Example of Destructive Worry vs. Constructive Concern

When we defend our tendency to worry as being only genuine concern, honest reflection requires that we take a close look at our hearts and minds.²⁴

Destructive Worry	Constructive Concern
“I’m so worried my child might drown—I’ll never let her near any body of water. That way I can keep her safe.”	“I’m so concerned my child might drown—I’ve made arrangements for her to take swimming lessons so I can help her be safe.”
Paralyzes	Mobilizes
Decreases creativity	Increases creativity
Prevents initiative	Promotes initiative
Results in anxious fretting	Results in calm focusing
Attempts to control the future	Attempts to improve the future

Fears the worst	Hopes for the best
Appears negative to others	Appears positive to others
Distracts the mind from what is important	Directs the mind to what is important

If you find your initial *concern* has turned into consuming worry, change your perspective . . . turn from a temporal focus on things of this world to an eternal focus on what God values in heaven. As Colossians 3:2 says, “*Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*” And when you find yourself being concerned about a situation or circumstance you do not know how to handle, remember that you can act on this promise:

“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”

(JAMES 1:5)

What Is the Worry Inventory Checklist?

Most people try to avoid unpleasant circumstances by physically evading them or mentally ignoring them.

At times, we need to directly confront what we find disturbing or uncomfortable. Clearly, the Lord wants to lead us into a greater level of trust in Him. When we faithfully walk the path the Lord has set before us, we need not fear for He is with us.

*“Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”*

(PSALM 23:4)

Worry Inventory Checklist²⁵

Assess the following list to determine if any of these situations, circumstances, or places trigger worry in you. Notice not only those that lead specifically to worry, but also those that you tend to avoid.

Place a check mark (✓) beside those that cause you to worry and underline those that you specifically try to avoid.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Abilities | <input type="checkbox"/> Parents |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anger of others | <input type="checkbox"/> Paying bills |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appearing nervous | <input type="checkbox"/> Politics |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Being in charge | <input type="checkbox"/> Rejection |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Children | <input type="checkbox"/> Reputation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Confronting people | <input type="checkbox"/> Retirement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Crime | <input type="checkbox"/> Safety |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Crowds | <input type="checkbox"/> School |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Death | <input type="checkbox"/> Sleep |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dental or doctor visits | <input type="checkbox"/> Social media |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disabilities | <input type="checkbox"/> Speaking in public |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disapproval of others | <input type="checkbox"/> Stress |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Driving | <input type="checkbox"/> Talking on the telephone |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Economy | <input type="checkbox"/> Terrorism |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Employment | <input type="checkbox"/> Tests |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Failure | <input type="checkbox"/> Time |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flying | <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health issues | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Money | <input type="checkbox"/> War |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loss of control | <input type="checkbox"/> Weather |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marriage | <input type="checkbox"/> Weight |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Meeting new people | <input type="checkbox"/> Work |

Worry can be well hidden, but examining and identifying the elements that make you worry are the first steps in addressing and overcoming it. Even when fighting fearsome foes, the Lord promises to be with us and provide a rescue.

*“They will fight against you but will not overcome you,
for I am with you and will rescue you,’ declares the LORD.”*

(JEREMIAH 1:19)

What Ways Do We Wrestle with Worry?

When you wrestle with worry, you sometimes find “helpful” people who will give you (often unsolicited) advice on how you can stop worrying:²⁶

“Be more positive.”

“Everything will turn out okay.”

“Try to get your mind off of it.”

“You have nothing to worry about.”

“You need to believe in yourself.”

“Just stop worrying!”

Suggestions like these aren’t exactly helpful! Rather than stop our worrying, these type of statements reinforce the thought that we need to worry so we can eliminate the threat of whatever we worry about.

Jesus asks a rhetorical question after pointing out the absurdity in “*this very little thing*” (that you can’t make yourself taller) . . .

*“Since you cannot do this very little thing,
why do you worry about the rest?”*

(LUKE 12:26)

Worrisome Ways We Wrestle with Worry

Worry is a troubling taskmaster. Some of the counterproductive ways in which we wrestle with worry include:²⁷

Seeking reassurance

- You worry about your health, so you ask: “Does this brown spot look like cancer?”
- You worry about your relationships, so you ask: “Are you getting tired of me?”
- You worry about your appearance, so you ask: “Does this look good on me?”

“The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 SAMUEL 16:7).

Trying to stop worrying thoughts

- You try to stop worrying thoughts by exercising, but they keep coming back.
- You try to stop worrying thoughts by snapping a rubber band on your wrist, but it doesn’t help.
- You try to stop worrying thoughts by closing your eyes and *not* thinking about them, but then that’s all you can think about.

“My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught” (PSALM 55:2).

Collecting information (confirming negative thoughts, finding trends that don’t exist, overestimating risks, gathering information that isn’t relevant)

- You worry about getting a certain disease, so you research everything you can find on the Internet.
- You worry about your retirement, so you obsess over watching the stock market. Every dip makes you worry more and every gain makes you wait for the next dip.
- You worry about flying so you focus on every plane crash, not taking into account every safe flight.

“With much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief” (ECCLESIASTES 1:18).

Checking over and over and over

- You worry about whether or not you locked your front door before you went to bed, so you check it every night.

- You worry that you’ve missed an important call, so you check your voicemail repeatedly and even call yourself to make sure your voicemail is working.
- You worry about getting older, so you check yourself in the mirror constantly. Not satisfied with what you see, you decide to stay home rather than go out with friends.

“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts”
(PSALM 139:23).

Avoiding discomfort

- You worry about what you will owe on your taxes, so you put off filing as long as you can.
- You worry you might have a disease, so you don’t go to the doctor to get checked out.
- You worry that you’ll be rejected, so you avoid making eye contact.

“For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own” (1 SAMUEL 12:22).

Numbing yourself with food, alcohol, or drugs

- You worry about being alone, so you overeat and binge watch TV.
- You worry about not being able to sleep, so you abuse medication regularly.
- You worry about your job, so you have a few drinks to relax.

“Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise”
(PROVERBS 20:1).

Overpreparing yourself

- You worry about taking a test, so you stay up all night restudying what you’ve already learned.
- You worry about forgetting something when you pack, so you go over and over your list and check and recheck your suitcase.
- You worry about giving a presentation at work, so you overprepare every single point.

“You can make many plans, but the LORD’s purpose will prevail” (PROVERBS 19:21 NLT).

Using safety behaviors

- You worry about giving a speech, so you read your notes and don't engage your audience.
- You worry about calling attention to yourself, so you say very little and speak in a low volume.
- You worry about driving across bridges, so you hold your breath when you do.

"The waters closed over my head, and I thought I was about to perish"
(LAMENTATIONS 3:54).

Striving to make a good impression

- You worry about saying the wrong thing, so you don't speak up in conversations.
- You worry about what other people are thinking about you, so you struggle to join a group.
- You worry about other people liking you, so you overshare, overhelp, and overwhelm others.

"Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ" (GALATIANS 1:10).

Thinking about it over and over

- You worry about having offended someone with something you said, so you repeat the conversation over and over in your mind.
- You worry about something you intended to do, but didn't (like invite a coworker to lunch) and can't stop thinking about your broken promise.
- You worry about missing a past family event, so you are reluctant to go to a future event because your prior absence might be discussed.

"One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead"
(PHILIPPIANS 3:13).

Demanding certainty

- You worry that your spouse might be having an affair, so you demand an accounting for every minute of the day.

- You worry about how well you’ve done an assignment, so you ask multiple people to check your work before it is due.
- You worry about family members traveling, so you check and recheck the weather, the political climate, and the crime statistics in the area to be certain they will be safe.

“In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety”
(PSALM 4:8).

Refusing to accept that your worries are often irrational thoughts.

- You worry, but don’t recognize your worries as unlikely to occur.
- You worry, but don’t acknowledge that pain in the past has led you to worry today.
- You worry, but don’t see that worrying is hurting you and those around you.

“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God” (PSALM 20:7).

Worried Christian

Question: “I worry all the time. Does this mean I’m not a good Christian?”

Answer: God doesn’t qualify or quantify your status as a Christian. While it’s true that God wants you to continue to build and develop trust in Him, He remains patient and faithful to walk with you through the ups and downs of your life.

You may experience anxiety at the thought of speaking in public, or face an irrational fear of snow even if you live in a desert. You may not have the boldness of Daniel facing the lions’ den or his three friends entering the fiery furnace. But know this: Whatever God calls you to do, He will equip you to do it. The Bible says, *“The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it”* (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

God's Word tells us that even Jesus was "*deeply distressed and troubled . . . overwhelmed with sorrow*" as He was praying in the garden of Gethsemane before His arrest and betrayal leading to His death on the cross.

Feeling anxious or struggling with worry doesn't make you an inferior Christian. It simply means you are human.²⁸

Still, God loves you and wants you to live the best life possible, which involves depending on Him for provision, seeking His will, following His instructions, and trusting His character and faithfulness.

Remember this truth about God:

*"For great is your love, reaching to the heavens;
your faithfulness reaches to the skies."*

(PSALM 57:10)

What Is the "What-If" Cycle of Worry?

When Jesus speaks from a boat on the lake to the crowds gathered around Him, He tells a parable. Today, some recognize the story in Matthew 13 as the "Parable of the Seeds," but it's actually known as the "Parable of the Sower." The seeds are incidental to the story. *Where* the seeds are sown by the sower is the central message of the story.

A farmer scatters seed and some falls along the path (but birds eat the seed). Some seeds fall into rocky soil (where shoots come up, but are scorched by the sun in the shallow soil). Some seed falls among the thorns (which eventually chokes the very life from the plants). But some seed falls on good soil (which yields a bountiful crop).

Jesus explains the meaning within the parable: His message about the kingdom of God is sown in the world: (1) When people don't understand, the enemy of their souls snatches away what is sown in their hearts like the birds snatching seed along the path. (2) The seed on rocky ground represents those who hear the Word of God and immediately accept it with joy. But with no sustaining roots, it lasts only a short while before trouble takes its toll. (3) The seed on good soil refers to those who hear God's Word and understand it.

Finally, (4) the seed among the thorns represents the Word choked by the worries of life . . .

*“The seed falling among the thorns refers
to someone who hears the word,
but the worries of this life . . .
choke the word, making it unfruitful.”*
(MATTHEW 13:22)

The Worry Cycle²⁹

Realize, the cycle of worry is a downward spiral, spinning in circles until anything good is strangled by the choking grasp of “what-ifs.” A fragment of fear starts the cycle of worry.

Imagine, your family plans a trip to the beach. You hear on the news that a shark has been sighted near your destination. Soon, the worry cycle starts . . .

- 1. If a shark has been sighted,** there must be more than one.
- 2. If there's more than one shark,** the odds are we will see one while we're at the beach.
- 3. If we don't see a shark,** how many more are there that we cannot see?
- 4. If there are sharks we cannot see,** then we can't be safe in the water.

5. **If we're not safe in the water**, we'll get too hot on the sand.
6. **If we're too hot on the sand**, we could suffer a heatstroke.
7. **If we could suffer a heatstroke on the beach**, we should probably just stay in our room.
8. **If we're going to stay in our room**, what's the point of going to the beach? Maybe we should just stay home! Then we don't have to worry about a plane crash, a car wreck, the airlines losing our luggage, our identities being stolen, getting food poisoning . . . and especially not being eaten by a shark!

No, the answer to stopping the “what-if” cycle of worry is to refuse to get on that not-so-merry-go-round in the first place. When you trust God, He invites you to trust Him with everything.

*“Those who know your name trust in you,
for you, LORD, have never forsaken
those who seek you.”*

(PSALM 9:10)

John D. Rockefeller, Sr.³⁰
American Oil Magnate & Philanthropist

At age 23, John D. Rockefeller pursues success as his highest priority in life. Nothing makes him happier than a good bargain. At age 33, he amasses his first million dollars, then by age 43, he stands at the helm of the largest monopoly in the world—the great Standard Oil Company. But by age 53, his body is wrecked by worry.

One biographer said he looked like a mummy at this age. Strange stomach issues leave him almost hairless—including losing his eyelashes and eyebrows. His looks are so startling, he wears a skullcap then silver toupees the rest of his life.

The man who once had an iron constitution, strong shoulders, and a swift gait now suffers with drooping shoulders and shuffling feet. Another biographer notes, “The ceaseless work, the endless worry, the streams of abuse, the sleepless nights, and the lack of exercise and rest” take their toll, bringing Rockefeller to his knees. His skin looks like parchment paper stretched across bones. Imagine, the richest man in the world subsisting on a diet of milk and a few crackers.

John D. has no time for rest, recreation, or relaxation. In his words, “I never placed my head upon the pillow at night without reminding myself that my success might be only temporary.” The “what-ifs” of worry wreak havoc with his health.

He confides in a neighbor that he “wanted to be loved,” yet few people like him because his demeanor is cold and suspicious. While Rockefeller’s colleagues and staff live in mortal fear of the man, he himself is afraid of them.

His private life collapses. Books tell tales of the robber-baron business, secret rebates, and the ruthless ruin of

competitors. In Pennsylvania oil fields, John D. Rockefeller becomes a most despised man. He receives threatening letters and hires bodyguards for protection.

Stacking hatred on top of worry leads to severe illness. Rockefeller attempts to hide his poor health, but physical symptoms of worry and collapse, like insomnia and indigestion, become evident to all. Finally, doctors issue the inevitable ultimatum: either choose your work to make money with its worries and woes or choose your very life—he must retire or die.

Doctors give him three rules, which he will follow the rest of his life.

1. Avoid worry—never worry about anything, under any circumstance.
2. Relax, and take plenty of mild exercise outside.
3. Watch your diet. Stop eating while you're still a little hungry.

Following these rules saves his life. In his retirement, he learns to play golf, chat with neighbors, garden, play games and sing songs. But something else changes. His nighttime insomnia and solitary activities give him ample opportunity to reflect on his life and think about others. Rather than focusing on how much money he can accumulate, he wonders what joy that money might offer others.

Soon Rockefeller begins to give money away to Christian causes and humanitarian needs. He hears of a college's impending foreclosure and pours millions into that school (now the University of Chicago). He supports black education through Tuskegee College. When a doctor announces, "Fifty cents' worth of medicine will cure . . . this disease which ravages the south" Rockefeller gives to fight hookworm. He establishes the Rockefeller Foundation and fights diseases all over the world, including cholera which had been claiming countless lives.

Never before has anyone undertaken philanthropy on the same scale as the Rockefeller Foundation with research funded, colleges endowed, and pioneers making medical discoveries. Thanks to John D. Rockefeller, Sr., medicines like penicillin and treatment for spinal meningitis, malaria, tuberculosis, influenza and diphtheria and many other diseases are available throughout the world today.

So what happens when John D. starts giving away his riches? He indeed finds peace of mind and fulfillment. The change is so profound, he stops worrying altogether. No longer does he lose sleep—even when his corporation is ordered to pay the heaviest fine in history for violating antitrust laws. His lawyers call to share the negative news, to their surprise he simply replies, “Don’t worry . . . I intend to get a night’s sleep. And don’t let it bother you either.”

Conquering worry took time, but being relieved of the heavy weight of worry also gives John D. more precious time. Although once near death at age 53, he lives to the ripe old age of 98!

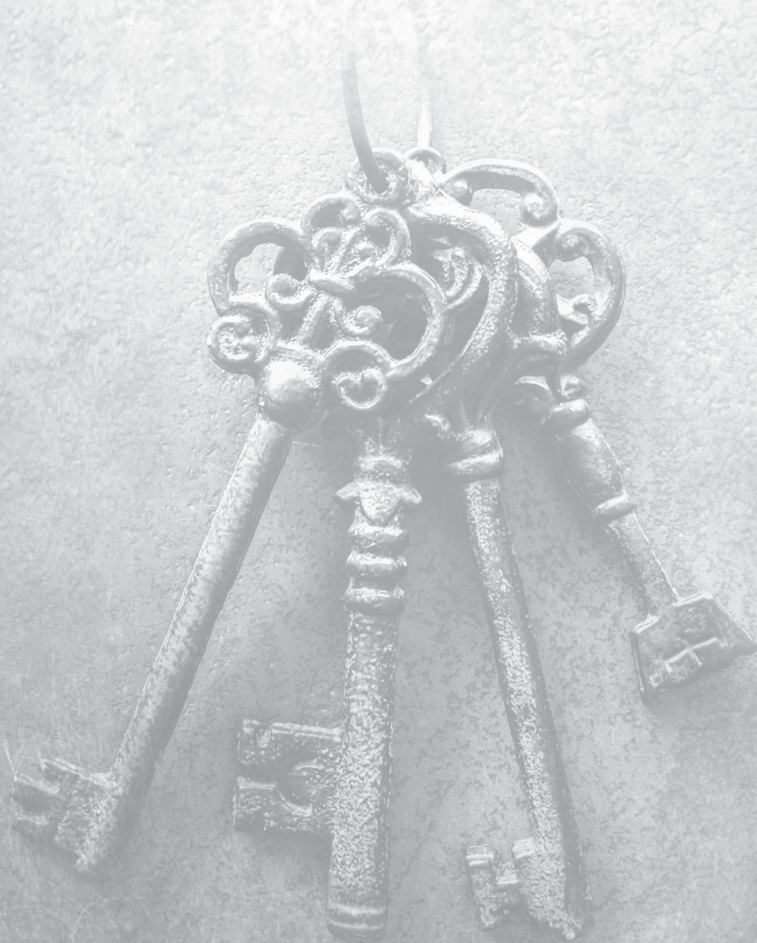
Rockefeller reads the Bible daily, attends prayer meetings twice weekly, and leads a Bible study with his wife. He not only tithes, but continues to give more and more of his money to responsible charitable causes. By the time he is 45 years old, he is giving \$100,000 per year. At age 53, he donates \$1,000,000 per year, and at 80, he is giving \$138 million. His philosophy of giving is founded on biblical principles such as “*Give, and it will be given to you*” (Luke 6:38).

With Rockefeller’s philanthropy, churches, schools, and hospitals are built and missionaries supported with his desire to bring the message of Christ to the whole world. Rockefeller was indeed a blessed man—not blessed because of the money he received, but because of the money he gave. As Jesus said,

"It is more blessed to give than to receive."
(ACTS 20:35)



CAUSES



*“God has a vested
interest in your
well-being because
He made you
and He loves you.”*



Have you ever heard the term *worrywart*? The first common use was applied to an eight-year-old boy in a comic strip titled, “Out Our Way,” which ran from 1922 to 1977.³¹ Ironically, the artist’s comic strip character, *Worry Wart*, caused others to worry while he himself wasn’t really a worrier.³²

Another variation of the word is spelled *worrywort* and appears to be related to the word *wort*—a type of plant possibly used to treat diseases or depression and other ailments.³³

The meaning for *Worry Wart* might relate to the long-held belief (a myth) that warts are caused by worry and, consequently, the term is currently used as a metaphor for someone who worries incessantly.

However, the words of Jesus should be taken literally as a deterrent to worry . . .

*“Can any one of you by worrying add
a single hour to your life?”*

(MATTHEW 6:27)

What Are the Core Causes of Worry?

Do you catch yourself worrying over things you cannot control, and wonder *why* you worry? Realize, worry is . . .

Not an *inherited weakness* (“My mom was a worrier.”)

Not a *humorous habit* (“Oh, I’m just a worrywart!”)

Not a *justifiable excuse* for prideful perfectionism (“Somebody has to worry about doing it right.”)

From the Lord’s perspective—since Jesus says, “Don’t worry”—you need to see worry as a choice: either worry or live by faith in Him. Faith means taking God at His word and totally trusting what He says.

Think back to when Jesus appeared before His disciples by walking on water toward their boat (Matthew 14:22-33). Peter asked Jesus to summon him, and Jesus said to Peter, “Come” (Matthew 14:29). Miraculously, Peter began walking on the water. But when he took his eyes off Jesus, he looked down, became afraid, and then began to sink. Peter cried out, “*Lord, save me!*”

“Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him.

‘You of little faith,’ he said, ‘why did you doubt?’”

(MATTHEW 14:31)

If you, like Peter, struggle with doubting God, then it’s time to identify the source of your struggle and the cause of your worry and then to try God’s solution.

The Two Core Causes of Worry

- 1. Disbelief:** You choose *not to believe* what Jesus literally says.

You really *don’t believe* God when He says He will provide all that you need.

“Despite all the miraculous signs Jesus had done, most of the people still did not believe in him” (JOHN 12:37 NLT).

Even when followers walked and talked with Jesus who performed miracle after miracle, most of the onlookers still did not take Him at face value. They did not believe that what Jesus told them about Himself was the absolute truth. When we worry, are we not doing the same?

- 2. Disobedience:** You choose *not to obey* what Jesus literally says.

You are choosing to be *disobedient* when you worry about what God has promised to provide.

Jesus says, “*I [Jesus] 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?*” (MATTHEW 6:25).

Jesus isn’t making a mere suggestion—He’s stating a command. When God commands us to do something and we refuse, we are choosing to disobey Him. This disobedience is a sin.

God's Two-Step Solution to Your Worry

1. **Belief:** Choose to *believe* what Jesus literally says.

Stop doubting and believe that God will meet all your needs (not all your “wants,” but all your needs).

“[Jesus] said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe’” (JOHN 20:27).

We, like doubting Thomas, would do well to stop doubting. God will provide, God will protect, God will prove faithful in our lives.

2. **Obedience:** Choose to *obey* what Jesus literally says.

Stop struggling with worry and allow the Lord to meet your needs.

“The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail” (ISAIAH 58:11).

Obedience and faith go hand in hand. The best way to build faith and grow in obedience is by reading the Word of God . . . and letting it read you (let the Bible show you where you need to change). As you begin to read and personalize Scripture, your faith in God will increase and your worry will begin to decrease.

The Side-Effects of Your Worry vs. God's Solution to Your Worry

Side-effect: Destruction—Worry destroys your physical body, which is the *“temple of the Holy Spirit”* (1 Corinthians 6:19). It can bring about a host of physical ailments, such as high blood pressure, heart trouble, headaches, colds, and stomach disorders.⁵⁴

God's solution: Instruction—You need to study God's Word, learn how He views your body, and discover His principles for living that will safeguard your body and enhance your health.

“Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies” (1 CORINTHIANS 6:19–20).

Side-effect: Dishonor—Worry shifts the focus of attention from the all-sufficient power of Christ to your human insufficiency and insecurity. Ultimately, worry can undermine your Christian witness by presenting God as ineffective or indifferent and unworthy of praise.

God's solution: Honor—You need to make it your goal to honor God by trusting in His promises and helping others do the same.

“Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (MATTHEW 5:16).

The Bible says . . .

*“My [Jesus'] grace is sufficient for you,
for my power is made perfect in weakness.’
Therefore I [Paul] will boast all the more gladly
about my weaknesses, so that
Christ's power may rest on me.”
(2 CORINTHIANS 12:9)*

What Choices Can Cause Worry?

As we try to make sense of our emotional tensions (our worries), we are tempted to look “out there” to identify things happening around us that create and perpetuate worry.

The tensions and worries we often experience are *not* due to a “hostile” environment, but rather to our own misguided choices.

*“Don't you realize that you become the slave
of whatever you choose to obey?
You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death,
or you can choose to obey God,
which leads to righteous living.”
(ROMANS 6:16 NLT)*

For instance, do you . . .

Believe life would be virtually stress-free if there was only more money in the bank, even though limited income is not necessarily what causes cash flow problems?

Find yourself committing to too many activities, overloading your schedule, and complicating your life and the lives of those around you?

Go too far in serving your kids' needs—to the extent that you inadvertently teach them to be self-indulgent and disrespectful of your needs and limitations as a parent?

Fail to take care of your own physical needs by not getting adequate sleep, not eating balanced meals, not exercising regularly, and not balancing busyness and rest?

Allow your life to be dominated by people who are not good for you—people who exert a negative influence, drain your emotional energy, or stir up conflict?

Tend to put off responsibilities you find difficult or unpleasant to the point that they cause unwanted repercussions?

Letting go of worry begins by examining your own life honestly and openly before the Lord.

*“Test me, LORD, and try me,
examine my heart and my mind.”
(PSALM 26:2)*

What Other Factors Contribute to Worry?

Are any of these statements true about you?

“Sometimes I lie awake at night worrying about something that happened during the day.”

“When I make a mistake at work, I am far more concerned about it than my coworkers are.”

“Going to the doctor always makes me uneasy because of what the exam might reveal.”

If your answer is Yes, take to heart the following scripture:

*“You will keep in perfect peace those
whose minds are steadfast,
because they trust in you.”*

(ISAIAH 26:3)

Throughout the day, there are many opportunities to worry. But have you ever stopped to think about what prompts you to worry? Besides trials (specific to you), life (as a whole), and daily news reports (from around the world), several other factors contribute to worry. These include:³⁵

Biology/Genetics—These worriers could be “wired” to worry.

- Some people are born with a predisposition to anxiety (worry is often tied to anxiety). They have a genetic makeup (related to encoded personality traits) that brings out the worrier in them.
- In 2007, Yale researchers identified a gene variation associated with chronic worrying. The “worry gene” as it’s called, is the result of a genetic mutation that predicts a person’s tendency to “overthink” or obsess over negative thoughts.³⁶
- Areas of the brain are linked along a circuit. The way the brain is wired regulates how someone responds to danger or threats. In some, more than the norm, this circuitry is more activated causing more anxiety and frustration.³⁷

Life Circumstances—These worriers have learned over time how to worry in response to their unpredictable, powerless environments.

- Difficult life experiences can bring worry to our lives. They make us more aware of how uncertain everyday life is and shake our confidence. (Example: The out-of-control events of September 11th, 2001 heightened worry in almost everyone.)
- Negative life experiences increase our feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness. The more we experience these feelings and don't know what to do with them, the easier it is to worry. (Example: You grew up in an alcoholic or violent family where unpredictability was the norm, so you remain hypervigilant and alert for the possibility of trouble.)
- Worry is a way to feel in control or avoid the reality of the present in a situation that feels unstable. Out-of-control situations often trigger worry.

Traumatic Experiences—These worriers experienced unresolved trauma which can trigger unrelenting worry.

- Loss that is unexpected, traumatic, or difficult can lead to future worry if not grieved or handled well. The emotions and thoughts associated with loss must be given full expression and worked through to be fully grieved.
- The grieving process leads to acceptance. This takes time and cannot be hurried. Moving through pain, rather than avoiding it, brings closure.
- We cannot prevent all traumatic events from happening, but we can control how we respond to those memories mentally and emotionally.

Unfortunately, trauma, genetics, and difficult life experiences can become the foundation on which some people build a life of worry. We can cling to worry and choose to see the world in a worried way, or we can let God transform our thinking into a willing walk of faith.

*“Do not conform to the pattern of this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.
Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is
—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

(ROMANS 12:2)

Why Do Some People Struggle with Worry?

Coping with their father’s illness and its economic impact on the family business leaves our four siblings wading into deeper waters. Medical expenses mount and financial fears soar. How will they manage to navigate this uncharted territory? Again, each responds to these storms in their lives in different ways.

*“This is a trustworthy saying.
And I want you to stress these things,
so that those who have trusted in God
may be careful to devote themselves
to doing what is good.
These things are excellent
and profitable for everyone.”*

(TITUS 3:8)

Carefree Connie

- Lives so much in the present that she neglects learning from the past and responsibly planning for the future
“Dad’s mother had cancer and I know plenty of people who have cancer. Dad will be fine.”
- Focuses on selfish desires or doing what she thinks is right
“I’ve still got a job and am bringing home a paycheck, so I’m fine.”
- Lacks conviction that she has no worries, cares, or concerns
“I’m not concerned about the future and I’m not worried at all about Dad.”

“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!”
(1 CORINTHIANS 10:12).

Controlling Travis

- Suppresses unresolved problems in the past, seeks to control the future so present opportunities are missed
“Even though my grandmother had cancer, I’ve done the research and Dad is getting the best medical care. I’ll keep the business afloat for when he returns to work.”
- Overcompensates for others’ dysfunction, suffers from lack of joy
“My brother and sisters aren’t much help, so I’ve got to hold the business and our family together.”
- Needs to control situations and circumstances, experiences exhaustion
“It doesn’t matter how tired I am. I can manage the business and its finances by myself, because that’s the only way I know things are getting done.”

“Unless the LORD builds a house, the work of the builders is wasted. It is useless for you to work so hard from early morning until late at night, anxiously working for food to eat; for God gives rest to his loved ones” (PSALM 127:1–2 NLT).

Consumed Susan

- Extreme fear in the past overwhelms the present and creates dread for the future
“Cancer took everything my grandmother had—her life, her money, her family—and now it’s going to take Dad, too.”
- Struggles with potential problems as much as actual issues, lacks coping skills and support system
“If the business goes under, then Mom and Dad can’t afford his treatment. We’ll all go bankrupt.”
- Suffers from a lack of sleep, depression, and exhausts self and others
“I spend every day and every night worrying. No one takes this as seriously as I do.”

“Now you too have proved to be of no help; you see something dreadful and are afraid” (JOB 6:21).

Concerned Chris

- Learns from the past, lives in the present, plans appropriately for the future
“Even though my grandmother passed away from cancer, God may have a different path for Dad. We’ll keep praying and walking along with him, one day at a time.”
- Can develop a tendency to care too much, more focused on others rather than self
“I wish there was more I could do for Mom and Dad, to take some of this burden from them.”
- Relies on God and eager to help others, but might ignore self-care or reaching out to others for help
“I’ll keep trusting God for Dad, Mom, the business, and all of our needs.”

“The LORD is my strength and shield. I trust him with all my heart. He helps me, and my heart is filled with joy” (PSALM 28:7 NLT).

Stress and Worry

Question: “What is the relationship between stress and worry?”

Answer: Stress and worry are closely related, but they are not the same.

- Stress is a natural response to a challenge. It is normal and, to some extent, a necessary part of life. Stress can be triggered by an event that makes you feel nervous, angry, or frustrated. But not all stress is bad. There’s a good stress, too. For a student, the moderate stress of an exam typically provides motivation to study. Likewise, with no homework to turn in and no regular tests to take, many students would be unmotivated to study.

- Worry is a reaction to stress. If a student thinks he or she can't handle a particular challenge (such as giving a speech in class), it adds pressure and he or she begins to feel out of control and, ultimately, becomes worried and afraid. Worry is like being caught in a spiral—stressful elements churn around and around in your mind making it very difficult, if not impossible, to sort out.
- Stress and worry share many of the same physical symptoms: fatigue, muscle tension, increased heartbeat, mood swings, difficulty concentrating or making decisions, a change in appetite, and trouble sleeping.
- With stress, you generally know what you're dealing with—a looming deadline, bills, a relationship issue. Whereas with worry you're less likely to be aware of what you're actually anxious about and, thus, your reaction becomes the problem.
- Stress and worry can both lead to *unrest*. And the enemy wants to use the *unrest* to *arrest* you—to hold you captive to the worries and stresses of life.

But God's plan—His path for both stress and worry—leads not to painful unrest, but rather to peaceful rest. The enemy wants to overwhelm you with unrest, but the Lord wants you to overcome with His rest. If you want to find peace in times of stress or worry, come to the Lord and find the rest you're looking for in Him.

*“Let me teach you, because
I am humble and gentle at heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.”*

(MATTHEW 11:29 NLT)

Why Do We Worry?

We can list dozens of reasons why we worry. Like “Chicken Little,” a character in a folktale with a moral message (known in parts of the world as “Henny Penny”), we can banty about the countryside crying out, “The sky is falling! The sky is falling!” And all because an acorn or a leaf once fell on our head.

How much of our worry directly relates to an unlikely or even non-existent threat? How often do we wrestle with, “I wonder what . . . ,” and wile away our time with the “what-ifs” of life? But consider one more “what-if” question: What if our worry directly relates to a lack of trust in God?

Even after seeing Jesus perform miracle after miracle, the disciples wonder and worry for their safety as they sail into the midst of a great windstorm. While Jesus sleeps in the boat’s stern, the wind and waves threaten to sink the boat. But when the disciples wake Jesus, crying out, “*Teacher, don’t you care . . . ?*” (Mark 4:38), He calms the troubled sea . . . and their troubled hearts, saying, “*Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?*” (Mark 4:40).

God’s Word reminds us . . .

*“Those who know your name trust in you,
for you, LORD, have never forsaken
those who seek you.”*

(PSALM 9:10)

Distrust (an acrostic for the word DISTRUST)

Examine some of the reasons why we worry:

D—Distorted thinking

Trusting God to save you for eternity but not trusting that He will meet your everyday needs in a way that will accomplish His purposes for your life.

“Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (MATTHEW 7:9-11).

I—Illusion of control

Thinking that by mentally rearranging future events you can control the outcome.

“Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that’” (JAMES 4:13-15).

S—Super responsibility

Having a burdened sense of duty to make every area of your life perfect, not having learned to set your hope on the grace of God.

“With minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 PETER 1:13).

T—Transferred guilt

Allowing false guilt to surface as worry in other areas instead of confronting areas of real sin in your life.

“When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD’—and you forgave the guilt of my sin” (PSALM 32:3-5).

R—Runaway emotions

Letting worry or fear have full control when you face difficulties instead of choosing to respond in the way Scripture teaches.

“I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears”
(PSALM 34:4).

U—Unhealthy need

Feeling a desperate need to have the approval of others and worrying about how you look and how you present yourself, rather than seeking to please God.

“Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ” (GALATIANS 1:10).

S—Spiritual starvation

Trying to live on spiritual nourishment gleaned in the past, but starving for lack of a present spiritual intimacy with God.

“Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. . . . The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing” (PSALM 34:8, 10).

T—Trampled self-image

Lacking a sense of your value to God and His thoughts toward you, thus feeling powerless to cope with problems.

“How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand—when I awake, I am still with you” (PSALM 139:17–18).

Why Do We Rationalize Worry?

In their book, *Why Worry? Conquering a Common Inclination*, authors James R. Beck and David T. Moore say, “Worry is a small trickle of fear that meanders through the mind until it cuts a channel into which all other thoughts are drained.”³⁸ What a perfect picture of worry!

Much of our thinking involves what we say in our heads but never speak aloud. Thus, many of our worry patterns are based on common misbeliefs or assumptions that simply are not true. So, if you want to conquer the worry habit, you must learn to monitor these unspoken voices, silencing them with the truth.

To find freedom from your worry, repeat in your mind these words of Jesus:

“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

(JOHN 8:32)

Rationalizations of Worriers

Common rationalizations worriers use to justify their anxiousness include:³⁹

1. Rationalization: “I feel sure that what I’m worried about will happen.”

The Truth: “Most of what we worry about rarely or never happens.”

God’s Truth: *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take”* (PROVERBS 3:5–6 NLT).

2. Rationalization: “It makes sense to worry because terrible things happen to me all the time.”

The Truth: “Looking back, I can see that terrible things have rarely happened to me.”

God’s Truth: *“Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD himself, is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation”* (ISAIAH 12:2).

3. Rationalization: “Worry helps to prepare me for what might happen.”

The Truth: “The future is in God’s hands, so there’s no reason for me to worry about this.”

God's Truth: *"Commit everything you do to the LORD. Trust him, and he will help you"* (PSALM 37:5 NLT).

4. Rationalization: "If I worry about this, then maybe I can keep it from happening."

The Truth: "I do not control the future, God does, and I can trust His plan for my life."

God's Truth: *"'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'"* (JEREMIAH 29:11).

5. Rationalization: "Worrying is better than doing nothing about it."

The Truth: "Spending inordinate amounts of time worrying accomplishes nothing."

God's Truth: *"Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge"* (PSALM 62:8).

What Is the Root Cause of Excessive Worry?

When the Israelites made their escape after fleeing from Egypt, they experienced fear. First, they feared Pharaoh's army in hot pursuit. However, the Lord swept the Egyptians into the sea after miraculously parting the waters for the Israelites to pass.

The Israelites trusted the Lord briefly before their next challenge. They went from the abundance of water that saved them from Pharaoh to traveling for three days with no water to quench their thirst. The Israelites came to a place with bitter water and, again, the Lord miraculously provided for them by making the water fit to drink.

Next their stomachs growled with hunger while their words grumbled against the Lord. Tasting freedom wasn't enough to sustain them, so they feared starving in the desert. Once again, the Lord miraculously provided for them with bread from heaven—manna. He

would provide their daily bread for a full 40 years before they reached the promised land. No one had too little . . . and no one had too much. (In fact, if they did gather more than they were instructed to collect, the next day they found it rotten and riddled with maggots.)

Likewise, God continues to meet our daily needs—He gives us just what we need each day. He won't load us down with more than we can handle today (with His help) and He won't expect us to carry the burdens of tomorrow today. So we don't have to live in fear. We don't have to be weighed down by the past or worry about living in dread of the future. We simply need to live each moment we have been given. Live today and remember: God was, God is, and God always will be with us and for us.

*“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come.”*

(REVELATION 4:8)

3 Inner Needs

We all have three inner needs: the needs for love, significance, and security.⁴⁰

Love—to know that someone is unconditionally committed to our best interest

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you” (JOHN 15:12).

Significance—to know that our lives have meaning and purpose

“I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me”
(PSALM 57:2 ESV).

Security—to feel accepted and a sense of belonging

“Whoever fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge” (PROVERBS 14:26).

The Ultimate Need-Meeter

What do our inner needs reveal about us and our relationship with God?

God did not create any person or position or any amount of power or possessions to meet our deepest needs. People fail us and self-effort also fails to meet our deepest needs. If a person or thing could meet all our needs, we wouldn't need God! Our inner needs draw us into a deeper dependence on Christ and remind us that only God can satisfy the longings of our hearts. The Lord brings people and circumstances into our lives as an extension of His care, but ultimately only He can satisfy all the needs of our hearts. The Bible says . . .

*“The LORD will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.”*
(ISAIAH 58:11)

All along, the Lord planned to meet our deepest needs for . . .

Love—*“I [the Lord] have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness”* (JEREMIAH 31:3).

Significance—*“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’”* (JEREMIAH 29:11).

Security—*“The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged”* (DEUTERONOMY 31:8).

Our needs for love, significance, and security can be legitimately met in Christ Jesus! Philippians 4:19 makes it plain, *“My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”*

Although Jesus tells us not to worry, He understands our struggles. He does not judge or condemn what may seem to be a lack of faith on our part. Rather, Jesus admonishes and encourages us to take a step toward deeper faith by examining the misbeliefs we have about worry and exchanging our doubts and fears for the hope, love, joy, and peace He offers.

*“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,
patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
gentleness, and self-control.
Against such things there is no law.”
(GALATIANS 5:21–23 NET)*

Excessive Worry

When worry overwhelms, we should remember that God wants us to rely on *His provision* . . .

*“You care for the land and water it;
you enrich it abundantly.
The streams of God are filled with water
to provide the people with grain,
for so you have ordained it.
¹⁰ You drench its furrows and level its ridges;
you soften it with showers and bless its crops.
¹¹ You crown the year with your bounty,
and your carts overflow with abundance.”
(PSALM 65:9–11)*

Wrong Belief: “I believe God cares about me, but I can’t believe He is concerned with the everyday details of my life. I can’t help but worry.”

Right Belief: “God has already promised to provide all the needs in my life through Christ. I don’t need to worry about how He will carry out that promise. I will trust Him to do it.”

*“My God will meet all your needs according to
the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”
(PHILIPPIANS 4:19)*

How Can You Have Freedom from Worry . . . Forever?

Many worriers struggle with trust—especially trusting God. Most people begin basing their understanding on who God is by looking to the authority figures in their lives, starting with their parents.

Woundedness from the past can distort our image of God. If you grew up in an abusive home, you may see God as absent or uncaring since He could have, but didn't, prevent the abuse. If you grew up with controlling parents, your perception of God may be as a manipulative puppet master. If you were a child of hypercritical parents, you might think of God as being disappointed in you or judgmental of you. Children who experience the loss of a parent may struggle to find comfort and security in our heavenly Father.

Sadly, no one grows up with perfect parents who are the ideal example of God's love and grace. But God longs to re-parent us if we will let Him into our hearts and lives. Even if we didn't have an ideal childhood or we've lived through many of life's storms, we can look to God who always proves Himself to be loving, faithful, and worthy of our trust.

To rid yourself of worry, you must first acknowledge that God is the creator of your life. He wants to be your provider and protector. God has a vested interest in your well-being because He made you and He loves you.

Next, you must submit your will and your worries to God's control. When He is in control, you don't have to *worry* about anything. In fact, don't worry about your future . . . God is already there!

When you trust in God, you can trust in His plan for your future. . . .

*"There is surely a future hope for you,
and your hope will not be cut off."*

(PROVERBS 23:18)

4 Points of God's Plan

Whether you're trying to make sense of your past, trying to overcome something in the present, or trying to make changes for a better future, the Lord cares about you. He loves you. No matter what challenges you or your loved ones are facing, no matter the pain or difficult feelings you may be experiencing, no matter what you've done or what's been done to you, there is hope. And that hope is found in Jesus Christ.

God has a plan for your life, and it begins with a personal relationship with Jesus. The most important decision you can ever make is whether you will receive His invitation. If you have never made that decision, these four simple truths can help you start your journey together with Him.

*“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord,
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.’”*

(JEREMIAH 29:11)

1. God's Purpose for You: *Salvation*

- What was God's motivation in sending Jesus Christ to earth? To express His love for you by saving you! The Bible says, *“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him”* (JOHN 3:16–17).
- What was Jesus' purpose in coming to earth? To forgive your sins, to empower you to have victory over sin, and to enable you to live a fulfilled life! Jesus said, *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”* (JOHN 10:10).

2. The Problem: *Sin*

- What exactly is sin? Sin is living independently of God’s standard—knowing what is wrong and doing it anyway—also knowing what is right and choosing not to do it. The apostle Paul said, *“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can’t. I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway”* (ROMANS 7:18–19 NLT).
- What is the major consequence of sin? Spiritual death, eternal separation from God. The Bible says, *“Your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God”* (ISAIAH 59:2). Scripture also says, *“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (ROMANS 6:23).

3. God’s Provision for You: *The Savior*

- Can anything remove the penalty for sin? Yes! Jesus died on the cross to personally pay the penalty for your sins. The Bible says, *“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (ROMANS 5:8).
- What is the solution to being separated from God? Belief in (entrusting your life to) Jesus Christ as the only way to God the Father. Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”* (JOHN 14:6). The Bible says, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved”* (ACTS 16:31).

4. Your Part: *Surrender*

- Give Christ control of your life, entrusting yourself to Him. Jesus said, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”* (MATTHEW 16:24–26).
- Place your faith in (rely on) Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and reject your “good works” as a means of earning God’s approval. The Bible says, *“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”* (EPHESIANS 2:8–9).

Has there been a time in your life when you know you've humbled your heart and received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—giving Him control of your life? You can tell God that you want to surrender your life to Christ in a simple, heartfelt prayer like this:

“God, I want a real relationship with you.
I admit that many times I've chosen to go my own way
instead of your way.
Please forgive me for my sins.
Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross
to pay the penalty for my sins.
Come into my life to be my Lord and my Savior.
Change me from the inside out and make me the person
you created me to be.
In your holy name I pray. Amen.”

What Can You Now Expect?

When you surrender your life to Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit who empowers you to live a life pleasing to God. The Bible says, *“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life . . .”* (2 Peter 1:3). Jesus assures those who believe with these words:

*“Truly I tell you, whoever hears my word
and believes him who sent me
has eternal life and will not be judged
but has crossed over from death to life.”*

(JOHN 5:24)

Dr. Linda Mintle⁴¹
Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist

Linda understands worry from both a personal and a professional perspective. As a licensed marriage and family therapist and clinical social worker with 30 years of clinical experience, Dr. Linda Mintle helps couples, families, and individuals deal with struggles like worry with a commonsense approach. This best-selling author, national news consultant/media personality and host of her own radio show possesses the expertise to speak on a variety of issues and topics, but she also addresses worry from personal experience.

Even understanding that some form of loss forms the root of worry, Linda finds herself surprised when she suddenly begins experiencing moments of panic, terror and dread about six months in to her second pregnancy. After struggling with infertility for seven years, a miscarriage, and a number of difficult medical procedures, she and her husband are overjoyed to be expecting. So, what precipitates this sudden surge of worry?

She thinks back to difficult experiences in her past. When Linda is only 10 years old, her mother receives a cancer diagnosis. Even in the midst of battling cancer, her mother rarely misses work and bravely carries on throughout her treatment. As a result of prayer and excellent medical treatment, Linda's mom is declared cancer-free and miraculously healed. Linda views her mother's healing as powerful proof that God exists and is actively involved in caring for her family. Thus, she feels no need to worry.

Just a few years later, her brother sustains serious injuries when a car crashes into him and his motorcycle. In a coma with an uncertain outcome, his motionless body in the hospital bed

frightens Linda. But, once again, her family turns to the Lord through prayer. And again, their family witnesses a miracle of healing attesting to God's powerful protection. So no worries.

When another brother enters the military, the family again gathers to pray for protection. He completes his tour of duty and arrives home safely. Once again, the family recognizes God's hand of blessing and protection.

Near the end of Linda's senior year in high school, the family prepares for the wedding of the brother who survived the motorcycle accident. Their older brother still serves as an officer in the army and is invited to a worldwide tour with other officers in his field of biology. This means he will miss the wedding. The family puts the decision to a vote and determines the seven-week trip is too important to his career to refuse. However, shortly after, the family learns his plane has crashed in India and he did not survive.

The news devastates the family and Linda's father must tell his son's wife she is now a widow. Linda accompanies her father and is tasked with watching for signs of shock in her sister-in-law and calling 9-1-1 if necessary. The mere thought of her role in delivering the tragic news sends Linda into a panic. Her sister-in-law is pregnant with her second child.

When Linda's father shares what happened, Linda feels emotionally paralyzed and watches as her sister-in-law sits in stunned, silent shock. All Linda can think about is the baby. How could the same God who healed her mom, spared one brother, and protected the other brother during war now allow a plane crash to take him from his family?

Reliving her experience during that tragic time, Linda suddenly realizes her sister-in-law had been six months pregnant when Linda's brother had been killed. Now Linda's

husband travels by plane for work and Linda struggles with worry every time he leaves. Somewhere in her subconscious, she worries her husband will die like her brother. She is six months pregnant and the same panic grips her mind.

She feels vulnerable and powerless, unable to fully trust God. She realizes she is still that fearful girl, worried that God might not protect her or her loved ones.

Linda begins to connect the fears of the past with her worries in the present for the future. Later, she will make peace with her tendency to worry as she concentrates on the truth that God is faithful and sovereign and good. She learns practical ways to relax and redirect her thoughts.

Linda takes what she's learned and experienced and shares it with others in one of her books. The title of the book matches her solution to the woes of worry, *Letting Go of Worry: God's Plan for Finding Peace and Contentment*. That's exactly what Linda does and recommends! In fact, Dr. Linda is living out the wisdom of Proverbs 9:9 . . .

*“Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still;
teach the righteous and they
will add to their learning.”*



STEPS TO SOLUTION



*“Relying on Jesus
through His presence
and provision,
He will replace
worries with joy.”*



Imagine never worrying about anything . . . not one thing . . . not on the job, not in your home, not at school, in your city, town, or neighborhood—not even in the world. Does this seem impossible? It isn't. And here's why: God knows. Although we can't see Him, God is watching over you and cares about every detail of your life as Hebrews 4:13 declares, *"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight."* No matter what issue you are facing, God knows. He is the all-knowing, all-caring Father who is intimately invested in your life and knows what you need even before you do.

Are you worried about an upcoming medical procedure or surgery? God knows. Trust Him. Are you worried about your job or a performance review coming up? God knows. Rest in Him. Are you worried about your children or grandchildren? God knows. Release them to Him.

When Jesus told His followers not to worry or fret about anything, He wasn't simply making a spiritually sound suggestion or leaving room for theological "yeah-buts"—He was giving them a straightforward command. The apostle Paul echoes Jesus' words in his letter to the Philippian believers, immediately after which he instructs them: *"Instead of worrying, pray"* (Philippians 4:6 MSG). Pray?

Do you want to worry less? Pray more. Take your worries to God. Pour out your concerns, your fears, your cares to Him. Tell Him what is keeping you awake at night. If you will do this, God promises to guard your mind (thoughts) and your heart (feelings) with His peace . . . a peace that comes from knowing He is in control.

As you learn to trust Him more and more, may these words from Scripture prove true for you . . .

*"Grace and peace be yours in abundance
through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord."*

(2 PETER 1:2)

Key Verses to Memorize

A sign in front of a church read, “When your knees knock together, kneel on them.”⁴² That’s good advice. In fact, that’s just the godly advice the apostle Paul gave the church at Philippi when he wrote encouraging them to turn their worries into prayers. . . .

*“Don’t fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray.
Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers,
letting God know your concerns.
Before you know it, a sense of God’s wholeness,
everything coming together for good,
will come and settle you down.
It’s wonderful what happens when
Christ displaces worry at the center of your life.”*
(PHILIPPIANS 4:6–7 MSG)

Key Passage to Read

When Jesus gave words of warning and encouragement to His disciples regarding worry and fretfulness, He essentially told them that worrying is worthless, anxiousness is aggravating, and fretting is fruitless. We need only look at the world around us to see how good God the Father is to His creation—even to the extent of feeding the birds of the air and clothing the flowers of the field.

When we realize the kingdom of God is our guaranteed inheritance, we have nothing to worry about—nothing to be anxious about. Our future is entirely and eternally secure.

*“Do not be afraid and anxious, little flock,
for it is your Father’s good pleasure
to give you the kingdom.”*
(LUKE 12:32 AMP)

Luke 12:22-34
Worry Is a Waste!

If you worry about life—what you are going to eat or what clothes you need—then God says to you . . .

You are forgetting that life is about more than what you need to live. v. 22

You are missing the deeper meaning of life. v. 23

You are forgetting that you are far more important to Me than the birds and flowers which I lavishly take care of. v. 24

You cannot add even a single minute to your life by worrying about it. v. 25

You are engaging in an exercise that is utterly unproductive. v. 26

You are not taking into consideration how I clothe the grass of the fields with flowers more splendid than even Solomon’s clothes. v. 27

You must grow in faith—trust Me completely, depend on Me fully to provide for you. v. 28

You are setting your heart on the wrong things . . . on tangible things I will provide. v. 29

You are acting like unbelievers who run after such things rather than depend on Me. v. 30

You are not to worry about security and safety, about food and clothing, but rather to pursue My Kingdom and trust Me to give you all that you need. v. 31

You do not need to be afraid of “missing out” because the Father wants to give you the very kingdom itself. v. 32

You are to use your earthly possessions to help others and, in doing so, you will store up treasure in heaven forever. v. 33

You are to stay consciously aware that your heart will be where your treasure is. v. 34

God's Sovereignty

Question: “How does the fact that God is sovereign help me overcome fear and worry?”

Answer: The word *sovereign* means that God is absolutely free to do whatever He chooses. But you must understand this within the context of His character. For instance, because God is completely holy, it is impossible for Him to sin. So whatever He decides to do will always be perfectly holy, perfectly just, perfectly loving, perfectly wise.

When you're filled with worry—when it feels like your life is coming apart at the seams—the truth that God is sovereign will bring you hope, peace, and confidence. The knowledge that God is in control (He is sovereign) can calm your greatest fear and wash away your most consuming worry.

When worry threatens to overwhelm you, remember these key truths about God's sovereignty:⁴³

- **He controls** every event, every outcome in life. (Personalize that!)

“The LORD determines every outcome” (PROVERBS 16:33 GW).

- **He is keenly aware of** what happens in nature itself, determining the seasons, the weather, the growth of crops.

“Rejoice in the LORD your God, for he has given you the autumn rains because he is faithful. He sends you abundant showers, both autumn and spring rains” (JOEL 2:23).

- **He determines** exactly how long each of us will live.

“You have decided the length of our lives. You know how many months we will live, and we are not given a minute longer” (JOB 14:5 NLT).

- **He is completely free to do** whatever He chooses.

“God is one of a kind. Who can make him change his mind? He does whatever he wants” (JOB 23:13 GW).

— **He is sovereign over everything**—even our sin, rebellion, and foolishness.

“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives”

(GENESIS 50:20).

How to Have a Transformed Life

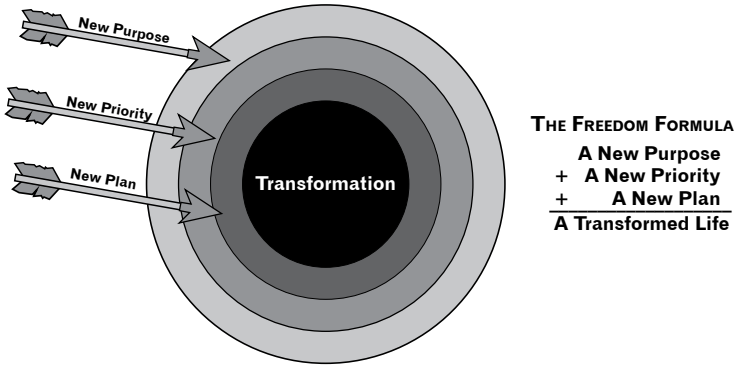
Followers of Christ aren't immune to worry or its complications. We want family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers to see us trusting in the goodness and provision of God. Yet, we worry about letting them down or whether or not our faith will make an impact on their lives.

The consequences of worry are costly. It divides our attention and saps our energy. We don't know what to do with the cares and concerns that wear us down. When we are preoccupied with what *might* happen, we let worry superimpose a negative future outcome on a current situation.

Our challenge as believers is to learn what God has given us to help deal with wily worries, step out in faith, and through His empowering Spirit, make life changes.

*“Remember that I commanded you
to be strong and brave.
Don't be afraid,
because the LORD your God
will be with you everywhere you go.”*
(JOSHUA 1:9 NCV)

Reaching the Target: Transformation!



Target #1—A New Purpose

God’s purpose for me is to be conformed to the character of Christ.

“Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (ROMANS 8:29).

— “I’ll do whatever it takes to be conformed to the character of Christ.”

Target #2—A New Priority

God’s priority for me is to change my thinking.

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (ROMANS 12:2).

— “I’ll do whatever it takes to line up my thinking with God’s thinking.”

Target #3—A New Plan

God’s plan for me is to rely on Christ’s strength, not my strength, to be all He created me to be.

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (PHILIPPIANS 4:13 NKJV).

— “I’ll do whatever it takes to fulfill His plan in His strength.”

My Personalized Plan

Worries become well-rehearsed words swirling around in my mind. I know I shouldn't worry, but I can't seem to stop the worrisome words . . . then I worry about worrying! Fortunately, God doesn't simply say, "Stop worrying," without telling me *how* to stop worrying. If I want my worries to vanish, then I must learn new ways of thinking and develop methods for changing my former thinking patterns. Although my thoughts and memories may not be erased, the rehearsed words can be replaced as I focus on the wisdom of Philippians 4:6–9 . . .

*"Do not be anxious about anything,
but in every situation,
by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving,
present your requests to God.*

*⁷ And the peace of God,
which transcends all understanding,
will guard your hearts and
your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters,
whatever is true, whatever is noble,
whatever is right, whatever is pure,
whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable
—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—
think about such things.*

*⁹ Whatever you have learned or received
or heard from me, or seen in me
—put it into practice.*

And the God of peace will be with you."

(PHILIPPIANS 4:6–9)

Applying God’s Word to My Worry

As I seek to overcome worry in my life on a daily basis, I will personally apply the truths of God’s Word found in the preceding passage. . . .

I will choose not to worry or be anxious about anything. . . . v. 6

I will bring every situation that concerns me to God rather than worrying about it. . . . v. 6

I will tell God what I need, and thank Him for all He’s done for me. . . . v. 6

I will focus on having a heart of praise and thankfulness. . . . v. 6

I will let His peace guard all of my thoughts and feelings—my entire mind and heart. . . . v. 7

I will direct my thoughts, intentionally fixing them on what is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy. . . . v. 8

I will act in a way that reflects God’s life—His words, His teachings, His actions, His character, His example in thought, word, and deed. . . . v. 9

I will continually remember that the God of peace will be with me . . . *always*. . . . v. 9

Applying God’s Way to My Worry

As I seek to overcome worry by applying God’s Word to my life, I will also commit to applying it God’s way and in His strength.

Therefore, I will . . .

Acknowledge what I worry about.

- Honestly evaluate the people or situations that burden me.
- Make a “Worry List” of my concerns, detailing each one and the outcome I hope to ultimately see.

“Oh, that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll”
(JOB 19:23).

Read Philippians 4:8 carefully, one point at a time.

- Evaluate my fretful thoughts against each point in Philippians 4:8.
- Ask myself, “Are my thoughts true . . . noble . . . right . . . pure . . . lovely . . . admirable . . . excellent . . . praiseworthy?”

“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (PHILIPPIANS 4:8).

Present each worry on my list to God, along with the details, moving all of them from my “Worry List” to my “Prayer List.”

- Set aside a sufficient amount of time to present my requests to God.
- Pray, “Lord, I know you are fully aware of my situation regarding (the problem). I am feeling (describe my emotions). I want your will to be done in my life and in the lives of everyone involved. I relinquish control of this situation and thank you that you already have a resolution in mind. I am trusting you to reveal your will for me in your time and in your way. And I am relying on you to direct my course of action and guard my heart and mind. I will not worry about this anymore, but will continue to leave it in your hands. Thank you, Lord.”

“I call on you, my God, for you will answer me; turn your ear to me and hear my prayer” (PSALM 17:6).

Slow down my thinking.

- Become more aware of the thoughts rushing through my mind as they occur.
- Recognize my troubling thoughts, submit them to the scrutiny of God’s Word, and write down their corrections. To change a thought, I must first capture it.

“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 CORINTHIANS 10:5).

Challenge my mistaken or false beliefs. (Mistaken beliefs are at the core of worry.)

- Carry a notebook with me to capture and record thoughts that imply some belief that may be false.
- Write down why I know what I believe is mistaken or not true. Example: “I am a victim of the way others have treated me.” “Not true. I can take control of my life now and change the outcome.”
“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer” (ROMANS 12:12).

Change my focus from *worrying* to *resting* in God’s sovereignty.

- I will recite scriptures that remind me of God’s sovereign rule over my life.
- And, I will sing and listen to songs that focus on the faithfulness of God and His character, and practice resting in Him by remembering and focusing on His goodness and faithfulness.
“Return to your rest, my soul, for the LORD has been good to you” (PSALM 116:7).

How to Correct Faulty Thinking

In his book, *The Dance of Hope*, Bill Frey recalls a day from his childhood in Georgia.⁴⁴ At age 11, one of his chores was to gather firewood. Young Bill would search for tree stumps to chop into kindling. Saturated with resin, pine wood burned easily and one large stump caught Bill’s attention. But to Bill’s surprise, the stump had a strong, deep root system. After hours of trying every trick and tool he could think of, Bill was no closer to pulling up that stubborn stump.

Bill was still struggling with the stump when his father returned home from work. Spying his son, he went over to watch. “I think I see your problem,” he said. “What’s that?” Bill asked. “You’re not using all your strength,” he replied. This lit a fuse in Bill’s young heart and he proceeded to tell his dad just how long and hard he had been working! “No,” his father said, “you’re not using all your strength.”

Later, Bill calmed down and asked his father what he meant. His father replied, “You haven’t asked me to help you yet.”

Likewise, we don’t access the strength available to us by going to our heavenly Father when we face a seemingly insurmountable problem. When worries wear you down, you need a plan of action. Rather than retreat in defeat, understand your core beliefs and why you worry. Examine your heart and seek the Lord’s help to correct your faulty thinking.

“Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

(MATTHEW 6:8)

Breaking Down a Breakthrough Battle Plan⁴⁵

When worry woes leave you weary, remember that God can shed light on our darkest moments. Even in the pain and anguish of what seems to be a breakdown, God can deliver a breakthrough to hope and victory.

Acknowledge your feelings when you worry.

- Your feelings are not haphazard or free-floating, but rather connected to your thoughts and perceptions.
- You matter and your feelings matter, too.
- Your feelings help you gauge the healthiness and helpfulness of your thoughts.
- When your feelings become overwhelming and you are overcome with emotion, know that something you may have repressed is bubbling up from deep within.
- Your feelings are useful in revealing the degree of impact an event had on you.

Avoid the five Bs of worry.

- **Busyness:** Martha worried about all the work she had to do while Mary spent time listening to Jesus (Luke 10:38–42).

- **Blaming:** Adam and Eve blamed each other, blamed the serpent, and ultimately blamed God for their disobedience (Genesis 3:12–13).
- **Bingeing:** The prodigal son demanded, then squandered, his inheritance on wild living (Luke 15:11–31).
- **Burying:** Pharaoh delayed releasing the Israelites (Exodus chapter 5); Jonah avoided preaching to the Ninevites (Jonah 1:1–3); and Peter denied knowing Jesus (Luke 22:61).
- **Brooding:** King Saul brooded over David’s success and popularity (1 Samuel 18:7–8).

Address the worries.

- Is this a legitimate concern or an illegitimate worry?
- How likely is it that a particular event will actually happen?
- Is there evidence that what you’re worrying about is an actual risk?
- If there is a risk, how much control do you have over it?
- What will you plan to do if the thing you are worrying about occurs?

Ask for help.

- Acknowledge your struggle.
- Admit you need help.
- Ask the Lord to help you.
- Accept the answer.
- Align your request with the character of God and His promises.

Attack the issue.

- Don’t get stuck in unhealthy thought patterns.
- Be brave. It won’t be easy, but you can do it with the Lord’s help.
- Fight the fear. Remember you are not alone in this battle.
- Pray Philippians 4:6–8.
- Trust in the Lord’s faithfulness on a day-to-day basis.

Don’t let your desire to be in control become a testimony to a lack of faith in God’s ability to take care of you. Don’t make it your job to do His job. Live like you believe in Him . . . what He can do . . . and what He will do for you.

*“In all my prayers for all of you,
I always pray with joy
. . . being confident of this,
that he who began a good work in you
will carry it on to completion
until the day of Christ Jesus.”*
(PHILIPPIANS 1:4, 6)

How Commonsense Wisdom Can Overcome Worry

It’s normal to be concerned about life, people, and circumstances. But what we do with normal concern is important. At times, there may be only a thin line between concern and worry, and that is the point at which we are tempted to let our concerns spiral downward into worry.

Because we have the Spirit of Christ living in us (Ephesians 3:16–17), calling us to walk in faith, it is actually God who empowers and enables us to do what He calls us to do in regard to worry. What God requires of us is that we stop focusing on our fears and choose to step forward in faith. Then with the power of Christ in us, we can overcome our worries.

It is all too easy to overlook commonsense considerations when dealing with worry because they seem too obvious. And yet, we must not ignore them as they are an essential part of the foundation needed to overcome unwanted worry.

The book of Proverbs applauds common sense, sound judgment, and discernment in our lives.

*“My child, don’t lose sight of
common sense and discernment.
Hang on to them.”*
(PROVERBS 3:21)

Commonsense Considerations for Overcoming Worry

In seeking to overcome worry, remember these practical suggestions:

Get sufficient sleep.

Exercise regularly.

Eat a balanced diet of healthy foods.

Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and drugs.

Make time for fun and recreation on a regular basis.

Plan outdoor activities on sunny days.

Keep your home organized and tidy.

Live in the present, not in the past or the future, taking one day at a time.

Play music that enhances your sense of calm, peace, and joy.

Pace your daily activities and don't take on more than you can reasonably accomplish.

Take charge of your time by scheduling daily activities and responsibilities.

Spend time with positive, hopeful people.

Plan ahead how you will deal with potentially stressful situations.

Talk about your feelings with safe people.

As you put into practice these suggestions, remember to seek God and rely on Him to help you accomplish each one.

*“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more
than all we ask or imagine, according to
his power that is at work within us,
to him be glory . . . throughout all generations.”*
(EPHESIANS 3:20–21)

Keeping Concern in Check

Question: “How do I stop concern from morphing into worry?”

Answer: Suppose you have a fight with your roommate and in the heat of the moment she threatens to move out. Regrettable things are said. Feelings are hurt. But eventually the two of you work things out. Apologies are made. Peace is restored. Unfortunately, the things said during the fight about her moving out resurface in your mind. Fear kicks in and engages your emotions, driving you to the scary adjacent thought: *What will I do if she actually moves out?*

You really need a roommate for financial reasons, but you also hate conflict and avoid it whenever possible. So as your fear comes home to roost, your thoughts move from normal concern to worry. Worry is created when negative thinking sticks around after the fact.

In this situation, the following proactive steps will help keep legitimate concern from morphing into troublesome worry:

- **Switch your thought process.** Refuse to focus on the worrisome “what-ifs” of your situation. Instead, reframe your thoughts with “even-if” thinking by reminding yourself . . . “*Even if my roommate moves out, God knows what I need and will meet my needs in His time and in His way. I choose to trust Him.*”
- **Take action.** Come up with a list of reasons you can trust God. How has He met your needs in the past? On a sheet of paper, make a list of ways God has met your needs. Then take time to thank God in prayer for His past provision.

- **Do a reality check.** During a time of household “calm,” ask your roommate if she really meant what she said about moving out. If she was serious about moving out, talk about the timing of her move, then establish a strategy for either finding a new roommate or looking for another living situation.
- **Practice conflict resolution.** If your roommate didn’t mean what she said (it was merely an idle threat spoken in the heat of the moment), then discuss ways you can more effectively resolve conflict in the future in a less worry-inducing way.
- **Identify repercussions.** If she does intend to move out, identify and make a list of what the repercussions of this housing change will mean for you—financially, relationally, socially.
- **Entrust (fully commit) your life to God.** Do this on a moment-to-moment basis. Seek His direction through prayer, Scripture reading, and the wise counsel of others.

Next time you find yourself entertaining worrisome thoughts about your housing situation, repeat this Scripture verse:

“When I am afraid, I will put my trust in you.”

(PSALM 56:3 NLT)

What Is the Two-Step Solution to Worry?

If you had to boil down all efforts to manage worry to the most essential basic steps, you could reduce the solution to two steps: one *ask* and one *action* step.

Step 1. Ask . . . Can I change this situation that I am worried about?

Step 2. Action . . . If you can change it now, *then change it*. If you can't, release it and allow God to take care of the situation and you.

Let's review the first step: Right now, can you change what worries you? Answer *Yes* or *No*—that's it.

Now consider the second step: If you answered *Yes*, and you are worried about something you can change—then change it.

— **If the door squeaks, oil it.**

— **If the faucet leaks, fix it.**

- If you fear losing your job, your home, your financial security, your spouse, your children, your friends—even your very life—and there is something you can do besides worry, then do it! Give your employer your best effort, manage your home and finances well, love your parents, your spouse, your children and friends, but resist the temptation to worry.

If you answered *No* you are worrying about something you cannot change—then let it go and allow God to take care of it and you.

— **If you fear suffering a loss in the future,** let it go (the fear).

- If you fear losing your job, your home, your financial security, your spouse, your children, your friends, even your very life, worrying about it will not change the situation. It will only make matters worse.

— **If you worry over what might happen in the future,** let God be in control—because He already is!

How do you let go of worry? First, identify what worries you—every issue, every situation. Then, go to God in all humility and surrender the situation and yourself to the Lord—past, present, and future. Although you may feel completely powerless, in reality you have the power to release your worry to Him.

“Releasing Your Worry” Prayer

“Lord Jesus, thank you for loving me.
Thank you for caring about me.
Since you know everything, you know
the strong sense of fear and worry
I have felt about (name or situation).
Thank you for understanding
my worry and forgiving me
when I struggle with avoidance
and seek control through worry.
Right now, I release all of my worry to you.
I trust you with my future and myself.
In your name I pray . . . Amen.”

*“Give all your worries and cares to God,
for he cares about you.”
(1 PETER 5:7 NLT)*

How to Help Worriers Become Warriors

As it was in Jesus' day, so it is in ours. Followers of Jesus need a godly perspective about worry. That is why Jesus asks two of the most profound, rhetorical questions in Scripture. First, *"Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?"* And, *"Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?"* (LUKE 12:25–26).

Just as the answer to the first question is unmistakably obvious (we can't), so is the answer to the second (we shouldn't). But we do anyway. How wise is that?

Those wearied by worry need to be encouraged. Worried people need faithful friends to come and walk alongside them on the path to peace.

"There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."

(PROVERBS 18:24)

Helpful Dos and Don'ts⁴⁶

Don't become impatient when you don't understand their worry.

Do understand that what fretful people *believe* is *real to them*.

"Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered displays folly" (PROVERBS 14:29).

Don't think they worry for attention.

Do realize they are likely embarrassed and want to change.

"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do" (ROMANS 7:15).

Don't be critical or use demeaning statements.

Do be gentle and supportive, and build up their self-confidence.

"Encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing" (1 THESSALONIANS 5:11).

Don't assume you know what's best for worriers.

Do ask how you can help.

"We urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone"
(1 THESSALONIANS 5:14).

Don't leave them to face threatening situations alone without a plan.

Do instruct and encourage them to try positive self-talk utilizing promises in God's Word and practicing relaxation techniques.

"Hold on to instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life"
(PROVERBS 4:13).

Don't abandon them to deal with their struggles alone.

Do be there and assure them of your support.

"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up" (ECCLESIASTES 4:9–10).

Don't begin with difficult situations.

Do help them begin facing the fear behind their worries in small increments.

"We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope" (ROMANS 5:3–4).

Don't constantly ask, "How are you feeling?"

Do suggest they explore other interests to counter worrisome feelings.

"Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (PHILIPPIANS 2:4 ESV).

Don't show disappointment and displeasure if they fail.

Do encourage them and compliment their efforts to conquer their worry.

"Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act" (PROVERBS 3:27).

Don't say, "Don't be absurd, there's nothing for you to worry about!"

Do say, "No matter how you feel, tell yourself the truth, 'I will conquer worry one step at a time.'"

"The wise in heart are called discerning, and gracious words promote instruction"
(PROVERBS 16:21).

Don't say, "Don't be a coward, you have to do this!"

Do say, "I know this is difficult for you, but it's not dangerous. You have the courage to do this."

"The hearts of the wise make their mouths prudent, and their lips promote instruction" (PROVERBS 16:23).

Don't say, "Quit living in the past, this is not that bad."

Do say, "Remember to stay in the present and remind yourself, 'That was then and this is now.'"

"Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones"
(PROVERBS 16:24).

How to Stop Worrying and Start Living

Weathering the storms of life, our quartet of siblings comes to realize that although they've had ups and downs in their lives, they don't have to fall for the enemy's tactics bent on doom and destruction. When seeds of mistrust are sown, they don't have to tend the garden of despair and reap the weeds of worry.

Even when they face future storms in life, they rest in the assurance that God is in control . . . and they don't have to be. Whenever the enemy wants to steal their joy with worries, God wants to bless them with His peace.

Relying on Jesus through His presence and provision, He will replace worries with joy.

*“You will show me the path of life;
In Your presence is fullness of joy;
At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”
(PSALM 16:11 NKJV)*

Carefree Connie

- Learns appropriate levels of care and concern for herself
“Because God sees me as worthy of care and concern, I should see myself through His eyes.”
- Develops healthy care and concern for others
“I can stop avoiding scary situations and start showing how much I really do care for others.”
- Realizes the challenges of life are worthy of care and concern
“The blessings of living life are worth the risks of loving others.”
“Do everything in love” (1 CORINTHIANS 16:14).

Controlling Travis

- Trusts God because He is sovereign and He cares
“I don’t have to be in control of everything because, honestly, I’m not in control. God is.”
- Doesn’t carry the weight of the world on his shoulders, seeks and finds rest
“I don’t have to do everything, just what God has called me to do. I can rest in His promises.”
- Learns to share the burdens of life and seeks help from others
“Instead of carrying all the responsibility, I can ask others for help by sharing the load and revealing what I’ve learned.”
*“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ”
(GALATIANS 6:2).*

Consumed Susan

- Trusts God and understands that change is possible
“When I focus on my problems, I lose sight of God. I know He can change my perspective and my outlook.”

- Sets boundaries for life in general and thoughts in particular
“If I start to fall into the worry trap, I turn to God and His Word to redirect my thoughts.”
- Shifts thinking from gloom and doom to hope and help; seeks professional help
“I don’t have to fight this battle alone. I can seek the wise counsel of others.”
“With us is the LORD our God to help us and to fight our battles”
(2 CHRONICLES 32:8).

Concerned Chris

- Maintains healthy spiritual life and relationships
“I need to rely on the Lord to help me balance my life in ways that keep me connected to what’s important.”
- Refrains from dealing with worries in an unhealthy manner
“If my thoughts start to slip into worry, I will turn those worrisome thoughts into a prayer.”
- Doesn’t neglect his own needs
“I will remember that I can’t give away something I don’t have, so I will do my best to make sure my mind stays centered in a healthy place of spiritual strength. Then, I can help others.”
“It is God who arms me with strength and keeps my way secure”
(2 SAMUEL 22:33).

How to Conquer Worry with the Word of God

If You Say: “I’m afraid that my situation is impossible.”

The Lord Says: I can make all things possible.

“What is impossible with man is possible with God” (LUKE 18:27).

If You Say: “I feel worried over the cares of the world.”

The Lord Says: Cast all your cares on Me.

“Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you” (PSALM 55:22).

If You Say: “I’m overwhelmed with fear.”

The Lord Says: I will give you My strength when you’re afraid.

“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (ISAIAH 41:10).

If You Say: “I’m so worried—I can’t forgive myself.”

The Lord Says: I can forgive you.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 JOHN 1:9).

If You Say: “I’m worried that my loved ones might leave me.”

The Lord Says: Once you’ve come to Me, I will never leave you.

“The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged” (DEUTERONOMY 31:8).

If You Say: “I’m worried about death.”

The Lord Says: I will give you eternal life.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (JOHN 3:16).

If You Say: “I’m so worried that I can’t rest.”

The Lord Says: I will give you my rest.

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly” (MATTHEW 11:28–30 MSG).

When worries sprout, weed them out.
Don't fret over the future—
God is already there.
—June Hunt

J. C. Penney⁴⁷
Businessman & Entrepreneur

As a young man, the meticulous model employee is thrilled to be given the opportunity to work as a junior salesman at a dry goods clothing store for \$50 a month. Later, this successful businessman is desperate—not due to his thriving business, but from the stress and strain of worry.

Ruminating over his younger years, J. C. Penney recalls “Often I went home at night and was unable to sleep until I had got up, dressed, and gone back to the store to make certain that everything was in place.”⁴⁸ Later, as a successful entrepreneur, he is so plagued with worry, he cannot sleep and cannot find any relief from his constant wrestling with worry.

As a naive young salesman, he believes he has been cut from a resilient retail cloth and can sell anything that can be sold. But a job loss and failed business venture costs J. C. Penney every cent he has. However, he learns that moral victories are sometimes accompanied by business defeats rather than monetary rewards.

Later, as a mature businessman, he opens his own stores becoming the largest dry goods proprietor in America. But in the early 1930s, the retail giant’s momentum meets disaster due to a colossal economic catastrophe called The Great Depression.

Penney’s worry is so severe that he consults a family friend—a physician—who confines him to a hospital bed. Broken mentally and physically, he grows weaker by the day. Defeated by despair, he thinks he doesn’t have a friend in the world.

“My business had crumbled, my communications with colleagues had faltered, and even my . . . wife and our children were estranged from me.” Penney says, “I was at the end of my rope.”⁴⁹ Certain he won’t see the dawn of a new day, he pens farewell letters to his loved ones.

When he wakes the next morning, he's startled to still be among the living! Then Penney hears music coming from a little chapel down the corridor. Making his way there he hears the sweet refrain, "Be not dismayed whate'er betide, God will take care of you. All you need He will provide, God will take care of you."⁵⁰

Penney's heavy heart of worry is lifted by the tender singing, the meaningful Scripture, and the personal prayers. A sudden miracle occurs as he is instantly drawn from the darkness of despair into the warmth of the light of the Lord. He feels the power of God as never before and discovers the Lord is personally with him. God's love penetrates Penney's heart and mind. He knows God will help him and take care of him.

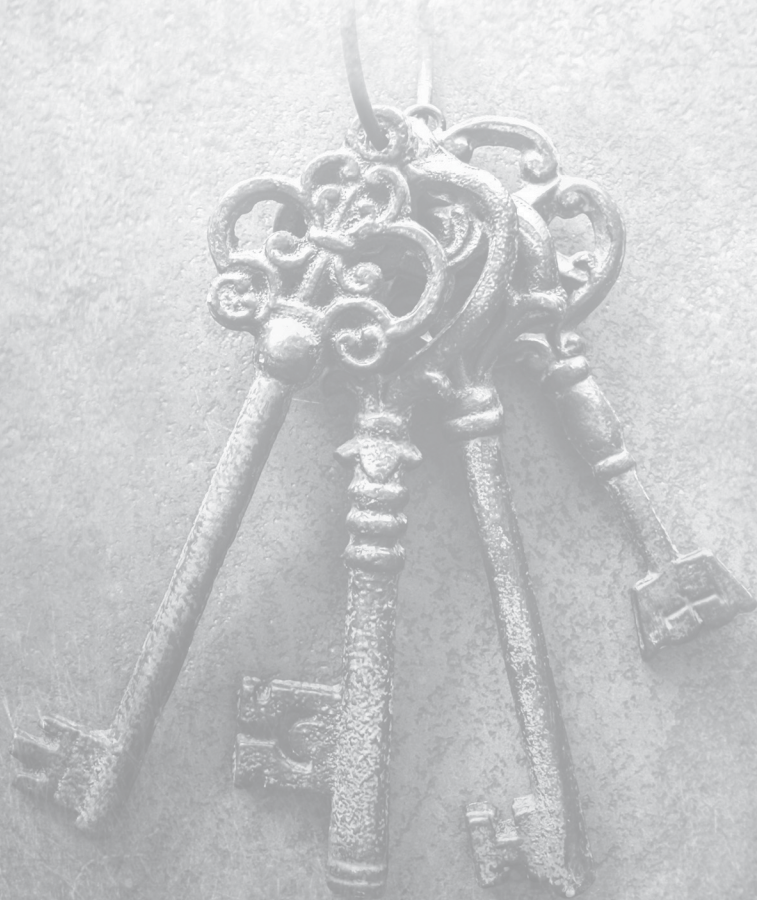
This moment of sweet surrender for J. C. Penney is the end of being controlled by worry and the beginning of abandoning himself to the boundless love, grace, and mercy of God. To Penney, the voices of doctors' and nurses' heartfelt singing in the chapel resemble a heavenly choir, lifting his spirit and his petition heavenward: "Lord, will you take care of me? I can do nothing for myself!"

Penney turns to the ultimate Need-Meeter, and his deepened dependence on Christ makes him feel as if he is "passing out of darkness into light." Like J. C. Penney, for those waiting to move from the darkness of worry to the light of peace, Jesus offers this welcome:

*"I am the light of the world.
Whoever follows me
will never walk in darkness,
but will have the light of life."
(JOHN 8:12)*



SCRIPTURES TO MEMORIZE



*“First seek the counsel
of the LORD.”*

(1 KINGS 22:5)



God's Word offers the hope and promise of a changed life. The Lord will renew your mind—transforming the way you think, act, and live—as you saturate yourself in His Word. In the following questions, the bold-faced words serve as prompts to help you more easily memorize the verses related to this topic. May God's truth come alive to you, flourish in you, and flow through you.

Where can I find **peace** and **safety** so I can **sleep**?

*"In **peace** I will lie down and **sleep**,
for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in **safety**."*

(PSALM 4:8)

If I am **not anxious about anything**, will I have **peace**,
and will that peace **guard my heart and my mind**?

*"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."*

(PHILIPPIANS 4:6–7)

How can I **not worry about tomorrow**—even though I know
that **each day has enough trouble of its own**?

*"Do **not worry about tomorrow**,
for tomorrow will worry about itself.
Each day has enough trouble of its own."*

(MATTHEW 6:34)

What keeps **hearts** from being **weighed down**
by the **anxieties of life**?

*“Be careful, or your **hearts** will be **weighed down**
with . . . the **anxieties of life.**”*

(LUKE 21:34)

Will I be **blessed** if I **trust in the Lord** and put
my **confidence in Him**?

*“**Blessed** is the one who **trusts in the LORD**,
whose **confidence is in him.**”*

(JEREMIAH 17:7)

Who is **my strength** and **my shield**, in whom
my heart trusts and I find **joy**?

*“The **LORD** is **my strength** and **my shield**;
my heart trusts in him, and he helps me.
My heart leaps for **joy**,
and with my song I praise him.”*

(PSALM 28:7)

In whom can **I trust** for **shelter** and **rest**?

*“Whoever dwells in the **shelter** of the Most High
will **rest** in the shadow of the Almighty.*

*I will say of the **LORD**,*

*‘He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom **I trust.**’”*

(PSALM 91:1–2)

Who has **answered** and **delivered me from all my fears**?

*“I sought the LORD, and he **answered** me;
he **delivered me from all my fears.**”*

(PSALM 34:4)

Who replaces my worries with **hope, joy, and peace**?

*“May the God of **hope** fill you
with all **joy** and **peace**
as you trust in him.”*

(ROMANS 15:13)

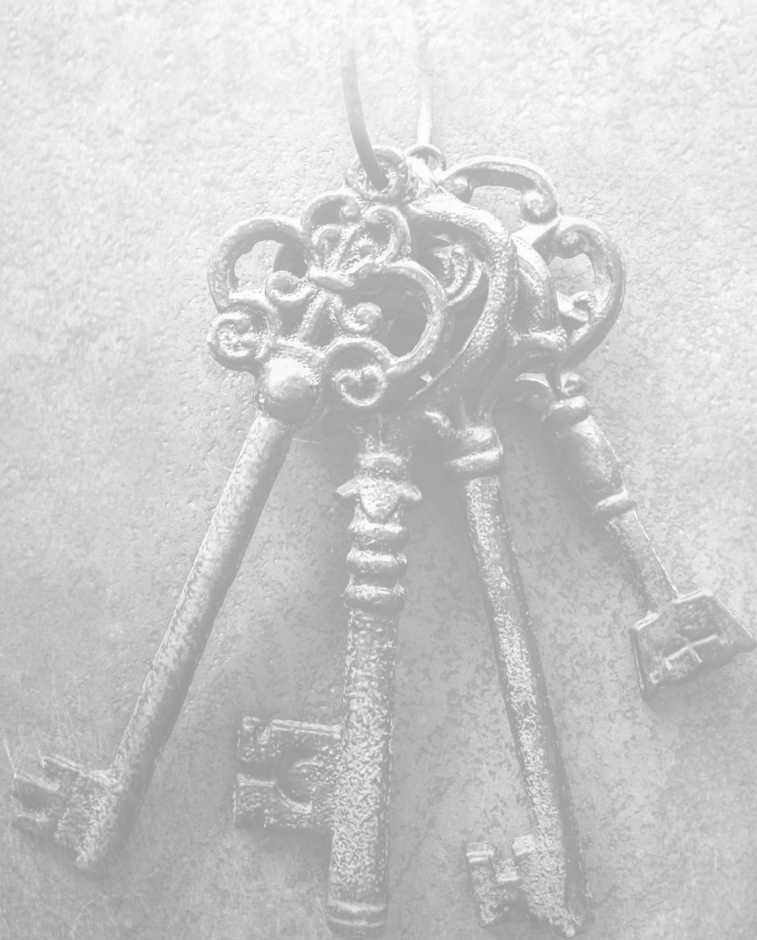
Who is **my help**, the **one who sustains me**?

*“Surely God is **my help**;
the LORD is the **one who sustains me.**”*

(PSALM 54:4)



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