

# Worry

## Matthew 6:25-34

In our culture worry and anxiety are seen as an indicator of responsibility. As children we had no cares or worries; our parents did all the worrying for us, but as we went into our teens we were taught to worry about school marks and exams, all the strange things going on in our bodies, our relationships with our friends and what other people thought about us. Parents and teachers laid on us the need to worry about the future. In fact any young adult who doesn't worry isn't considered to be properly 'grown up'. Worrying is a habit we acquire in our youth and is very hard to get rid of. We worry about everything. There is even a Worry map for the UK about what people worry about in different regions. How should we act in the light of Jesus words "Therefore I tell you, do not worry!"?

Now whenever we see a 'therefore,' we have to consider what it's there for. Jesus has been teaching the principles of life in the Kingdom of Heaven: to treasure up treasures in heaven, not on earth; to make sure our eyes project light into our minds by filtering what we look at in a positive and pure way and thirdly that the Lord is our only Master and that we control our use money in a godly way and never allow money to control us. Therefore, in the light of the confidence we get by having our treasure in heaven and in being bondslaves of the Lord, Jesus says: Don't worry. Don't be anxious.

Today psychologists make fine distinctions between anxiety, worry, panic and stress. But what Jesus is saying here covers all of these. Don't worry; don't be anxious; don't panic: don't get stressed out! These all affect our lives - they cause the release of stress hormones, such as cortisol, into our blood which can lead to an inability to switch off and relax, difficulty in sleeping, loss of appetite, difficulty swallowing, dry mouth, fast heartbeat, headaches, fatigue, difficulty in concentrating, tense and aching muscles, nausea, rapid breathing, shortness of breath, trembling, twitching and can lead to irritability and depression & even more serious conditions: digestive disorders - stomach ulcers, suppression of the immune system, coronary artery disease, heart attacks. Back pain, Alzheimer's. Worry does not help us live the 'life in all its fulness' that Jesus promised us.

Jesus tells us that it doesn't have to be like this and that there is a better way. So let's look at the three areas Jesus highlights in the worry-market.

Under the heading **life** he specifies food, drink and height; under the heading **body** he specifies clothing.

**1. Food and drink** are essential for life. Without them we die. The main purpose of work is in order to provide such essentials for ourselves and our dependants. In this country to lack adequate food and drink is very rare; social security provides the basics for all who are not able to work. The only reason anyone might worry about food and drink is where we have spent excessive amounts on other things and have run out of money to buy the basics. If we wisely steward our incomes we can avoid such worries as “What will we eat, what will we drink?” Jesus gives the illustration of the birds of the air, which are fed by their heavenly Father. They find all the food God has provided for them. Do they worry?

**2. Adding a year to our life.** Jesus asks who by worrying can add a year to their lifespan? It could equally well be translated who by worrying can add a cubit to their stature? Either way worrying doesn't help. If anything worrying is more likely to shorten your lifespan than adding to it. If we make sensible lifestyle decisions about diet, e.g. cutting out sugar so we don't get diabetes in later life, getting exercise, avoiding harmful substances - not smoking, filtering your drinking water, using biologically safe house- hold products, may well extend our lifespan. We can make wise decisions without worrying at all about the future. As for adding a cubit to our height, we grow to our God-ordained height. Some of us are short and thankfully some are tall and can close the windows we can' reach. There is nothing we can do about our stature and as Jesus says, worrying has absolutely no effect, so why do it?

**3. Clothing.** We need clothing. But when someone says, “I've got nothing to wear” they don't really mean it. They mean “I've got nothing that I consider suitable to wear for this occasion”. We all have plenty of clothes for different occasions, yet we worry about what to wear! This worry is not about poverty, but about image. “Does my bum look big in this?” We seriously worry about what we look like and what other people will think about us! Jesus again gives an illustration: of the lilies of the field - wild flowers that grow in profusion on the mountainsides in spring and early summer. No one knows what flowers Jesus had in mind. Whatever the '*krinon*' is it was an impressive wild flower as Jesus says that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. (The most popular contender is the red crown anemone) God clothes the flowers of the field.

#### **4. The Cure for Worry.**

1. Jesus commands us not to worry and his cure is firstly that we realise just how much God cares for us. He says '*Are you not much more valuable than the birds of the*

*air? If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? For the pagans seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.' It is all a matter of confidence and trust that our Father really cares for us. As Peter says, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." 1 Pet 5:7*

2. His second antidote is a hugely important statement, "*Put God's kingdom and his righteousness first in your life and whatever you need will be provided for you.*" This is about putting God first - the things we must pursue are his kingdom, treasures in heaven and serving the Lord not material things, and his righteousness which is about living a godly life with total faith in our heavenly Father. This is what life is really about and if we can instil this into our kids from a young age they will grow up without worry and will become far more mature and stable and responsible than all those who do worry.

3. Paul unpacks this practically in Phil 4:6-7. It is through **prayer** that we seek our Father who cares so much about us. If we pray, God's peace will garrison our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus. This is why it is so vital that we up our own prayer lives and become a community of prayer. A praying people are warriors not worriers.

4. But many find it impossible not to worry and that prayer doesn't help! This is because Satan has established a stronghold of anxiety and worry in our youth that has such a hold of us that we need setting free from. Jesus has come to set us free. Luke 4:18. We need to seek help from those who know how to pray for deliverance from the strongholds of anxiety and worry that have gripped our lives. But it is not impossible; Jesus can do it!

Phil Rogers  
23/01/11