

INTRODUCTION

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*A*nxiety, fear, worry, and stress are familiar words in our day and familiar experiences to many. More and more we're hearing of an extreme form of anxiety referred to as a "panic attack." Some time ago, I observed one close at hand in the emergency room on board a ship. Such extreme displays of anxiety are becoming frighteningly common in our society. They usually are related to an unfounded fear—so overwhelming and so overpowering—that it clutches a person's heart, makes it beat faster, produces chills or perspiration, and the person feels completely unable to cope with the moment.

One lady wrote grippingly of her experience in an article titled "I Was a Prisoner of Panic Attacks." She begins, "While interviewing with my prospective employer, something terrifying happened. The windowless room where the interview took place closed in around me, the air became thin. My throat tightened

and the rushing in my head became deafening. All I could think was, *I've got to get out*. My mind and heart raced for what seemed an eternity as I feigned composure. Somehow, I made it through the meeting without giving my interviewer a clue I had been seconds away from fleeing his office or passing out on the spot.... I endured a rush of the fight-or-flight instinct one usually experiences in life-threatening situations.”¹ The reality, however, was that she wasn't in a life-threatening situation.

Anxiety is, at its core, an inappropriate response in light of the circumstances—very different from the cares and concerns in life that cause people to attend to business in a responsible way. Stress and pressure, instead of being things to avoid, strengthen us to accomplish the challenges God sets before us in life. The apostle Paul wrote that apart from the unrelenting external pressures he had to face, such as persecution, hardship, and imprisonment, he also had daily upon him the internal pressure “of concern for all the churches” (2 Cor. 11:28). In spite of that, he had room in his heart to feel the anxiety of others, for he went on to write, “Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?” (v. 29). He wouldn't have had it any other way, though. In fact, that kind of response to pressure is what Paul looked for in those who would serve with him. Note how he commended Timothy to the Philippian church: “I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare” (Phil. 2:20; cf. 1 Cor. 4:17).

Anyone who knows and loves Jesus Christ is capable of handling pressure like that. The wrong way to handle the stresses of life is to worry about them. Jesus said three times, “Do not be anxious” (Matt. 6:25, 31, 34). Paul later reiterated, “Be anxious for nothing” (Phil. 4:6). Worry at any time is a sin because it violates the clear biblical command.

We allow our daily concerns to turn into worry and therefore sin when our thoughts become focused on changing the future instead of doing our best to handle our present circumstances. Such thoughts are unproductive. They end up controlling us—though it should be the other way around—and cause us to neglect other responsibilities and relationships. That brings on legitimate feelings of guilt. If we don't deal with those feelings in a productive manner by getting back on track with our duties in life, we'll lose hope instead of finding answers. Anxiety, left unresolved, can debilitate one's mind and body—and even lead to panic attacks.

I am concerned about the solutions some Christians offer to the problem of anxiety. A survey of the books put out on the topic by evangelical publishing houses is telling. Most are formulaic, anecdotal, or psychological in orientation. They contain a lot of nice stories, but not many references to Scripture. When Scripture is employed, it is often incidental and without regard for its context. Scriptural concepts are often boiled down to single terms and presented something like this: “If you do [term 1] and [term 2], then God must do [term 3].”

Even more troubling to me than that superficial approach is the disdainful attitude that Scripture, apart from modern psychology, is inadequate for dealing with anxiety and life's other woes. It contradicts the biblical truth that our Lord Jesus Christ, through His divine power, “has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence” (2 Peter 1:3). My concern over this issue prompted me to write *Our Sufficiency in Christ*.²

The potential danger of believers being encouraged to take a psychological approach to anxiety became especially clear to me as I read of a young Christian lady named Gloria. She

sought counseling after years of worrying about her weight. She submitted herself to a well-known Christian clinic in Dallas and began extensive therapy. Because the clinic advertised on a local Christian radio station and was named after men who wrote books widely available in Christian bookstores, Gloria assumed it was a safe place for a Baptist minister's daughter to place her trust. It was the beginning of a nightmare that eventually led to her "remembering" a variety of bizarre, unspeakable crimes her parents had supposedly committed against her and accusing them in court.

D Magazine in Dallas picked up the story and reported it in depth.³ They discovered there was no independent evidence to corroborate any elements of Gloria's story and that Gloria seemed to have been programmed with the perceived expectations and suggestions of her therapist, whose records showed he had counseled a string of patients with similar "memories."

One of the most shameful tragedies in life is that some children are abused by their parents, but there is absolutely no evidence that such a horror is tucked away into the far reaches of the mind, accessible only by a specially trained therapist. "Amnesia is not a common thing in post-traumatic stress disorder," explains one expert quoted by *D Magazine*. "The opposite is the case: There's a preoccupation with the event."⁴ Gloria succumbed to the power of suggestion and paid a terrible price. *D Magazine* concludes, "Years after placing her trust in Christian psychologists to help her lose weight, she weighs more than ever. And Gloria's memories of her childhood have become distorted into a vision of a hell on earth."⁵ She is totally alienated from the people she needs most because she has been led to believe lies about them. Her anxiety is unrelieved. What a frightening end to a young woman's quest to end worries about her weight!

The moral of the story is to be careful how you deal with your worries and to discern the kind of counsel you receive. See what you think about this advice from a contemporary Christian book:

We suggest setting aside fifteen minutes in the morning and another fifteen minutes in the evening for active worry. If concerns surface during other times of the day, the person should jot them down on a card and vow to deal with them during the designated period. Worry-free living involves confining the natural worry we all feel into a designated time slot of only 1 percent of a twelve-hour day.⁶

Remember what Jesus and Paul said about worry? They didn't suggest we do it twice a day; they commanded us not to do it at all. The suggestion above makes about as much sense as prescribing a time limit for lascivious thoughts or any other sin that comes "naturally" to sinners!

Please don't misunderstand me: I am not against all forms of counseling. Although I have been compelled to warn about counseling that calls itself Christian but uses unbiblical means to solve spiritual problems such as anxiety, I am agonizingly aware of people's deep need to know what Scripture says about the difficulties they face. That's why I am an avid proponent of biblical, spiritual counseling. There is a great need within the church for gifted, qualified, caring people to come alongside those who are anxious, guilt ridden, depressed, or fearful. Within my own church we started a ministry that trains our members in biblical counseling so we can lovingly help one another apply scriptural solutions to our problems.

It takes time to think through important issues. To tackle anxiety in a biblical fashion, first we need to know the primary Scripture passages on the topic. Then we need to consider those passages in their context, not merely cite and recite them unthinkingly or use them as props for a nice story or a suggested behavior-modifying technique. As a person “thinks within himself, so he is” (Prov. 23:7).

As we realign our thinking on anxiety with what God says about it in His Word and why, we will be different people. We will be ready to apply His precious Word to our hearts. We won’t just know we’re not to worry; we will have confidence and success in doing something about it. And we can be aggressive in our approach. I’ve titled this book *Anxious for Nothing* because I want you to know you can overcome your anxieties. Each chapter and a special appendix at the end will show you specific biblical ways you can do just that. I trust you will find them practical, enabling you to say with the psalmist:

When I said, “My foot is slipping,”
Your love, O LORD, supported me.
When anxiety was great within me,
Your consolation brought joy to my soul.
(Ps. 94:18–19 NIV)

OBSERVING HOW GOD CARES FOR YOU

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Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's legendary detective, Sherlock Holmes, is one of the most intriguing creations of literary fiction. He is, quite simply, extraordinary. His famous cohort, Dr. John Watson, is ordinary. Watson is often erroneously portrayed as a bumbling fool, but that flies in the face of Doyle's attempt to make the average intelligent reader relate to Watson. In this celebrated interchange between Holmes and Watson, see which character you more closely resemble:

HOLMES: You see, but you do not observe. The distinction is clear. For example, you have frequently seen the steps which lead up from the hall to this room.

Watson: Frequently.

- Holmes: How often?
- Watson: Well, some hundreds of times.
- Holmes: Then how many are there?
- Watson: How many? I don't know.
- Holmes: Quite so! You have not observed. And yet you have seen. That is just my point. Now, I know that there are seventeen steps, because I have both seen and observed.¹

Most of us probably don't know how many steps we regularly ascend each day and therefore relate to Watson. But here Holmes is making a point similar to the one Jesus makes in Matthew 6:25–34. There Jesus directly addresses the topic of worry, telling us what to do about it and why. Like Holmes, Jesus says we need to take a good look around us and observe or think deeply about the meaning behind what we see. This is what Jesus tells us to ponder if we want to be free from worry:

For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing? *Look at the birds* of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single cubit to his life's span? And why are you anxious about clothing?

Observe how *the lilies* of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these. But if God so arrays the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more do so for you, O men of little faith? Do not be anxious then, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or, “With what shall we clothe ourselves?” For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

The often-repeated phrase “Do not be anxious” is the theme. The Lord is issuing a cease and desist order against anxiety based upon the sovereign care of a loving and omnipotent God.

EXPRESSIONS OF WORRY

We all have to admit that worry is a common temptation in life. It is a favorite pastime for many. It can occupy a person’s thoughts for a great portion of the day. However, worry cruelly inflicts a severe toll. But far beyond the need to avoid its psychological and physiological effects is the reality that Jesus commands us not to do it, thus making it clear that worry is a sin. The Christian who worries is really

thinking, *God, I know You mean well by what You say, but I'm not sure You can pull it off.* Anxiety is blatant distrust of the power and love of God. In spite of its lack of subtlety, we fall into it so easily and so often.

The word *worry* comes from the Old English term *wyrgran*, which means “to choke” or “strangle.” That’s appropriate since worry strangles the mind, which is the seat of our emotions. The word even fits the notion of a panic attack.

We’re not much different from the people to whom Jesus spoke. They worried about what they were going to eat, drink, and wear. And if you want to legitimize your worry, what better way than to think, *Well, after all, I'm not worrying about extravagant things; I'm just worrying about the basics.* But that is forbidden for the Christian.

As you read through the Scriptures, one thing you learn is that God wants His children preoccupied with Him, not with the mundane, passing things of this world. He says, “Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth” (Col. 3:2). To free us to do that He says, “Don’t worry about the basics. I’ll take care of that.” A basic principle of spiritual life is that we are not earthbound people. Fully trusting our heavenly Father dispels anxiety. And the more we know about Him, the more we will trust Him.

Many rich people worry about necessities—that’s why they stockpile so much of their resources as a hedge against the future. Many poor people also worry about life’s essentials, but they aren’t in a position to stockpile. It’s just as well that they can’t because stockpiling basically is an attempt to determine one’s own destiny apart from faith and trust in God. Even Christians can make that mistake.

Believers are commanded to be financially responsible and care for their families (1 Tim. 5:8). Scripture does not imply that having a savings account, investing extra money, or owning insurance shows a lack of trust in God. Such provisions from the Lord are reasonable safeguards for the average person in any complex, modern society. However, they ought to be balanced with Jesus' command to "seek first His kingdom, and His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33) and to "lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (v. 20 KJV). We are not to lavish on ourselves what God has given us for the accomplishment of His holy purposes.

I believe in wise planning, but if after doing all you are able to, you still are fearful of the future, the Lord says, "Don't worry." He promised to provide all your needs, and He will: "My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). That is His concern, not yours.

WHAT JESUS SAYS ABOUT WORRY

In Matthew 6:25 Jesus says, "Do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing?" The tense in the Greek text is properly translated, "Stop worrying." The tense in verse 31 is different, however, and means, "Don't start worrying." Thus Jesus brackets our passage with this meaning: If you are worrying, quit; if you haven't started, don't.

The Greek word for "life" is *psuch*. It has to do with the fullness of earthly, physical, external life. Don't be anxious about this temporal world—and the food, clothing, and shelter associated with it. Jesus said previously, "Where your

treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:21). Focusing on earthly treasures produces earthly affections. It blinds our spiritual vision and draws us away from serving God. That’s why God promises to provide what we need.

As children of God we have a single goal—treasure in heaven; a single vision—God’s purposes; and a single Master—God, not money (vv. 19–24). Therefore, we must not let ourselves become preoccupied with the mundane things of this world—“what [we] shall eat, or what [we] shall drink” (v. 25).

Perhaps in American society such a warning seems a bit obscure. After all, there’s a market of some sort on practically every corner. We’ve got so much water in our homes we never think about it. But then again, maybe some conservation prophet of doom comes along and says we’re running out of food and water in America, and maybe we do worry a little.

To appreciate the impact of what Jesus said to His hearers, imagine what it would be like to live in a less plentiful country. If you were living in Palestine at Jesus’ time, you might have cause for concern. There were times when the snows didn’t come to the mountains, and as a result the streams didn’t run. Sometimes a plague of locusts would devour the crops, bringing about famine in the land. When there was famine, there was also no income. And when there was no income, no one could purchase clothing and other necessities.

Jesus’ saying not to worry about such things is especially powerful in the context of His day. Certainly that is an indictment of our own worry about life’s basics. Jesus then asks rhetorically, “Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing?” (v. 25). Of course it is, but you wouldn’t know it judging by what’s advertised today and what people seem to feel they need to be pursuing.

So many in our society are totally consumed with the body—they decorate it, fix it up, clothe it, put it in a nice car, send it off to a nice house, stuff it full of food, sit it in a comfortable chair, hang a bunch of jewelry all over it, take it out on a boat, let it swim, teach it to ski, take it on a cruise, and so on. But life is not contained in those things; it transcends all externals. Life comes from God—and the fullness of life from Jesus Christ.

WHY HE SAYS IT

Jesus gives us, His children, three reasons for not worrying about this life: It is unnecessary because of our Father, it is uncharacteristic because of our faith, and it is unwise because of our future.

WORRY IS UNNECESSARY BECAUSE OF OUR FATHER

It is unnecessary to worry about finances, the basics of life, and what we eat or drink or wear because of who our heavenly Father is. Have we forgotten what He is like? My children never worried about where they were going to get their next meal or whether they would have clothes, a bed, or something to drink. Such thoughts never entered their minds because they knew enough about me to know I would provide for them—and I don't come close to being as faithful as God. Yet how often we fail to believe that God is going to provide for us as well as the average earthly father.

If your concept of God is right and you see Him as Owner, Controller, and Provider, and beyond that as your loving Father, then you know you have nothing to worry about. Jesus said, "What man is there among you, when his

son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!” (Matt. 7:9–11).

Since all things come under God’s control, rest assured He controls those things on behalf of His children. Jesus illustrates that with three observations from nature.

God always feeds his creatures

In Matthew 6:26 Jesus says, “Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?” I can imagine the Lord standing on a hillside up in Galilee looking over the beautiful north end of the sea, the breeze rippling across the water, the sun bright in the sky. Since that part of the Sea of Galilee was known as a crossroads of bird migration, perhaps Jesus saw a flock fly by as He spoke.

He wants us to think about birds. Here’s one observation: Birds don’t get together and say, “We’ve got to come up with a strategy to keep ourselves alive.” They have no self-consciousness or ability to reason. But God has planted within them the instinct or divine capacity to find what is necessary to live. God doesn’t just create life; He also sustains life.

Job 38:41 and Psalm 147:9 tell us that baby birds cry out to God for their food. Jesus tells us that even though they don’t sow or reap or gather surplus into barns, their heavenly Father hears and provides for them. Now that isn’t an excuse for idleness. You won’t see a bird standing out on the edge of a tree with its mouth wide open. Perhaps you’ve noticed: It never rains worms! God feeds birds through the instinct that tells them where to find food. They work hard for it. They’re

always busy searching, gobbling up little insects, preparing their nests, caring for their young, teaching them to fly, pushing them out of the nest at the right time, migrating with the seasons, and so on.

All this work is to be done if they are going to eat, yet they never overdo it. Not even in your strangest dream would a bird say, “I’m going to build bigger nests. I’m going to store more worms. I’m going to say to myself, ‘Bird, eat, drink, and be merry.’” Birds work within the framework of God’s design and never overindulge themselves. They get fat only when people put them in cages.

Birds don’t worry about where they are going to find food; they just go about their business until they find it, and they always do because God is looking out for them. Birds have no reason to worry, and if they don’t, what are you worrying for? Jesus put it this way: “Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Matt. 10:29–31).

Are you not much better than a bird? No bird was ever created in the image of God; no bird was ever designed to be a joint heir with Jesus Christ; no bird was ever prepared a place in heaven in the Father’s house. If God sustains the life of a bird, don’t you think He will take care of you? Life is a gift from God. If God gives you the greater gift of life itself, don’t you think He will give you the lesser gift of sustaining that life? Of course He will, so don’t worry about it.

Keep in mind, of course, that like a bird, we have to work because God has designed that man should earn his bread by the sweat of his brow (Gen. 3:19). If we don’t work, it is not fitting that we eat (2 Thess. 3:10). Just as God provides for

the birds through their instinct, so God provides for man through his effort.

Some people fear we are running out of resources. I read a brochure from the United States Department of Agriculture titled *Is the World Facing Starvation?* that gives these answers to two commonly asked questions:

- “Is the world’s food supply large enough to meet everyone’s minimum needs?” Answer: “The world has more than enough food to feed every man, woman, and child in it. If the world’s food supply had been evenly divided and distributed among the world’s population for the last 18 years, each person would have received more than the minimum number of calories. From 1960 to the present, world food grain production never dropped below 103 percent of the minimum requirements and averaged 108 percent between 1973 and 1977.... If a system existed today to distribute grains equitably, the world’s 4 billion people would have available about one-fifth more grain per person than the 2.7 billion people had 25 years ago.”²
- “Hasn’t the amount of food produced per person been dropping in the developing countries of the world over the last 25 years?” Answer: “This is a common misconception. Food production in the developing countries has been increasing.... World per capita food production declined only twice

in the last 25 years.... Production of grain, the primary food for most of the world's people, rose from 290 kilograms per person during the early 1950s to an average of 360 kilograms some forty years later, about a 25 percent increase.”³

Obviously some of the statistics have changed, but the essential fact remains the same: There is more food on earth than ever. When God says He will provide, He means just that. Every time you see a bird, let it serve as a reminder of God's abundant provision. May it stop cold any worry you might have.

Worry is unable to accomplish anything productive

Jesus gives another practical observation that highlights the folly of worry: “Which of you by being anxious can add ... to his life's span?” (Matt. 6:27). Not only will you not lengthen your life by worrying, but you will probably shorten it. Charles Mayo, cofounder of the Mayo Clinic, made the observation that worry adversely affects the circulatory system, heart, glands, and entire nervous system. In the medical journal *American Mercury* Mayo said he never knew anyone who died of overwork, but he knew many who died of worry. You can worry yourself to death, but you'll never worry yourself into a longer life.

We live in a day when people are in a panic to lengthen their lives. They have an excessive interest in vitamins, health spas, diet, and exercise. God, however, has previously determined how long we shall live. Job 14:5 says of man, “His days are determined, the number of his months is with Thee, and his limits Thou hast set so that he cannot pass.” Does

that mean we should disregard sensible advice about our diet and exercise? Of course not: It will increase the quality of our lives, but there's no guarantee about the quantity. When I exercise and eat right, my body and brain work better and I feel better all around, but I'm not going to kid myself that by jogging in the neighborhood every day and eating hefty quantities of complex carbohydrates that I'm going to force God to let me live longer.

To worry about how long you are going to live and how to add years onto your life is to distrust God. If you give Him your life and are obedient to Him, He will give you the fullness of days. You will experience life to the fullest when you live it to the glory of God. No matter how long or short, it will be wonderful.

God arrays even the meadows in splendor

Jesus gives another illustration from nature on why not to worry: "Why are you anxious about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these. But if God so arrays the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more do so for you, O men of little faith?" (Matt. 6:28–30).

For some people, the most important place in their whole world is the closet. Instead of being afraid they won't have anything to wear—a major concern in biblical times—these jaded individuals fear not being able to look their best! Lusting after costly clothes is a common sin in our society.

Whenever I walk through a shopping mall, I am overwhelmed by how much stuff is hanging on the racks. I don't

know how those stores can sustain their inventory. We have made a god out of fashion. We indulge in a spending spree to drape our bodies with things that have nothing to do with the beauty of character: “Let not your adornment be external only—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, and putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God” (1 Peter 3:3–4).

If you want to talk about fancy clothing, though, Jesus tells us that the best this world has to offer doesn’t even compare to “the lilies of the field” (Matt. 6:28). That’s a general term for all the wildflowers that graced the rolling hills of Galilee, such as anemones, gladiolus, narcissus, and poppies. “They do not toil nor do they spin” (v. 28)—you won’t find one making fancy thread to drape over itself and saying, “I’ve been scarlet for two whole days now. I think I’d like to be blue tomorrow.”

Look at the simplest flowers around you: There is a free and easy beauty about them. You can take the most glorious garment ever made for a great monarch like Solomon, put it under a microscope, and it will look like sackcloth. But if you likewise examine the petal of a flower, you could become lost in the wonder of what you would see. If you’ve ever taken a good look at a flower, you know there is a texture, form, design, substance, and color that man with all his ingenuity cannot come close to duplicating.

So what is the point? That “if God so arrays the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more do so for you?” (Matt. 6:30). Wildflowers have a very short life span. People would gather dead batches of them as a cheap source of fuel for their portable cooking furnaces. A God who would lavish such

beauty on temporary fire fodder certainly will provide the necessary clothing for His eternal children. An anonymous poem expresses this lesson simply:

Said the wildflower to the sparrow:
 “I should really like to know
 Why these anxious human beings
 Rush about and worry so.”

Said the sparrow to the wildflower:
 “Friend, I think that it must be
 That they have no heavenly Father,
 Such as cares for you and me.”

WORRY IS UNCHARACTERISTIC BECAUSE OF OUR FAITH

If you worry, what kind of faith do you manifest? “Little faith,” according to Jesus (Matt. 6:30). If you are a child of God, you by definition have a heavenly Father. To act like you don’t, nervously asking, “What shall I eat? What shall I drink? With what shall I clothe myself?” is to act like an unbeliever in God’s eyes (vv. 31–32).

Christians who worry believe God can redeem them, break the shackles of Satan, take them from hell to heaven, put them into His kingdom, and give them eternal life; but they just don’t think He can get them through the next couple of days. That is pretty ridiculous. We can believe God for the greater gift and then stumble and not believe Him for the lesser one.

The worrier strikes out at God

Someone might say, “Why make a big deal out of worry? It’s just a trivial sin.” No, it is not. I suspect a majority of mental illnesses and some physical illnesses are directly

related to worry. Worry is devastating. But more important than what worry does to you is what it does to God. When you worry, you are saying in effect, “God, I just don’t think I can trust You.” Worry strikes a blow at the person and character of God.

The worrier disbelieves Scripture

It breaks my heart to hear some Christians say, “I believe in the inerrancy of Scripture,” but then live as perpetual worriers. They are saying one thing out of one side of their mouth and another thing out of the other. It is incongruous to say how much we believe the Bible and then worry about God fulfilling what He says in it.

The worrier is mastered by circumstances

When you or I worry, we are choosing to be mastered by our circumstances instead of by the truth of God. The hardships and trials of life pale in comparison to the greatness of our salvation. Jesus wants us to realize it doesn’t make sense to believe God can save us from eternal hell but not help us in the practical matters of life. The apostle Paul reflects a similar desire in Ephesians 1:18–19: “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.” When you catch yourself worrying, go back to Scripture and have your eyes opened again.

The worrier distrusts God

When we worry, we are not trusting our heavenly Father. That means we don’t know Him well enough. Take heart—there’s

an effective remedy: Study the Word of God to find out who He really is and how He has supplied the needs of His people in the past. That will build confidence for the future. Stay fresh in the Word every day so that God is in your mind. Otherwise Satan is apt to move into the vacuum and tempt you to worry about something. Instead, let God's track record in Scripture and in your own life assure you that worry is needless because of God's bounty, senseless because of God's promise, useless because of its impotence to do anything productive, and faithless because it is characteristic of unbelievers.

WORRY IS UNWISE BECAUSE OF OUR FUTURE

Jesus said, "Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matt. 6:34). He was saying, "Don't worry about the future. Even though it will have its share of problems, they have a way of working themselves out at the time. Just deal with them as they come, for there's no way to solve them in advance." Providing for tomorrow is good, but worrying about tomorrow is sin because God is the God of tomorrow just like He is the God of today. Lamentations 3:23 tells us His mercies "are new every morning." He feeds us like He fed the children of Israel—with just enough manna for the day.

Worry paralyzes its victim, making him or her too upset to accomplish anything productive. It will seek to do that to you by taking you mentally into tomorrow until you find something to worry about. Refuse to go along for the ride. The Lord says you have enough to deal with today. Apply today's resources to today's needs or you will lose today's joy.

Lack of joy is a sin for the child of God. By worrying about tomorrow, many believers miss the victory God

would give them today. That is not fair to Him. “*This* is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it” (Ps. 118:24 NIV). God gives you the glorious gift of life today; live in the light and full joy of that day, using the resources God supplies. Don’t push yourself into the future and forfeit the day’s joy over some tomorrow that may never happen. Today is all you really have, for God permits none of us to live in tomorrow until it turns into today. Jay Adams, who has written excellent materials on counseling those who struggle with anxiety and other sins, adds this:

Tomorrow always belongs to God.... Whenever we try to take hold of it, we try to steal what belongs to Him. Sinners want what is not theirs to have, and thereby destroy themselves. God has given us only today. He strongly forbids us to become concerned about what might happen.... Worriers not only want what has been forbidden, but also fail to use what has been given to them.⁴

Realize God gives you strength one day at a time. He gives you what you need when you need it. He doesn’t encumber you with excess baggage. Perhaps your worst fear is how you’d handle a loved one’s death. Let me assure you as a pastor who’s kept watch over many Christians finding themselves in this situation, this is the attitude I most often encounter: “It is so wonderful how God has sustained me! Of course I miss my loved one, but I feel such incredible strength and confidence and a gladness in my heart that he is with the Lord.” God gives us His grace in the hour we need

it. If we worry about the future now, we double our pain without having the grace to deal with it.

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today ... and forever” (Heb. 13:8). That means He will be doing the same thing tomorrow that He was doing yesterday. If you have any question about the future, look at the past. Did He sustain you then? He will sustain you in the future.

REPLACING WORRY WITH THE RIGHT FOCUS

This is what Jesus says to you today: “Seek first His kingdom, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you” (Matt. 6:33). In other words, move your thoughts up to the divine level, and God will take care of all your physical needs. God wants to free His children from being preoccupied with the mundane. Colossians 3:2 says as directly as possible, “Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.” Therefore a materialistic Christian is a contradiction in terms.

The Greek word *prōtos* (“first”) means “first in a line of more than one option.” Of all the priorities of life, seeking God’s kingdom is number one. It is doing what you can to promote God’s rule over His creation. That includes seeking Christ’s rule to be manifest in your life through “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17). When the world sees those virtues in your life instead of worry, it’s evidence that the kingdom of God is there. You can say, “I want to tell people about Jesus so they can be saved,” but if your life is marked by anxiety and fear, they will not believe you have anything they want. They are certainly going to question the power of God.

Perhaps you already are painfully aware of your less-than-perfect testimony and would do anything to root out your

shortcomings. Although in the context of addressing irrational fears, Jay Adams offers this wise caution that applies to any sin you lament in yourself:

God wants you to seek to please Him first, and think about the problem of fear secondly. That is why when speaking of worry (a lesser form of fear), in Matthew 6:33 He commands “Seek *first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” If you put anything else first—even the desire to rid yourself of a terrifying fear—you will discover that you will fail to achieve either goal. God will not take second place, even to a legitimate concern to be free of fear.⁵

What is your heart’s preoccupation? Are you more concerned with the kingdom or with the things of this world? Love for what this world can offer is an especially tempting sin in our society. You wouldn’t be alone if you as a Christian have been tempted by it. The Russian playwright Anton Chekhov cleverly stripped the world of its allure in his short story “The Bet.” In it a poor attorney makes a bet with a frivolous wealthy banker for two million dollars if he voluntarily submits himself to solitary confinement for fifteen years under the banker’s supervision. In the first year the books he sent for were mostly of a light character. In the second year the prisoner asked only for the classics. Later on he began zealously studying languages, music, philosophy, and history. By the tenth year the prisoner sat immovably at his table and read nothing but the Gospels. Theology and histories of religion followed.

The night before he was due to collect the two million, the prisoner wrote this to his captor:

With a clear conscience I tell you, as before God, who beholds me, that I despise freedom and life and health, and all that in your books is called the good things of the world.

For fifteen years I have been intently studying earthly life. It is true I have not seen the earth nor men, but in your books I have drunk fragrant wine, I have sung songs, I have hunted stags and ... have loved women.... Beauties as ethereal as clouds, created by the magic of your poets and geniuses, have visited me at night, and have whispered in my ears wonderful tales that have set my brain in a whirl....

Your books have given me wisdom. All that the unresting thought of man has created in the ages is compressed into a small compass in my brain. I know that I am wiser than all of you.

[Yet] I despise your books, I despise wisdom and the blessings of this world. It is all worthless, fleeting, illusory, and deceptive, like a mirage. You may be proud, wise, and fine, but death will wipe you off the face of the earth....

You have lost your reason and taken the wrong path. You have taken lies for truth, and hideousness for beauty.... I marvel at you who exchange heaven for earth....

To prove to you in action how I despise all that you live by, I renounce the two millions of

which I once dreamed as of paradise and which
now I despise.⁶

That's an example of learning the hard way. We as believers don't need to do that. Our Lord "gives grace and glory; no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly" (Ps. 84:11). Don't be anxious for the goods of this world—or anything else for that matter. As Sherlock Holmes would say, don't just see but observe. And remember what Jesus told you to observe: abundant evidence all around you of God's lavish care for the needs of His beloved.