

## “I’m Just Worried”

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We live in anxious times. More has happened in the last two years than we could have ever imagined. While much has improved in the world, there remain unresolved problems. There are geopolitical conflicts abroad and economic uncertainties at home. There are cultural trends that continue to indicate our society is spiraling downward spiritually. Gallup recently published a poll which indicated eighty-one percent of Americans claim they believe in God: the lowest level in seventy-eight years for this statistic. When we think about the future, we worry.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught the people not to be anxious. Jesus called their attention to the lilies of the field and the birds. Both were provided for by God. Surely, people are more valued by God than plants and animals.

Then, Jesus made His point: “Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matt. 6:31-34).

When we read this, we might ask, “What did these people have to worry about?” We tend to look at past societies with rose-tinted glasses. We think their lives were simpler; less complicated than ours. In reality, there was little easy about life for the people who heard Jesus speak these words.

The people of Jesus’ day were mainly poor. They had humble dwellings. They had a hand-to-mouth existence. Each day was a hardship. They lived under the political occupation of the Roman Empire. They could suffer abuse at the hands of a Roman soldier for looking at him the wrong way. The people of Jesus’ generation had little reason for hope and every reason to worry.

Worry, anxiety, and stress are states of mind that everyone experiences. If they are not addressed, they will consume us. They will rob us of faith and joy. Consider the following strategies for calming our anxiety.

**1. Be realistic.** Much of what causes us worry is simply part of life. We have to learn how to cope with the pressures of living in a fallen world. For example, God told Adam, “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19).

This means that providing for our families will not be easy. Much of the stress we experience is related to employment and economic concerns. The Bible teaches us what to expect in the world. Being realistic about life in the world will help us properly adjust our expectations. Unrealistic expectations are harmful. They can contribute to our anxiety.

**2. Properly order our lives.** Anxiety can stem from disorder, confusion, and chaos. Jesus uses the Gentiles as an example. They had the wrong priorities. They focused on food and clothing. They gave no consideration for God. Instead, we are to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33).

Jesus was not being insensitive when He made these remarks. He understands we have responsibilities. Rather, He gets us to analyze our priorities. What matters most in our lives? What we prize most highly matters, but so too does our third and fourth priority. If priorities three and four get out of order, our lives can become chaotic. Jesus calls us to properly order our lives.

Ultimately, the cross of Jesus is what is to order our priorities. For example, providing for our families is significant. We have to work. Yet, nurturing our children is also significant. Instead of focusing on climbing the corporate ladder, we should climb down on the floor and play with our kids. Our careers are important, but they are not more important than our children. Like Jesus did for us, we must humble ourselves to nurture our children.

**3. Focus on what we can fix.** We frequently worry about things that are beyond our control. As Jesus said, anxiety cannot add a single hour to our lifespan (Matt. 6:27). Yet, there are aspects of our lives that we can control.

We can get to the kingdom. We can properly order our lives. We can change our character and behavior. All of this requires faith in the King. Anxiety is the enemy of faith. Anxiety feeds on us focusing on things that are beyond our control. If we keep our eyes on Jesus, our faith will grow (Heb. 12:1-2).

**4. Accept help.** As Americans, we are taught to be self-sufficient, self-reliant, and self-made. Asking for help is considered a sign of weakness. This is an unrealistic perspective. For example, God gave Eve to Adam because it was not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18).

By God's design, we are intended to receive help from other people. God provides this support through marriage and the family. He also provides this support through the Church. Christians are to love and help one another. Paul wrote, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2).

We all have burdens we carry. We must bear them responsibly; however, we can receive help. Regrettably, pride often keeps us from asking for and receiving help. In our society, we are expected to be strong and independent. This mistaken perspective will crush us. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

## **Conclusion**

We worry about many things. We worry about our health. We worry about our kids. We worry about money. We worry about our jobs. There is no escaping the pressures and responsibilities of life. Therefore, we must learn how to manage the stressors of life in ways that will not crush us. Thankfully, Jesus has shown us how we can manage our anxiety and grow our faith.