

Matthew 6:24-34

Worry Is a Waste! Four Ways to Stop It

In today's Gospel reading Jesus asked:

"Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?"

The answer is obvious: No one, of course.

Worrying about life will not prolong life.

On the contrary, too much worry will very likely shorten our life as recent medical research has shown.

Worry is a waste.

It bums up a lot of our time, energy and health,

but it never accomplishes anything that is positive and good.

In fact, most of the things we worry about will never happen.

So what are we to do about it?

For the sake of our health and wellbeing, how can we change our ways?

How can we worry less and trust more?

The first way to stop worrying, says Jesus, is to recognize and affirm our worth.

After telling us not to be worried about such things as food and drink and clothes, and reminding us of God's care for the birds,

Jesus goes on to ask,

"Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Are you not much more valuable than birds?"

Jesus showed great wisdom when he pointed out the relationship between our worry and recognizing and affirming our worth.

Jesus affirms that we are of great value to God.

God cares for the flowers of the field and the birds of the air and provides for all their needs, yet human beings, who are much stronger,

live much longer, and are much more important in God's eyes than flowers or birds,

are constantly worrying about their survival and their future.

"Therefore I tell you," Jesus said, "do not worry about your life."

There is no legitimate need for us to worry.

God has invested too much love in us not to provide for our needs.
He does not want us to be wasting away through worry.
We are of worth to God and he will take care of us
and use us for his purposes.
Therefore, says Jesus, there is no need to worry.
The word for "worry" in Greek refers to strangling or being choked.
And that is precisely what worrying does to us.
It strangles the life out of us and choking out the joy of trusting in
a God who loves us and promises to take care of us
in very specific and practical ways according to our needs.
Our needs will never exhaust God's supply.
However, if we are to grow in our ability to worry less
we must recognize that God's promise of provision doesn't mean
that he wants us to just sit back and do nothing.
It's not so much that birds don't work.
Actually, they are among the busiest of all the world's creatures.
We too should work, but not from a place of worry.
Not from a place of anxiety.
Not from a place of running scared.
Not of a place of hoarding.
We work because it is good and right and natural for us to work.
The point is that God will meet us where we need to be met and will
ensure that our efforts will more than prove adequate to our needs.
Being freed from worry also requires us to sort out
the difference between our needs and our wants.
In the Lord's Prayer we pray for our need, not our greed.
Sometimes we won't trust God because we want more than what we fear
God will provide.
Trust in God calls us to recognize that God knows what is best for us.
If we are honest, we must admit that most often it is not our needs that
make us sick with worry, but our wants.

The second way to stop worrying, says Jesus, is to concentrate living one day at a time: "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Jesus is not forbidding us to participate in normal, intelligent, commonsense planning for the future.

He is telling us that we should not try to live two days at the same time, today and tomorrow, and he is telling us not to worry anxiously about that which has not yet happened.

One day at a time, one step at a time, one word at a time, one brick at a time, one page at a time - that is the second way to stop the waste of worrying.

If we fill our hours with regrets of yesterday and with worries of tomorrow, we have no today in which to be thankful.

The third way to stop worrying, says Jesus, is to focus on our faith in God and not on our problems.

What are our problems?

Are we worried about having enough food to put on our table?

Are we worried about having enough clothes to keep us warm?

Are we worried about our health, our future, our family?

The list could go on and on.

Don't worry about these things, says Jesus.

Instead "seek first (God's) kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

Here is where we run head on into the major problem with worry.

Worry is basically a lack of faith in God.

Worry is an inability or an unwillingness to trust God to provide for our needs.

That is why it is so important to focus on God and not on our problems.

Psychologists tell us that worry is like a thin stream of fear trickling through our mind.

If encouraged, it cuts a channel into which all other thoughts are drained.

When our fears and anxieties dominate us,

we soon begin to show symptoms of physical or emotional stress as the worrying slowly takes its toll.

When we focus on our problems,
it is inevitable that our worries will increase.
But when we focus on God, we are acting on faith,
and we begin to see our worries and concerns in God's gracious hands.
When we focus on the negative, peace eludes us.
But when we put our problems and worries into God's hands,
he puts his peace into our hearts.

I will admit to you that I am preaching to myself now, as well as to you.
I find it much easier to focus on my problems
than on the Problem-Solver.
I find it much easier to focus on my fears than on my faith.
I find it much easier to focus on my worries than on the Word of God.
I suspect that you do, too.
Therefore, it is all the more important that we listen to Jesus
and begin to move in the opposite direction.
We have to be proactive.
Someone said, Worry is like a rocking chair.
It keeps us busy, but never gets us anywhere.

The fourth way to stop worrying is to count our blessings
before we count our cares.
Let's take time on this Thanksgiving Weekend
to count our blessings and thank God for his provision, protection,
goodness, love and faithfulness.
Then let's thank him for all the good gifts he so graciously gives us
and the many blessings he pours out on our lives every single day.
Jesus calls us to live each day by faith, throwing ourselves completely
into the arms of God.
When we begin to live that way,
we begin to see our worries and concerns in a new light.
We experience the power of God's grace
liberating us from bondage to our fears and anxieties,
so that they can no longer dominate or control our lives.

Finally, let us take to heart the following quotations.

The first is by a prominent Duke University Medical Centre researcher:

"If thankfulness were a drug, it would be the world's bestselling product with health benefits for every organ system."

The second is by Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

"It is only with gratitude that life becomes rich."

Lastly: Proverbs 17:22 says that praising God and giving thanks is the key to a healthy and joyful life" A cheerful heart is good medicine, it works healing."

May God help us to be thankful people.

May he give us a thankful heart. Amen.