

# ARE YOU WORRIED?

By

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“In nothing be anxious...” (Philippians 4:6).

**ARE YOU WORRIED?** If you are, the advice, “Don’t worry,” is about as useless as a doctor’s prescription at a witch’s convention. It is said that in such times only an idiot could live without worry. With our nation being torn apart and violence everywhere, most people are not only worried but extremely distressed.

It is true that Jesus said, “Be not anxious.” Paul repeated the command in the Philippian letter and it is sometimes translated, “Don’t worry about anything.” But even Jesus had His times of great concern, which could be interpreted as “worry”. When faced with conditions at the tomb of Lazarus, He wept. He told the disciples that his soul was “troubled” as He contemplated His final betrayal and crucifixion. Paul expressed great concern and worry over the churches, even to the point of tears and sleepless nights. Then what did he mean: “in nothing be anxious”?

The answer to this question is needed for Christian sanity in this day of the human rat-race. A hospital patient said to me, “I feel that I’m on a merry-go-round; just one vicious circle. The illness is caused by worry, and the worry is caused by illness! How can I get off?” Doctors estimate that 80 to 90 percent of the illness of our day is psychosomatic; that is, it stems from our minds, from anxiety, frustration, fear and worry.

The question is: How can we stop being fearful and anxious? The answer is: We must set our goal in line with God’s eternal goal, instead of temporal goals that are so easily blocked by daily trifles.

My wife and I once served the church in Flagstaff, Arizona, on Highway 66, the main artery used by many friends on their trip to California. A family would come through our town on the way to a vacation in California. We would urge them to see the majesty of the Grand Canyon, the unique cliff dwellings at Walnut Canyon or the sheer loveliness of Oak Creek. In such spots a person can relax and enjoy the glory of God’s creation. But most of the time the visitors were too dead-set on seeing Beverly Hills or taking a splash in the ocean. They considered any detour for local sights as interfering with their vacation. It seemed to me that such detours would have actually made the vacation, for a vacation is to relax and be refreshed. But such relaxation only frustrated the person whose heart was set on another goal.

The Christian aim is godliness, to be in the image of God. That being the case, daily detours should not hinder our attaining the goal.

If a man’s aim is to be president of the company, then he might worry a great deal every time some person or problem loomed up in the way of his rise to that position. If his aim is to acquire a certain level of financial worth, then he will worry a lot about money, how to get it, and how to keep from losing it. This is why Jesus said, “Be not anxious” about things such as clothes, food and houses and etc. These things are NEVER to become goals. Think how millions of people worry constantly over whether or not they

are fashionably dressed. The Bible teaches that we should dress modestly, for this is in keeping with the goal of Godlikeness.

Christ set the goal before us when He said, “But seek you first His kingdom and His righteousness...” (Matt. 6:33). Here is the ultimate goal, not only for man, but for God as well. His purpose in creating man was to have man in “His image”. I never get tired of that great theme, and I keep reminding my readers and my congregation of it all the time. It is the only purpose there is that is worth “worrying” about! It is the only purpose that will be achieved forever by any person. One may gain millions of dollars or attain a high office, but both the money and the office will perish in the day of judgment. “The world passes away...but he that does the will of God abides forever” (I John 2:17).

IF the “image of God” is our first and foremost goal, then the worries about temporal things vanish. If sickness lays us in bed for weeks at a time, it doesn’t deter us from the goal. An insurance salesman told me recently that he had spent three sessions in the hospital within the previous year, and was bedfast for at least three weeks each time. Nine weeks out of his year lying in a hospital bed! He said he spent the time meditating on God and the purpose of his life. That time wasn’t wasted, because that man was “worrying” about the RIGHT thing, and came out of the hospital nearer the goal than when he went in. you see, the detours of life-problems do not hinder our reaching the goal if God is the goal.

A lot of folks have tried to stop worrying by the so-called “positive thinking” process and have failed, saying, “I can’t help worrying.” The trouble is that they have not had a truly positive thing to think about.

Before any progress can be made toward right thinking we must know where we stand with God. Anxiety abounds because man stands guilty before God, and the wages of his sin is death. The common idea is that we can try to be good, and just hope that we can be good enough so that God will not condemn us at judgment. But this is only to compound anxiety. Who is good enough? Jesus said, “None is good, save one, even God.” This leaves all in jeopardy, fearful and anxious. The only solution is to trust God Himself, who has supplied the remedy through Jesus, by allowing Him to suffer death in our stead. This is not just a stop-gap measure, nor an act of love to show us His good will. This is the total and final solution. “There is therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus” — “Who bare our sins in his body on the tree” (Rom. 8:1 I Peter 2:24). Either one is “in Christ” or he isn’t. This means he either stands condemned or he stands free from condemnation through Christ. The Christian does not go through life wondering if he is forgiven of sin, but takes God’s word for it that he is. Therefore, as John says, “we know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the evil one” (I John 5:19).

This is the first step to freedom from anxiety, and is essential to any further progress.

Next, we must know the purpose of God if we are to think in that direction. It is tragic that many who profess Christian faith know nothing of the great future God has planned; the resurrection to an immortal body and the “new earth wherein dwells righteousness”, where the final and eternal purpose of God is fulfilled. After claiming Christ as Savior, they go on trying to build a life based on the world’s concepts of success. They mistakenly support the socialist goals of a Utopia in this world, trying to create a heaven on earth of men and women who do NOT seek God’s kingdom and

righteousness. They fail to realize the fact that God's goal is to be accomplished with the return of Jesus, the consummation of history, the end of the world and the creation of a new world made up of only those who are Christians. What counts NOW is our development in God's image, our total trust in Him and seeking of His way. The stock market, the salary, our health, or what someone else thinks of us and even Satanic powers that are loose in the world are not going to keep us from going on each day seeking this goal.

What preachers worry over too often reveals a lack of centrality of purpose. For example one writes that he is concerned about "comfortable seating." Christians in communist countries haven't this worry, for they do not even have buildings in which to meet. Another is worried about meeting the budget. Another is concerned about maintaining the building and still another is putting forth a drive for choir robes! How often the elders have to "worry" through a session on whether or not to robe the choir! I wonder if "be not anxious what you shall put on" wouldn't apply to the choir as well as the pew. Where the real concern is centered in the goal of Christ-likeness there will be unity of purpose and no time for worry over the inconsequential matters.

A case of worry over the wrong thing is found in Luke 10, where Jesus was entertained by Mary and Martha. Martha wanted the meal to be a triumph in itself and was getting fussy about it, to the point of worry and frustration. The entire visit of Jesus was about to be spoiled by this woman's concern for making an impression. Many times, in an evangelistic meeting, I have looked in vain to see the face of the person with whom I was to share Sunday dinner, only to find later that she had chosen to stay home from the morning worship in order to prepare an elaborate table. Obviously she was more concerned about the physical food than the spiritual. Of course, such meals are always a disappointment. Better to have a cold sandwich where hearts are filled with desire toward God than an eight course dinner where God takes second place.

I cannot believe Mary was lazy or negligent. She had to eat, too. But she had found something of more importance than setting a fine table. It was more important to learn of God's purpose, as Jesus revealed it. So Jesus said that Mary had "chosen the good part." If you are going to fuss and worry over something, better choose that which is really worth the worry: the purpose of God.

People keep asking, "How can one HELP worry?" The answer is, don't worry about not worrying. Just make sure you are concerned about the right things. Turn your concern to God and whether or not you are pleasing Him. Are you redeemed from sin and ultimate death? Are you seeking His righteousness? Do you really know His word, as He expects you to? Do you "meditate upon His law"? Are your habits clean and pure? Can you look forward to his coming, to resurrect the dead and give all believers glorious and never-dying bodies like His own? Here are things worth your concern and things you can do something about. If God is your goal, make that your first and foremost "worry", and you will find the pace that He promised.

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