

# How to Deal with Worry

Matthew 6:25-34

## Intro

### The Fears and Worries of Famous People

Jennifer Aniston, Cher, and Whoopi Goldberg are all aviophobes. They are afraid of flying. Barbra Streisand is xenophobic—she is uncomfortable around strangers. Michael Jackson was haunted by the fear of contamination, infections, and diseases. He was mysophobic. But the celebrity with the most phobias is Woody Allen. He's afraid of insects, sunshine, dogs, deer, bright colors, children, heights, small rooms, crowds, and cancer.

Famous people of the past were no different. George Washington was scared to death of being buried alive. Richard Nixon was terrified of hospitals, and Napoleon Bonaparte, the military and political genius, feared cats. (Source: David Jeremiah, *What Are You Afraid Of?* Tyndale, 2013)

Did you know that worry is a modern condition? Its history can be traced through its etymology (the study of the origin of words and the way in which their meanings have changed throughout history). Worry has evolved from its Old English meaning of 'to strangle', to its Renaissance sense of 'physical harassment', and now to its current connotation of 'mild anxiety'.

The word worry as it is understood today did not emerge until the 19th century, with the growth of major cities and modern industry.

How come? It's because we all worry about the risks that come with modern abundance: cars break down, investments lose money, factories close, businesses go under, appliances stop working etc. Also because we simply have more access to information than ever before, so we are aware of more than we can really process and we worry.

## Focus

Today I want to talk about focus. Sometimes we are focused on our fears and they consume us and cripple us emotional, psychological and spiritually.

Practically all worry and anxiety is rooted in fear, whether we are afraid of losing control or dying or failing or being rejected. Fear turns into true anxiety and then it takes power over us and our lives. It's what our minds are focused on that really matters.

I want us to look at 3 areas of focus that will help us deal with worry. These areas of focus are faith principles found in God's word.

The first faith principle we need to focus on is:

### **1. Focus on the fact that God will see you through anything.**

Don't focus on the bad things that might happen. How many of you play a movie in your mind of all the bad things that could possibly happen in the future?

Don't exaggerate the negative. Worry is often associated with believing lies; what we think has a great impact on how we feel. If we believe and tell ourselves that we are worthless, life is hopeless, no one loves us, or nothing will ever get better, we are believing and living the lie.

Worry is like a man who is carrying a bag of feathers in which he thinks he is carrying a bag of stones. There is always something to worry about: losing your job, financial problems, aging parents, wayward children, illness, terrorism, just to mention a few.

Isaiah the prophet wrote: *“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands...”* (Isaiah 49:15-16).

When we accept the fact that bad things will happen, but a good God will see us through them, it changes our focus. We begin to concentrate on how big our God is, not how big our problems are. We know that God is able, and that is all we need to know. We have the confidence that nothing will happen to us that God cannot handle, and even use for our benefit and blessing.

Psalm 34:17-19 says, *“The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry. . . . The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all”*

#### A Practical Way to Handle Worry

A Good way to handle worry is to use a God-bag. Write concerns on slips of paper and place them into a paper bag. Agree with God that you are not going to worry about these circumstances for 30 days. When tempted to do so, remind yourself, ***“It’s in the bag!”*** Notice at the end of the month how God has worked in those areas. Update the bag as needed. God will see you through!

The second faith principle we need to focus on is:

**2. Focus on what is unseen, rather than what is seen.** What is seen is often transient or transitory, and what is unseen is a solid spiritual reality.

The Bible explains what is unseen is so much more important than what is seen. In 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 it says, *“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”*

If what is unseen is the eternal reality, and the seen is temporary, then we need to focus on what is unseen rather than what is seen.

#### Biblical examples

The Red Sea was the seen temporary problem but the dry ground through the middle of the sea was the unseen blessing.

The impenetrable walls of Jericho were the seen temporary obstacle; but their collapse was the unseen breakthrough.

Goliath was the seen temporary challenge; little David was the unseen victor.

The lion’s den was the seen temporary dilemma but Daniel in the lion’s den experienced the unseen deliverance! I could go on with so many biblical examples.

Look at Hebrews 11:1, “*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*” Faith is exercised not on the seen but the unseen. Our faith in God must excel the circumstance. In other words it is not our temporary circumstance that should control my life BUT it is my faith in God that should control my circumstance and life.

### Walk in Faith not Fear

My responsibility as a believer is to walk in faith, not in fear. My responsibility is to persevere and push through the present dilemma I am facing until I come through on the other side.

Can I say this? My faith in God should be greater than my circumstance. When temporary problems, obstacles, challenges and dilemmas try to assail me or burden me with worry – I will turn to God in faith, trusting in Him that He is in absolute control. Faith is “*assurance about what we do not see.*”

The third faith principle that we need to focus in order to stop worrying and start living is:

**3. Focus on the fact that God is in control, not on your ability to control.** Understand that God has a plan for your life, and that he is carefully working it out. He is in absolute control. That is one of the major reasons why we should not worry.

As Christians we believe in providence. Nothing catches God off-guard. Nothing surprises him. He is carefully, and with great skill, weaving all the events of life together into his eternal plan. The Bible says, “*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose*” (Romans 8:28).

François Fénelon, the seventeenth-century French Bishop, said, “*Don t worry about the future — worry quenches the work of God within you. The future belongs to God. He is in charge of all things. Never second-guess him.*”

Corrie Ten Boom said, “*Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.*”

You cannot see the whole picture — only God can. Just because your life seems out of control at times does not mean that God is not in control. So you have to trust that there is a plan, even if you don’t understand fully what the plan is. Just because you cannot grasp it does not mean it does not exist.

Dr. E. Stanley Jones, the great missionary to India, has a beautiful passage in his book *Transformed by Thorns*. He writes: “*I am inwardly fashioned for faith, not for fear. Fear is not my native land; faith is. I am so made that worry and anxiety are sand in the machinery of life; faith is the oil. I live better by faith and confidence than by fear, doubt and anxiety. In anxiety and worry, my being is gasping for breath — these are not my native air. But in faith and confidence, I breathe freely — these are my native air.*”

### A Practical Way to Handle Worry

Did you know that if you purposely breathe out longer than you breathe in, your body calms down? Take a deep breath in to the quick count of 5 in your mind. Then slowly breathe out to the quick count of 10 in your mind.

If you do this for a minute or so, you'll be amazed how quickly you've calmed down. It helps you relax and reduce anxiety.

Again I would like to reiterate what Jones said, *“In anxiety and worry, my being is gasping for breath — these are not my native air. But in faith and confidence, I breathe freely — these are my native air.”*

### **Matthew 6:26-34**

Jesus wants us to change our focus from fear to the faithfulness of God when he said: *“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these”* (Matthew 6:26-29).

What helps me most is to change my focus to the faithfulness of God. I see it in the world all around me. I have experienced his faithfulness in the past, so I have every reason to believe I will experience his faithfulness in the future. I have seen winter turn into spring so many times that I no longer have trouble believing that spring will come – in spite of what I see outside.

Jesus said, *“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own”* (Matthew 6:31-34).

Indeed it does, but if we live by faith, each day has enough joy of its own as well. And that is where our focus should be. Jesus forbids worry. Three times he commands his followers to not worry. For those who are already living in worry, he commands them, *“Stop worrying.”* For those who are about to start to worry, he says, *“Don’t take that step. Don’t even begin to worry.”*

Jesus’ command is meant to keep his followers from getting hurt. Worry hurts. It affects people and their relationship. It cripples people. It incapacitates them. It affects even their sleep. It depletes faith. It leads to a lot of trouble.

A John Hopkins University doctor says, *“We do not know why it is that worriers die sooner than the non-worriers, but that is a fact.”*

But I think I know. We are inwardly constructed in nerve and tissue, brain cell and soul, for faith and not for fear. God made us that way.

Fear deteriorates the quality of my life and even destroys me physically and emotionally. I was not designed to live that way. Faith breathes life and joy into my mind and body.

### **Conclusion**

Worry is an attitude unbecoming of the child of God. To fret is a useless endeavor. To believe is better. If you have lived in worry, it is time to make some important changes. Make the right decision. Put your faith and trust in God.

When we drift away from the Lord or when we lose relevancy in our relationship with God we make ourselves vulnerable and weak. The world's constant pressures and fears can take a hold of us and burden us with worry and anxiety. At times the world tries to suck the faith out of us and make us slaves to worry. We, as believers, NEED to be connected to the Lord and exercise our faith in Him. We need to believe that He is in absolute control over our lives.

### Nun in Elevator

While staying alone in her convent, an 85-year-old nun by the name of Margaret Geary got trapped inside a broken elevator for four nights and three days. She tried pushing the inside elevator door, but the electricity went off. She had her cell phone with her, but there wasn't a signal. Fortunately, she had carried a jar of water, some celery sticks, and a few cough drops into the elevator.

At first she said to herself, "This can't happen!" But then she decided to turn her elevator into a personal prayer retreat. "It was either panic or pray," she later told an interviewer for CNN. She started viewing the experience as a 'gift.' "I believe that God's presence was my strength and my joy—really," she said. "I felt God's presence almost immediately. I felt like he provided the opportunity for a closer relationship." (Source: Jenny Wilson, "Nun Stuck in Elevator Survives Four Nights on Celery Sticks, Water and Cough Drops," Time.com, Apr. 28, 2011)

Let me summarize:

- 1. Focus on the fact that God will see you through anything.**
- 2. Focus on what is unseen, rather than what is seen.**
- 3. Focus on the fact that God is in control, not on your ability to control.**