

NBC Devotional
May 5, 2021
“What Jesus Says About Worry”

It is my privilege to be able to share a few thoughts with you this morning.

First, allow me the opportunity to congratulate Dr. Graves and Cheryl on their upcoming retirement from the presidency of Nazarene Bible College. I remember the General Assembly when Harold was elected to represent our region as a Trustee at NBC.

Some of you may know that I am married to Cheryl’s sister, Patty. Harold and Cheryl married in June 1974, and Patty and I followed about 7 months later. Actually, Patty and I started dating before they. I remember one day as I going for a meal in Ludwig Hall at Olivet, Harold (Bubba as we called him in those days) sidled up to me and said, ‘Hey Virgil (Virg) How about putting a good word in for me with Cheryl?’ I think I did. It must have worked. After we both were married, we actually lived in the same small apartment quad for a short amount of time. I was working nights at Tenney Sales, and Harold was Youth Minister at Kankakee 1st. During that time, in the late afternoon, Harold and I would sometimes have some fierce whiffle ball games. I remember Cheryl worked for a time at a local funeral home as a receptionist. She would answer the phone, “Mrs. Graves, May I help you.”

As I look back, those seem like carefree times, but were they really? Life had its challenging moments even then, which could have pulled us into paralyzing worry.

Jeffrey Kluger wrote this in TIME magazine a decade and a half ago:

It would be a lot easier to enjoy your life if there weren’t so many things trying to kill you every day. The problems start even before you’re fully awake. There’s the fall out of bed that kills 600 Americans each year. There’s the early-morning heart attack, which is 40% more common than those that strike later in the day. There’s the fatal plunge down the stairs, the bite of sausage that gets lodged in your throat, the tumble on the slippery sidewalk as you leave the house, the high-speed automotive pinball game that is your daily commute. Other dangers stalk you all day long. Will a cabbie’s brakes fail when you’re in the crosswalk? Will you have a violent reaction to bad food?

Kluger could not have imagined what we would experience over the last 15 months. I don’t need to detail for you the challenges of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Yes, there are many things that can cause concern and burden us down with paralyzing worry.

What does Jesus have to say about this? Let’s look at Matthew 6:25-34, a portion of the Sermon on the Mount. I will be reading from the (NIV):

“Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? 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? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? (or a single cubit to your height - KJV)

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers 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. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 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.”

Allow me to borrow from an alcoholics' anonymous expression:

- “Hi my name is Virgil. I am a worrier.”

C.S. Lewis wrote:

- Some people feel guilty about their anxieties and regard them as a defect of faith, but they are afflictions, not sins.

The Greek word for worry is used in I Corinthians 12:25 to describe

- *‘having concern for each other in the body of Christ...’*

Again, the Apostle Paul writes in Philippians 2:20: ‘

- *I have no one else like Timothy who will show genuine concern for your welfare.’*

However, in the New Testament, the word is more often used negatively:

- “To be drawn in opposite directions...to go to pieces....to be pulled apart.”

Has concern become paralyzing worry?

- I spoke to a woman a few days ago who’s teeth were literally chattering because of her worry over a particular situation in her life.

I want to highlight some thoughts that come to us from Jesus’s words:

1. When we allow worry to dominate us, we are allowing ourselves to forget or even deny our value to our Heavenly Father.

Speaking of the birds of the air, Jesus asked, “*Are you not more valuable than they?*” Is it a rhetorical question? The obvious answer is yes.

I saw a church sign that read: Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.

Psalm 139:13-16 The Message

*Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out;
 you formed me in my mother's womb.
 I thank you, High God—you're breathtaking!
 Body and soul, I am marvelously made!
 I worship in adoration—what a creation!
 You know me inside and out,
 you know every bone in my body;
 You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit,
 how I was sculpted from nothing into something.
 Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth;
 all the stages of my life were spread out before you,
 The days of my life all prepared
 before I'd even lived one day.*

King David in Psalm 71, cries out *'Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come.'*

There is no shelf life or expiration date on our value to our heavenly father. I pastor a congregation with the majority being seniors. I have a calling to let them know how valuable they are to me, the church, and the Lord.

2. Worry is pointless and useless.

In the movie, *Bridge of Spies*, when attorney James Donovan (Played by Tom Hanks) brought troublesome news on a couple of different occasions to his client, accused Soviet Spy, Rudolf Abel (portrayed by Mark Rylance) ... Aren't you worried? 'Would it do any good?'

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

Regardless of whether Jesus is referring to the futility of extending one's height (as translated in KJV) or one's life (NIV) through worry, the result is the same. Worrying is futile. This is a good question to consider when tempted to worry about the health of your body. Can you change anything about your body through worrying about it? Since the answer is no, you shouldn't worry!

In fact, medical studies have repeatedly shown that those who worry the most, age fastest and die earliest. There's something else for you to worry about!

C.S. Lewis wrote: Remember one is given strength to bear what happens to one, but not the 100 and 1 different things that might happen. And don't say God has proved that he can make you fear poverty, illness, etc. I am sure that God never teaches us to fear anything but himself.

About 14 months ago, my wife and I went for a Coronary Calcium Scan – her score was zero. A score greater than 300 is a possible sign of a very high to severe coronary disease and heart attack risk. Mine was over 4000. I was concerned. To keep a long story short, I had a Coronary Artery Bypass Grafting on May 1, 2020. No family were allowed to visit due to COVID-19 restrictions.

I found myself quoting the 23rd Psalm repeatedly. I also recited Philippians 4:6-7: *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

3. Worry is counter to faith in a God who can do the impossible.

The expression ‘O you of little faith’...literally is ‘O you of ‘little faiths.’

Robert Mounce, American NT Scholar who lived to age 98, wrote: ‘Worry is practical atheism and an affront to God.’

George Mueller founded schools and orphanages in England in the early 19th Century. I don’t believe he ever asked for money, he just believed that God would provide. He said: ‘The beginning of anxiety is the end of faith, and the beginning of true faith is the end of anxiety.’

As the Angel said to Mary in Luke 1: *“For with God nothing will be impossible.”*

4. The Antidote to Paralyzing Worry and Fear is to Have the Right Focus.

“Seek first His kingdom and righteousness...”

In closing, I want to go back to the Old Testament Book of Daniel.

Remember the 3 Hebrew children (young men), Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, preparing to be thrown into the fire, because they refused to worship a pagan, golden image erected by King Nebuchadnezzar?

I think it would have been excusable for them to be anxious, worried, and fearful.

King Nebuchadnezzar said to them *“If you do not worship it (the image of gold), you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?”*

But their response: *‘O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.’* (Dan 3:16-18)

Remember, they were delivered, but prior to their release from the fiery furnace, the old, pagan king saw not 3, but 4 men, walking in the fire!

The Speer Family, a southern gospel group, sang a song back in the 90’s entitled ‘He’s still in the fire.’ It tells the story about a mother reading the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to her children. At the end of the story, one of the children asks the question: “Mama wait a minute, there’s one thing that I must know. If three went in, and three came out, then where’d that fourth man go?” She said, ‘He’s still in the fire and He’s walking in the flame. And He’ll be there to help you when you call upon His name; and He can still deliver by His almighty power. While here below it’s good to know, He’s still in the fire.’

There are many circumstances that cause us to be concerned.

I imagine that many of you could testify to instances of God's guidance, assistance, and answered prayer, as NBC has been in transition for many years. And now, there is the transition from Harold Graves to a new President, Scott Sherwood. (By the way, I went to church as a child with Scott's dad, John.)

Remember...

- You are valuable to God.
- It is pointless to be dominated by worry.
- Worry is counter to faith in a God who can do the impossible.
- Seek Him and His will and His kingdom first!
- He is still in the fire.

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