

SURVIVAL KIT

ANXIETY

&

Worry

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DO NOT *worry*

There are struggles in life that can become emotional strongholds—things that hold you hostage and keep you from wholeheartedly serving and trusting God and experiencing the abundant life He has promised. One of the most damaging strongholds is worry. It is available for every age and is an obstacle to moving forward. When it is a stronghold in your life, it is a way of life.

We worry about so many things—what do people think about us, do we look fit, are we healthy and do we have enough money. If you are prone to worry, there is no limit to the possibilities to worry about.

People cope with worrying in a number of ways—some drink to dismiss it, others shop for a distraction, some take naps or go to bed early to avoid it. None of these remedies work because the panic still sets in. In Matthew 6:25, 31–34, Jesus stated three times, “Do not worry!” The Greek word used for “worry” is the concept of being strangled or choked. It leaves you frustrated when you

ought to be free, and if you are His disciple, then you should stop it.

Worrying is a sin because it is doubt in the power and goodness of God. Some people don't like to call worrying a sin—they are just “concerned” about something. How do you distinguish concern from worry? Legitimate concern is when you are in control of your thoughts and feelings, and illegitimate worry is when the matter controls your thoughts, actions and emotions.

Jesus said, “For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?” (Matthew 6:25-26). The reason we worry is that we are focusing on the wrong authority. If our Father feeds birds that have no soul, how much more will He take care of us since we are worth even more to Him? Remember His promise that He will never leave you nor forsake you as the first antidote to worry.

Key verses:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

- Philippians 4:6-7

Worrying IS POINTLESS

The first thing Jesus wants us to realize from the passage we looked at yesterday (Matthew 6:25-26) is that if we are bound by the emotional stronghold of worry, we have forgotten who our Father is. He said our heavenly Father finds us more valuable than the birds and flowers. He introduced this section about worry by saying in verse 25, “For this reason.” For what reason? In verse 24 it says, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” If money is your master, you’re going to find yourself worrying about it and not serving God.

Jesus put worry in perspective when He asked, “Who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?” (Matthew 6:27). If we do all we can and then entrust the outcome to God, worrying is pointless.

God’s people who know Him and have a relationship with Him should not live or

think the same way as those who do not. God is insulted by our worry; and it impedes our ability to function as trusting children of His.

Lois and I have a getaway spot away from the hustle and bustle of city life. When I wake up in the mornings there, I often hear the birds singing outside of my window full of peace and joy because they aren't worried. These are birds with no bank account, mutual funds and no career paths. They understand that the One who created them has provided all their needs.

God feeds the birds, yet they have no eternal value to Him. But you have so much value to Him that He gave His only Son to purchase your salvation and redemption from hell.

You may have been raised in an environment where your needs were not met while the needs of those around you were. Or you experienced betrayal in a close relationship—maybe a marriage—and all of that is evoking emotions of worry, dread and doubt. Jesus is talking about your “heavenly” Father, not other people who may neglect you or forsake you. When you make that distinction in your mind and in your thoughts, that God is not

like the others, you will be on your way to overcoming worry.

Key verses:

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

- 1 Peter 5:6-7

And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

- Philippians 4:19

A WORRY *box*

There are two days you should never spend a lot of time thinking about—yesterday and tomorrow. Many of us are crucified with two thieves. On the right is yesterday, and on the left is tomorrow. He doesn't want us worrying about the past, and He certainly doesn't want us worrying about tomorrow. He says, "So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:34).

There was a man who began to worry that he would get cancer because it had been prevalent in his family. He worried about it for thirty years and then suddenly died of a heart attack.

My friend, worrying wastes your time. Not only that, it puts within you negative self-talk that can affect your choices and your actions. Should you be concerned about your health? Yes. Should you make efforts to eat wisely and exercise? Yes. Should you manage your money well? Yes. But to be bound to worry on these things will only prevent you from enjoying your health and blessings.

Jesus told us how to get rid of the worry that He forbids by changing our priorities. He said, “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33). The problem with worry is that we are seeking the wrong things—we need to seek God and His kingdom, and everything else will fall into place.

If you are prone to struggle with the stronghold of worry, I suggest that you make yourself a worry box by cutting a slot in the top of an old shoebox. When Satan drives you to worry, write your worry down on a slip of paper. Talk to the Lord, and tell Him what you have written down and that you believe He is able to take care of whatever worries you put in that box. You cannot handle them, but you know that He can. Then fold up your worry, drop it in the box, and leave it to the Lord. He promises to give you a peace that can only come from Him.

Will a worry box make your problems go away? Probably not. But what it will do is shift the weight of those problems off of you and back onto God. He is strong enough to carry that burden for you. Let Him.

Key verses:

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

- Matthew 11:28-30

When I am afraid, I will put my trust in you.

- Psalm 56:3

Identity THEFT

America is currently having a problem with identity theft. The advancement of technology and our shift to buying and selling things online has added to this crisis. People who steal other's identities will use their credit score and bank accounts to live a life that is not truly reflective of them, but rather of someone else.

A similar thing happens when we worry too much about what other people think rather than what God thinks. We begin to adopt the identities of people we see on television or successful people we read about rather than remaining true to who we are. Worrying about other people's acceptance of us is one of the greatest strongholds to overcome. People-pleasing strongholds can lead to other strongholds such as perfectionism, over-working, and obsessive body-imaging thoughts and actions.

What is the cause of this stronghold? In Galatians 1, we read about the religious leaders called Judaizers who sought to place Chris-

tians under a performance standard “under the Law” thereby abandoning grace.

In Galatians 1:10, Paul talks about these well-meaning, Bible-quoting leaders who were ripping the saints away from grace, “Am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.” Paul is saying that it is possible to be more people-oriented than God-oriented. Proverbs 29:25 says, “The fear of man brings a snare, but he who trusts in the Lord will be exalted.”

Satan uses our legitimate need for acceptance in an illegitimate way that can result in us living under a false identity. You’ll notice how confused people are who want to please everyone—one minute they are pleasing one person, the next minute they are pleasing someone else. They have to be around people that are making them feel good, otherwise they become depressed.

You will begin to overcome your stronghold of worrying when you decide what God says about you is most important.

God, who does not change, loves you with an everlasting love. He has seen your ugly cry, your days without make-up or messed up hair and has heard your rants and raves — yet still loves you! If you are driven by approval of people, remember that they are fallible and their emotions are shifting.

Key verses:

Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

- Matthew 6:1

Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

- Matthew 6:16

WHEN IT DOESN'T *get better*

The story of Hannah is one that many of us can relate to. We're in a difficult situation, yet despite our persistent prayers, it doesn't get better. Hannah was one of two wives of Elkanah and couldn't conceive children, but Peninnah, the other wife, could. In biblical culture, bearing children for a woman was critical because they would be the ones to care for you. So not only did Hannah bear her own internal shame and pain, but Peninnah "would provoke her bitterly to irritate her" (1 Samuel 1:6).

Hannah's pain drove her to tears—so much so that she was accused of being drunk at the temple when she was crying out to God for a child!

Hannah and Elkanah's yearly Shiloh trip to sacrifice to the Lord was most likely her saddest day. She worshiped the Lord even though her persistent problem worried and distressed her. She would watch as those around her enjoyed their children and rested securely in their futures.

I suspect you've been in a position like this as well. The problem wasn't that the situation got worse—nothing changed for Hannah. Doubts most likely crept into her head, making her wonder if her husband would continue to love her.

Can you appreciate how Hannah must have felt? Even though her situation didn't change she put her trust, hope and belief in God.

The point to this story is that Hannah persevered year after year—overcoming her worries through both prayer and worship. God knew her pain, and His silence must not be perceived as inattentiveness or lack of involvement.

God was bringing Hannah to the point where she was willing to give back to God the very thing she wanted most—her son Samuel. God had a special plan for him to be a great prophet. The only way Hannah would be moved to this place of surrender was through her painful barrenness. Hannah promised the Lord that she would give Him Samuel if He would open her womb. He did, and she kept her vow and God blessed Hannah with five more children (1 Samuel 2:21).

Friend, if there is something specific that you are worried about, consider going to the Lord and willingly give it up or give it back to Him. Oftentimes, He is waiting for you to trust Him before He will move. It is far more important to Him to fulfill His purpose and plan in your life than to fulfill your whim.

Key verses:

But Hannah replied, “No, my lord, I am a woman oppressed in spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have poured out my soul before the Lord. Do not consider your maidservant as a worthless woman, for I have spoken until now out of my great concern and [c]provocation.” Then Eli answered and said, “Go in peace; and may the God of Israel grant your petition that you have asked of Him.” She said, “Let your maidservant find favor in your sight.” So the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.

- 1 Samuel 1:15-18

The Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends, and the Lord increased all that Job had twofold. Then all his brothers and all his sisters and all who had known him before came to him, and they ate bread with him in his house; and they consoled him and comforted him for all the adversities that the Lord had brought on him. And each one gave him one piece of money, and each a ring of gold.

- Job 42:10-11

GOD IS THE *greater force*

Most of us know what it feels like to be alone in the dark. If you ever had to take the trash out late at night or found yourself stranded alongside a road at night, then you understand—your mind can create hidden shadows or images. Before you know it, the hair on the back of your neck begins to rise.

However, if you turn on a flashlight, your fears quickly fade because the light exposes the truth.

In Psalm 23, David wrote about a time when he was sure that he would lose his life. It was a season when he walked “through the valley of the shadow of death” (v. 4). Yet, he was not afraid because he knew the One who walked with him had the ability to bring light to the darkest situation and exchange his worry for faith.

When you face worrisome difficulties in your life, turn to God’s reassuring and

never-ending love. When you awake in the middle of the night to the whispers of the enemy's lies, remind yourself that Christ overcame, and you will also. Proclaim what you know to be true!

In essence, David said, "Though I walk through the threat of death, I will not fear because my Lord and Savior are beside me." God is the greater force, and He loves you with an intimate, personal love. Even though life may become dark, His light continues to burn. There is no darkness that can quench the light of God's love. You have no reason to worry—God is with you!

Your brain signals dangers in your life whether they are real or imagined. What you need to do when these worry signals happen is to assess and triage them. Become aware if the danger is a real threat or an imagined one. If it is imagined, then let it go. If there is no action you can take toward alleviating it, turn your thoughts to something else.

You can overcome threats by trading worry for trust that God is with you and is in control, and you do not need to be afraid. Like David penned in Psalm 34:3-5, "O mag-

nify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together. I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces will never be ashamed.”

Key verses:

O Lord, how my adversaries have increased!
Many are rising up against me.
Many are saying of my soul,
“There is no deliverance for him in God.”

But You, O Lord, are a shield about me,
My glory, and the One who lifts my head.
I was crying to the Lord with my voice,
And He answered me from His holy
mountain. Selah.

I lay down and slept;
I awoke, for the Lord sustains me.
I will not be afraid of ten thousands
of people
Who have set themselves against me
round about.

- Psalm 3:1-6

Key verses:

O Lord my God,
I cried to You for help, and You healed me.
O Lord, You have brought up my soul from
Sheol;
You have kept me alive, that I would not go
down to the pit.
Sing praise to the Lord, you His godly
ones,
And give thanks to His holy name.
For His anger is but for a moment,
His favor is for a lifetime;
Weeping may last for the night,
But a shout of joy comes in the morning.

- Psalm 30:2-5

FREE ME FROM *worry*

Prayer:

Dear Father, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, to change the things that I can and the wisdom to know the difference. Help me to live in the present rather than worry about the future. When my mind starts wandering to things that it shouldn't, do something to bring me back to now—whether it be a loud noise, siren or someone speaking to me—anything to jolt me back to where I am in the present, Lord. Free me from the burden of worry and increase my faith in you.

Key verses:

Cast your burden upon the Lord and He will sustain you;
He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.

- Psalm 55:22

My Prayer Needs/Requests:

My Own Prayer:

Practical Steps

1. Think of a problem that a friend or family member of yours worries about. Write down what they think about it and how it makes them ultimately act in one column, and the potential or realized outcome. Then in another column, write down your thoughts, actions and outcome to the same problem. Notice how thoughts can affect outcomes. Now apply this to something you worry about. Write down your worry, thoughts, actions and possible outcomes and then what you believe someone else who does not struggle in these areas would think, say, do and experience.

2. Practice breathing calmly. Breathing has far more power than most of us realize. Women have gone through labor without medication simply by mastering and employing the art of focus and breathing. When you breathe deeply, it can lower your blood pressure, balance your pH levels and reduce the amount of cortisol running around in your body. That's why you will often hear someone say, "Take ten deep breaths" to someone who is becoming agitated. Or perhaps you have said it yourself. If you will set aside time to practice deep breathing on a regular basis, you will be more inclined to apply this method to overcoming worry when worry strikes.

3. Evaluate your thoughts when they enter. If a thought is not a productive or plausible thought, then write it down, and stick it in your worry box that you made earlier in the week. Pray to the Lord to handle it and to give you His perspective on the matter.