

Overcoming Worry

On Sunday we continued our sermon series called “Eight EPIC Bible Passages.” Tonight we’ll talk about the sixth epic passage – Matthew 6:25-34.

1. Warm up question: Life is full of things to worry about. Someone recently told Jeff that the typical person swallows 8 spiders per year while sleeping. It’s a creepy thought, and hopefully untrue. What are some equally silly things you worry about?
2. A large survey conducted in 2011 found that more Americans report struggling with the temptation to worry than any other temptation. Worry has enormous destructive power.
 - a. Jeff told how he learned to worry about cancer and death from the example of his parents. Ever since, he has struggled with fears about cancer and disease, finding ways to spin every little twinge in his body into a potential devastating diagnosis. Do you worry much about your health? What’s your worst health nightmare?
 - b. What kinds of things did your parents tend to worry about most? How did their example affect you?
 - c. Right now in your life, what are you most tempted to worry about?
 - d. Corrie ten Boom once said, “Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow; it only empties today of its strength.” What do you think she means? In what ways have you experienced this in your own life?
 - e. A 2005 Garvan Institute study documented that, during times of emotional distress, our body releases a hormone called NPY that inhibits the ability of our immune system to destroy pathogens in our body. Many medical professionals believe more than half all doctor visits can be traced back to the impact of stress. Do you buy it? In what ways have you experienced this in your own life?
3. In today’s Scripture passage, Jesus offers us a three-part strategy for taming and worry in our lives. Read Matthew 6:25-34 through twice, slowly.
4. In this passage, Jesus says, “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. . . . Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?” (Mt. 6:25, 27). The obvious answer is, “Of course not!” **From this we can draw the first step for overcoming worry: Realize the futility of worrying about things you can’t control.**
 - a. Jeff told how, as a young adult, he wasted countless hours worrying about losing his hair prematurely, until he finally came to realize worry was not helping, only making things worse. Looking back over life, what’s something big you worried about that was completely out of your control? How did that feel?

- b. A famous AA prayer says, “God, help me to change the things I can, accept the things I cannot, and give me the wisdom to recognize the difference.” Name something you’re tempted to worry about that you cannot change? Since you can’t change it, why do you worry about it?
5. Thoughts of worry (even if futile) won’t go away on their own. They have to be replaced by more-powerful thoughts. In verse 28, Jesus’ identifies the thought antidote for worry: trust. **Step two for overcoming worry: learn to trust God.**
- a. Re-read Matthew 6:28-30. What point is Jesus making in these verses?
- b. Read Jeremiah 29:11 and Philippians 4:19. Do you believe these verses are an accurate expression of God’s plan for your life? Why or why not?
- c. To uproot worry in our lives, Jeff suggested we must consciously retrain our brain, so that each time the worry surfaces, we stop and replace it with a positive affirmation of trust for God’s work in our lives. Have you ever consciously tried that strategy? Was it helpful to you?
- d. When we face great hardship, doubts can arise about whether we should trust God. Os Guinness tells a parable about someone who joins the French resistance to the Nazi occupation. Sometimes the person receives orders from the resistance leader that make intuitive sense. Other times the person receives orders that seem crazy – like being told to help someone who appears to be Nazi Gestapo – without realizing that person is only posing as a Nazi. In times like that, you just have to trust that the resistance leader knows something you don’t. Does that parable help you reconcile hard times in life with trust in God?
- e. When in your life has it been most counterintuitive to trust God?
6. In verse 25, Jesus asks us not to worry about food, drink, or clothing, then says, “Is not life more than food, and the body more than drink?” **This is Step 3 for overcoming worry: Realize that happiness is not ultimately determined by externalities (like how much fancy food I eat, or how fashionable my clothes are), but rather by the interior spiritual quality of my life.**
- a. Re-read Matthew 6:33. In Luke 19:10, Jesus says, “The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed. Nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ For, in fact, the kingdom of God is within you.” When you put these two verses together, what do they seem to say?
- b. Jesus seems to be saying that true happiness depends far more on the inner strength of our spirit than our outer circumstances. That places a real premium on nurturing our inner spiritual life. With that in mind, let’s each reflect aloud on this question: Right now, where you find yourself in life, how goes it with your soul? Is your inner life strong? What are you doing to keep it strong?