

How to Overcome the Stranglehold of Worry

Luke 12

Introduction:

1. Let me take a poll: How many of you have ever worried about something? So this is a subject that concerns all of us! Worry is, in fact, a universal problem.
2. Here in this passage of Scripture, Jesus is encouraging His disciples to quit their worrying (vs. 22). Jesus knows that His disciples and the believing flock of Israel are about to endure some deep trials and persecution for their faith. vs. 4-5
3. Why was Jesus so adamant about them not being anxious and worried? Here is why - because faith and worry cannot dwell together. Will fearful and anxious thoughts cross our mind? Of course, but our faith must overcome **them** or our worries will overcome **us**. **Hebrews 11:6** - It is so crucial that we build a stronger faith.
4. The word "worry" comes from an Anglo-Saxon word that means "to choke or strangle." Worry, in fact, damages our health, consumes our thoughts, destroys our productivity, and can negatively affect the way we treat people. Most importantly, it hinders our walk with Christ.
5. If you are to build a stronger faith in troubled times, you must overcome worry. But how do you do it? The Bible makes it very clear and easy to understand.

First, you must learn to think eternally.

1. Let's look at Jesus' words in verses 33-34.
 - Doctrinally, Jesus is telling believing Israel to sell their belongings and divest themselves of all their earthly assets. They will only weigh them down as they go through the Tribulation before Christ returns with their heavenly rewards and they enter their earthly kingdom.
 - This is, in fact, what we see the little flock doing in the early Acts time period.
2. But let's seek to apply this principle in light of Paul's doctrine for the body of Christ today.
3. If you want to overcome worry and anxiety, you cannot allow the temporal things of this life to consume your thinking, but you must learn to think from an eternal viewpoint.
4. Let's look at Paul's words that He writes under inspiration of God's Holy Spirit.
Colossians 3:1-2; 2 Corinthians 4:18
5. Our problem is that we think from an earthly viewpoint instead of from an eternal perspective. We pour our lives into things of no eternal consequence and it leads to stress and worry. We all have physical, material needs, but God is much more concerned with your inner man, your spiritual well-being.
6. Until we learn to think eternally, the cares of this life are going to continue to swallow us up, and worry will choke us. What is the answer? Simplify your life, get out of debt and stay out, forget trying to live an excessive, extravagant life-style, forget trying to keep up with all the new things your neighbor has. Forget it! Learn to think eternally. **Colossians 3:2**

Second, you must understand your value to God.

1. Have you ever made a mistake because you didn't understand the value of something?
 - **Illustration:** As a kid, I traded a Mickey Mantle card.
2. A lot of people are in bondage to worry because they fail to understand their value to God. They really don't understand how God feels about them.
3. Many believers have no concept of their worth or value to God. They say, "I'm just an old sinner saved by grace..." Yes, we **are** sinners saved by God's grace, but that is not **all** we are. The story doesn't end there.
4. If you are saved by God's grace through your faith in Jesus Christ, you have been placed in the family of God and you are a child of the living God. You have actually been placed **in Christ** and been made **one** with Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 5:30
5. Many people think God's attitude towards them is, "I know I saved you and forgave you of your sins, but you didn't deserve it and you're still not worth a dime. I'm keeping my eye on you, and when you get out of line, you're going to get it!"
6. This leads to worry because every time a problem comes along, you worry and fret that it is God getting even with you. Every problem we face is from the viewpoint, "I am on one side and God is on the other and we're working against each other," instead of "We will work through this problem together as Father and child."
7. What does the Bible teach? Look at the words of Christ in verses 6-7, 24.
 - According to God's Word, you are valuable to God. You are worth something to God.
8. You are no longer an enemy of God, but a child of God. You are in Christ, "*accepted in the beloved.*" **Ephesians 1:6**; cf. **2 Thessalonians 2:16-17**; **Ephesians 2:10**
9. Once you realize how valuable you are to God, it eliminates worry. You realize, "I am God's child and nothing can separate me from His love." **1 Peter 5:7** - God cares!

Third, seeking God must become first place in your life.

1. Imagine for a moment if every time you worried about something, you spent time praying instead. What a difference it would make.
2. Look at what Jesus said in **Luke 12:29-31**. The context is Christ preparing Israel for their coming kingdom, but there is some definite application we can make to us today.
 - People will worry all day Saturday about what they are going to wear Sunday to church.
 - Teens will worry and fret about what label is on their jeans or shoes.
 - We are covetous because our neighbor's TV screen is two inches bigger than ours.
3. Do you know what God is concerned about in your life? Not the make and model of your vehicle, not your electronic gadgets, not how fat your bank account is - He is concerned about His relationship with you! **Colossians 3:1**
4. God wants to see your heart in love with Him and seeking Him. When your relationship with God and your time spent with Him begins to slip, you can fully

expect worry and stress to envelop your life. This is the price we pay for failing to put God in His rightful place. **Psalm 34:4**

5. Maybe you are here this morning and you are an internal wreck. Your heart is full of worry and fear. Ask yourself this question: How much time did I spend seeking God this past week (through prayer and Bible study)?
6. Our heartbeat should be to know Christ in a deeper way than we did yesterday. **Philippians 3:10; Ephesians 1:17-19** (This was Paul's prayer for believers.)

In Conclusion:

1. Imagine that your house has somehow become very weakened and somebody knowledgeable says, "Look, we see the problem, but here's the tools and the plan on how you can fix it." But you never choose to pick up the tools and fix the problem. Sooner or later the house will collapse.
2. This morning, picture yourself as that house. Maybe worry and fear has weakened you and threatens to destroy you. I've given you the tools from God's Word to fix the problem, but it is up to you to pick them up and use them.
3. If we are going to pry loose the stranglehold of worry in our lives, we must put into practice these biblical principles that we learned this morning.

How to Develop a Great Faith **Matthew 8**

Introduction:

1. How many of you have ever grown something (a flower, bush, tree, garden, muscle, business, etc.)?
2. If you are a believer today, God has given you something that He expects you to grow. According to **Romans 12:3**, God has given you the measure of faith. But it is your responsibility to grow your faith. **2 Thessalonians 1:3**
3. In the Christian life, it is vital to possess a strong, vibrant faith.
 - Without faith you cannot please God. **Hebrews 11:6**
 - Through faith we overcome the world. **1 John 5:4**
 - Through faith we overcome Satan. **Ephesians 6:16**
 - Through faith we overcome sin. **Romans 14:23**
4. Did you know that Jesus spoke of people with "great faith" and people with "little faith?" Let's see examples of this in Matthew 8 (vs. 5-10, 23-27). What is the difference between a great faith and little faith? How would Jesus describe **your** faith?
5. Regardless of what your faith is today, every believer can develop a great faith. How do you develop a great faith even when you have little faith?

First, by focusing on Christ instead of your circumstances

1. I remember several years ago when the Patriots won their first Super Bowl. The Bills beat the Patriots at the beginning of that season 31-0. The next time they met, the Patriots beat the Bills 31-0.
 - Did the circumstances change? Not really - it was the same players, coaches, etc. The Patriots are what changed and the way they dealt with the circumstances.
2. Let's apply this to our lives. We have all dealt with problems and adverse circumstances since childhood, and we always will. This fact won't change, but what needs to change is us!
3. In Matthew 8, you see two encounters with adverse circumstances.
 - A centurion (military officer) - has a close friend grievously tormented and ill.
 - The disciples - in the middle of a terrible storm at sea.
4. The centurion is said to have great faith; the disciples are said to have little faith.
5. What was the difference? The centurion focused on Christ and mastered the circumstances, while the disciples focused on the problem and allowed the circumstances to master them.
6. Because the centurion was fully focused on Christ, he was filled with peace. Because the disciples were focused on the problem, they were filled with fear.
7. The apostle Paul was in prison for preaching the gospel of Christ. Even supposed believers were turning on Paul and trying to make his situation tougher, yet notice Paul's determination in **Philippians 1:20-21**. He was fully focused on Christ.
8. This was the key to Paul's faith. He was not focused on his circumstances, but He was looking unto Jesus. **Philippians 3:14, 20, 4:13**

Second, by truly believing God's promises

1. If I were to personally promise to give you one million dollars after the service this morning, you would probably not believe it (you're thinking Monopoly money). But if I were to promise to take you out to eat after the service, you would believe that.
 - What is the point? A promise is really only as good as the one making the promise and his ability to fulfill that promise.
2. I hold in my hand a Bible - it is called God's Word.
 - It doesn't contain the Word of God; it is the Word of God.
 - It is inerrant, infallible, absolutely perfect, and 100% pure - no mistakes or errors.
 - **2 Timothy 3:16** tells us that it is inspired (God-breathed). It pulsates with divine life.
3. God has made promises in His Word. Many times people make promises and they don't keep them, but God is completely faithful. He always keeps His promises.
4. Of course you must rightly divide God's Word as you study it. You must ask yourself, "Who is God making this promise to?" Is it a promise to a specific person, a nation, Israel, or the church, the body of Christ today?
 - If I write Deniece a note with a promise to take her out to eat for lunch and Larry reads the note, he can stand on that promise all day long, but it won't do him any good because the promise wasn't made to him.
5. But if want a great faith, study the 13 letters that Paul wrote to us, the church. Read the many promises and believe them utterly.
 - God's Word will work **in** you when received as God's Word **by** you.
1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Thessalonians 1:3
6. Let's look again at this story in **Matthew 8:5-10, 13**.
 - This man is going through a trial, but he isn't sitting at home biting his nails.
 - He went straight to Jesus. vs. 5-6
 - He received the Word of Jesus. vs. 7
 - He believed Jesus' Word utterly. vs. 8-9
 - Jesus commends him (vs. 10), and his friend was healed (vs. 13).
7. But many times, instead of believing God's promises, we reason. **Matthew 16:6-8**
8. When we begin reasoning about something that we should believe, this is a warning signal. Faith doesn't reason with God's promises, faith trusts and obeys God's promises.

Third, by understanding the depth of God's commitment to you

1. Many Christians struggle with their faith because they fail to understand just how committed God is to them.
2. Here in this text, the disciples failed to see how committed Christ was to them. Therefore they woke up Christ and said, "We're going to all die."
3. Christian, at salvation a great change took place. You were placed **in Christ**.
4. These are two very precious words. Every time you see the words "in Christ" (and you see them for the most part in Paul's letters), they explain something that God has already done for you or something He has promised to do for you.

- Let me give you an example from Ephesians 1 & 2 (1:3, 5, 7, 11, 12, 13, 2:5, 6, 7, 10, 13, 18, 22).
 - This is only two chapters! Do you see the level of God's commitment to you? You are His child. God has invested all that His Son is, **in you!**
5. Once this really sinks in, it will take the fear and anxiety away. You suddenly realize, "I can trust God in every situation in my life. He is totally committed to me."
 6. When you are secure in your relationship with someone, you have faith in that person. As you grow more secure in your relationship with Christ, you will find that your faith will grow incredibly.
 7. The only way to grow in that security is to read God's Word. Read Romans through Philemon (3 chapters a day and you will read them in a month), and underline every time you read "in Christ", "by Christ", "through Christ."

In Conclusion:

1. There is not a believer in here who is incapable of building a strong faith.
2. You can make a choice to implement these principles and begin to build a strong faith.
3. But please understand that your faith won't magically grow. It will only grow as you look to Christ, take in His Word, and grow in your understanding of His Word.
4. My prayer is that all of you will be able to look back a year from now and say, "Wow, my faith has really grown!"

Becoming a Casting Christian **1 Peter 5:5-14**

Introduction:

1. In the past few weeks we have been looking at the issue of faith in the Bible. It is crucial that every believer be growing their faith and becoming stronger in their faith.
2. Trials and problems are a part of life. You will never successfully avoid them. But you do have a choice as to how you will respond to trials.
 - When we respond right, it is evidence that our faith is growing and strong.
 - When we respond wrong, it is evidence that our faith is weak.
3. What is the right response to our cares, our worries, and our burdens in life? Please turn to **1 Peter 5:7**. The word “casting” means “to throw upon.”
 - Think about it – what is the key to gaining relief from a physical load you are carrying? Release it where it is supposed to go!
 - In the spiritual realm it is the same. Are you carrying a heavy load of cares, burdens, and problems? The key is, you have to release it – you have to let it go. You must release it where it is supposed to go – to God! Otherwise, you may unload in all the wrong places.
4. As a Christian you must learn to cast your cares upon God. When you begin to do this and obey God you will know that your faith is growing and becoming stronger. This text will explain why it is so crucial that every believer become a casting Christian.

First, a casting Christian exhibits a lack of pride. vs. 5-6

1. When you take your cares and cast them at the feet of Jesus, what you are in essence saying is, “Jesus, this problem is too big for me, my wife, my pastor, or anybody else. I need You!”
2. You know what that is – humility. You are admitting that you can’t do something.
3. Let’s read verses 5-6. Now verse 7 – they go hand in hand.
4. I love the expression, “*Be clothed with humility.*” **Illustration:** You would never dream of leaving for work and heading out the door naked. When we start our day without humbling ourselves before God and acknowledging our need of Him, we go forth spiritually naked.
5. Each morning, as we face a new day, we should, one by one, take each care and concern and humble ourselves before God and acknowledge our total dependence on Him.
6. God gives two promises to the humble:
 - Grace – the problem may not go away, but God will give you grace to handle it.
 - Exaltation – God will exalt (lift you up), but notice “*in due time*” (the proper time.)
7. What does God promise the worrier? Absolutely nothing – there are no promises at all.
 - **Illustration:** Sometimes when my boys were small they would have a helium balloon and it would be at the top of the ceiling. They would jump, get on the couch and jump, throw a toy at it, but finally give up, come to me and say, “Daddy, will you get my balloon?”
8. What problem are you dealing with today? This is what God desires you to do. cf. **Philippians 4:6-7**

Second, a casting Christian actively resists Satan. vs. 8-9

1. Who is our adversary according to verse 8? Is there a literal devil according to God's Word? He definitely is real, but Satan would love for you to believe that he is fictitious.
 - **Illustration:** a lion would love nothing more than for his prey to believe that he doesn't really exist.
 - The word "devour" literally means "to drink down, to gulp entire."
2. What do you think is one of Satan's most strategic weapons that he uses to devour people? I believe it is worry, which leads to discouragement. Can you relate to this?
3. Satan deceives you into thinking that you have to carry all of your cares and burdens on your own shoulders. Let's read **1 Peter 5:7** again.
 - You have a clear choice according to this verse. You can either have your cares or God's caring.
 - If you have one care resting on your shoulders it is not because you don't have a God that wants to shoulder it for you. The word "careth" means "to be of interest, concern." God cares!
4. How is the Christian to respond to the devil? Verse 9 – resist him. The word "resist" means "to stand against, oppose."
5. When you take your cares and cast them at God's feet, you are actively resisting the devil.
 - **Illustration:** Ever play hot potato? You have a situation that is a hot potato and you and Satan are passing it back and forth, so to speak. You try not to worry, but Satan seems to put it right back in your lap. You know how you win this game? Take the hot potato and cast it at God's feet. He won't put it back in your lap. He will take it and shoulder it.

Third, a casting Christian demonstrates total trust in God. vs. 10

1. The Bible says in **Hebrews 11:6**, "*But without faith it is impossible to please him (God)...*" It is so pleasing to God when He sees the heart of His children fully trusting in Him.
2. Why shouldn't we trust Him? Look at verse 10. God has an eternal plan and purpose for our lives. In fact, Paul taught that we have already been seated in heavenly places in Christ. We are God's workmanship, and His purpose for our lives extends into the eternal ages. **Ephesians 2:6-7**
3. He is the God of all grace and He has called us unto His eternal glory.
4. If you are saved and a child of God, you can fully trust your heavenly Father. Even in the trials of life, Paul said that God is working in them so that they will produce a far more eternal weight of glory. **2 Corinthians 4:17-18**
5. Are you saved today? Do you know Christ as your Savior? This is crucial.
6. Once you enter into a relationship with Christ you can lean upon Him and trust Him in every situation that life brings your way. You can become a casting Christian.