

Promises
For
Now And Evermore

Promise for Overcoming Worry

Steve Flatt

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Do you worry a lot? Most of us do. Most of us spend hours each week, sometimes countless hours, worrying about all of our circumstances, the environment, what's happening around us, and what's threatening to happen to us.

Erma Bombeck, one of my favorite authors, wrote "I've always worried a lot, and frankly I'm good at it. I worry about introducing a group of people and going blank when I get to my mother. I worry about a shortage of ball bearings. I worry about the world ending at midnight and getting only three hours of a 12-hour cold capsule. I worry about getting in the *Guinness Book of World Records* under "pregnancy" the world's oldest recorded birth. I worry about what the dog thinks when he sees me getting out of the shower. I worry that my daughter will marry an Eskimo and set me adrift on an iceberg when I can no longer feed myself. I worry about salesladies following me into the fitting room, oil slicks, and Carol Channing going bald. And I worry about scientists discovering someday that lettuce has been fattening all along."

You know her list tops mine. But we're learning that as a nation, we are worrying ourselves sick. We're living in what the American Psychological Association has labeled the "Age of Anxiety." The American Academy of Physicians has reported that at least two-thirds of all patients who occupy hospital beds are there because of stress-related illness.

Do you know what the three best-selling prescription drugs in America are? They kind of reveal the worry and anxiety that we're going through. Number one is tagamet. Tagamet is an ulcer medication. Number two is enderol, and enderol is prescribed for hypertension. And number three is valium, and valium is a tranquilizer. Do you see that? The three bestselling drugs in America and all of them are related to anxiety and illness. Somebody said in a 1988 *Newsweek* article that stress and worry costs our nation's economy \$150 billion annually. The sad thing is most of it is all pure folly.

One psychologist reported in a study that 80 percent of all the things that we worry about never come to pass. Of that remaining 20 percent, three-fourths of that little fraction are things that we cannot do one thing about. In effect what they are saying is, that only five percent of everything that people worry about is actually things that we can't do anything about and that will actually come to pass.

How about you, do you worry? What do we worry about? Think for a moment, sometimes misery loves company. I think worry likes company also. What are the things that we universally, collectively worry about? You can lump them into three major categories.

1. Money. To some degree we all do worry about money. Some way, somehow, you have, you do, and you probably will worry about money in the future.

Now money comes in a number of packages. You may worry about money in the form of how you're going to get your mortgage paid, how you're going to pay off your second mortgage or those ever-increasing credit card bills. Maybe your worry in money concerns how you're going to get your kids through college, or how you're going to have enough to be able to retire when you want to finish work.

Maybe your worry is just about how to make ends meet month to month. Many of you are going through that struggle. Perhaps you're worrying like I did the other day when I went through the grocery store checkout line. I reached in for my checkbook and realized I had already written my last check. Half the groceries were already across the scanner. I reached into my wallet and had about \$42, and as those groceries were crossing the scanner, I was saying a little prayer to the Lord, "Please, please don't let it be more than \$42." The line was four-deep behind me and all I could see me doing is taking the Folgers back to the counter saying, "I can't pay for that."

Guess what? It was about 19 cents short of that. But isn't it amazing how we worry about money? God is good, isn't he?

Even people who have tons of money, probably worry about it more than anybody. Why? Because they worry about what to do with it, how to invest it, where to put it, and how much to give away. It entraps them.

I think about the rich young ruler. In the story that was told by Jesus in Matthew 17, he came to the Lord and wanted the secret to eternal life. Jesus told him, "Keep the commandments." He said, "Which commandments?" That's just like humans, isn't it? You tell me which ones to keep, let's be specific. So Jesus named a few. And he said, "Well all those I've kept." Jesus said looking into his heart, "Then go sell what you have and give to the poor." Then the Bible said, that rich young ruler went away sorrowfully, for he had many possessions.

Do you know why he walked away sorrowfully? It was not because he really had many possessions, but because his possessions possessed him. He fell into the devil's oldest trap of thinking that what he had, made him what he was. So when you fall into that trap - you worry your little head off about money. We do worry about it, don't we? Sure we do.

2. The Future - We worry about our future. We worry about what's going to happen around the corner, particularly physically. We worry about our health, sickness, and death. Those things don't usually fall under the money worries, because quite frankly, money can't touch them. Money might buy medical care or a few vitamins, but frankly this is another whole realm that causes us anxiety. We worry about getting sick, or old, or useless.

I heard a story about that was kind of cute about President Bush in the last days of the campaign when he was running against Bill Clinton. He was in California visiting a retirement center, a nursing home, and he was shaking every hand he could. There was a little lady in a wheelchair, he bent down on one knee, took her hand on the wheelchair and patted it, then looked at her in the eye and said, "Ma'am, do you know who I am?" She looked up at him, paused a second, and she said, "Well no honey, but if you go over to that desk, they can tell you."

You know we laugh about that and think it's cute. The truth of the matter is, down deep in our souls we worry about the day that we can no longer take care of ourselves. We worry about the day when I might not even know myself or know you. If I had a quarter for every time somebody has said to me, "Oh, I pray I never have to go to a nursing home," I could retire today.

We worry about hearing the words, "You've got cancer." We worry about an airplane crashing when we're on it. We worry like old Fred Sanford about having the big one. We worry about our futures.

3. People You Love - I catch myself more than worrying about money today or worrying about what's going to happen to me; I worry about the people I love. I worry about my Mom, who is now widowed, how she is doing, what she's thinking and what her future is. I worry about my wife if everything is going along fine with her. I worry about my precious children. I think about them every day while they're off at school. I think about my oldest boy, Ethan, and I wonder what kind of peer associations he's forming. I wonder if anybody is teasing him. I wonder if he's learning proper values. I wonder if somebody is tempting him with drugs. I worry that he'll begin to like girls. Then I begin to worry that he won't like girls. My point is worry just keeps you in turmoil. Then my little son, Lee, I go through all that with him at his age and my daughter, Rachel, sometimes it's hard not to worry about other people. I'll confess that to you.

Now have I pretty well hit the nail on the head? Don't you worry about those same things? Don't you worry about moneyrelated things? Don't you worry about your future? Don't you worry about other people?

Now what do we do about all that? Well, the great news is, God's got a magnificent promise. "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

important than food, and the body more important 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? 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. 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, O 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." (Matthew 6:25-33)

The first word that catches my attention there is that word, "Therefore." Do you see it? By the way, whenever you're studying the Bible or anything else and you see the word, "therefore," you pay close attention to the context because there's a reason that it is "there-for." Why? Because it is telling you this is a conclusion reached by something just said. Isn't that right?

Something has just been said, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry..."

That makes me want to go back to verse 24. What is it that he just said? Some people think it's totally unrelated, but it's the secret to overcoming worry. "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." One of the older translations says, "You cannot serve both God and mammon." By the way folks, there is the secret to overcoming worry. That's the reason in the next breath Jesus could say, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry..." All you've got to do is choose not just with your head, but deep within the pit and confines of your heart, who your Master is. That's right.

If you really commit your life to the Lord Jesus Christ and God, the Father, you have overcome the barrier for worry. If you find yourself a worryaholic, you need to check your heart and ask, "Have I really committed my life to where I'm trusting in Him?" You're either going to serve money and all the things money can buy or God. When you serve the reason you want money, stocks and material things, it is because they give you the illusion of control. It's the idea that if I had those things, I don't have to worry about things, I can control them. But it's an illusion, it's a mirage.

The truth of the matter is: if you're going to serve mammon, you'll find yourself worrying all the time. Because mammon keeps slipping through your fingers, and mammon keeps causing you to worry. But the Almighty God said, "I will rest you in the security of my bosom." Let me tell you something if you've not learned it by now. Control is a silly illusion.

The key reason we worry is because we want to control things. I want to control everything! I want my future, the economy, and even the future of other people. Let's get real here. There's precious little in this world that I control. The only things I really control are my own choices. That's the truth. I don't even control the outcome of those choices, not all of them. Some, but sometimes I make a choice and things happen as a result of that choice I never even saw. If I think I've got to control everybody else, how they think, what happens to them, what they do, every sense that's flowing around me, and control everything in my home life, I am desolate.

Do you think you control? Jesus said, you think you control something, make a planet. That's silly we can't make a planet. Okay, just make it snow but nobody can do that. Then grow another inch. Do you see what he said? "Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?" Go ahead, just grow an inch. You cannot even control that. You can't control the number of hairs on your head, unless you go buy one to put on your head.

Do you see the point? If I will acknowledge God as my master, that is the key to the antidote for worry. The key word in Christianity is the word, "submission" being able to say, "God, you are God, and Lord, you are Lord."

Even if the economy is like a roller coaster or that new car I've been saving for got a dent the first week I owned it or even if the doctor walks in and tells me, "Steve, you have cancer." Lord, what I know is you love me, and Lord what I know is you will take care of me not only through this life but even to the other side. With all my futile attempts at control, Lord I surrender. Worry tries to take the control from God and put it in our own hands. That's really what causes us to worry.

The Promise

1. It is irreverent. "For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them." (verse 32) It's irreverent to think that God won't take care of us.
2. It is irrelevant. "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" (verse 27) I can't add an hour to my life by worrying about it. In fact, I'll probably shorten my life by an hour by worrying about it. It's irrelevant. Why take the time? Remember what we said at the start of the lesson? Ninety-five percent of the things we worry about either never happen or we couldn't control anyway.
3. It is irresponsible. "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'" (verse 31) That's just an irresponsible action. God's going to take care of that.
4. It is irritating. "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, O you of little faith?" (verse 30) Do you see the irritation in Jesus' voice? If God takes care of the grass of the field, which is going to be thrown into the oven, won't he take care of you? O you of little faith are irritating to God.

Well, what is the promise? I've been all around it. We've talked about the antidote and the characteristics of worry, but what is the promise? The promise is in verse 33. "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you as well." That's it. The Lord must be your Master, not mammon, not things I want to control. You're my Master and I'm going to seek you. I know that when I seek you Lord anything that I really need you're going to provide. I realize because we're packaged in flesh it's a hard thing for us to see. But one of these days, when we are robed in immortality and we have that incorruptible we may say, "God, that promise was as true and solid as anything ever has been. You really did provide anything I really needed." That's the truth. That's the promise for overcoming worry. So let's you and I seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and let him take care of the rest.

Adapted from Amazing Grace #1165 - Steve Flatt, June 26, 1994