

July 24, 2014

Wisdom for Worry/ Answers for Anxiety by Bryan Hodge

The word “anxiety” word is from a Latin word meaning “to strangle.” The word “worry” is from an old English word meaning “to strangle.” Adam Clark indicates that the Biblical word, *merimnao*, can be used of “dividing or distracting the mind” (Commentary on Matthew – Acts, p. 91). This clearly is the context of Matthew 6:25-ff cf. 6:24 and Luke 12:22-ff cf. 12:21. Some people are strangling their happiness, health, energy, and productivity by useless worry.

1. Determine your master

“No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve God and Mammon” (Matthew 6:24). The decision to allow God alone to be your Master will lessen stress. Some strive for riches but are never satisfied (Ecclesiastes 5:10). Some fall into temptation and pierce themselves through with many sorrows because they are obsessed with material things (1 Timothy 6:9-10). Some are not productive Christians because they try to serve both God and Mammon (Luke 8:14). Let us be clear in our minds about who is master.

2. Focus on the important

“Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?” (Matthew 6:25). *“Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing” (Luke 12:22).* Staying focused on what is important will lessen stress. “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or, what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26). “Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out” (1 Timothy 6:17). “We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18). Let us stay focused on that which is eternally important. The state of “The Rich Man” and Lazarus was very different in the after-life, than it was in this life (Luke 16:19-ff).

3. Trust in God’s general providence

“Look at the birds... your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” (Matthew 6:26; Luke 12:24). *“Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow ...Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you...?” (Matthew 6:28-30; Luke 12:27-28).* The very reason that life exists is because of Him. He has set His general providence on humanity. “He makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust” (Matthew 5:45). He created plants and animals for mankind’s benefit (Genesis 1:28-30; 9:1-3; Psalm 8:4-9). He provides for them. His general providence is upon us as well. Let us not forget this. A point to ponder – while God does provide for the birds, He does not drop food into their mouths. “The early bird gets the worm.”

4. The promise of special providence

“Therefore, do not worry saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’... But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all of these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:31-33; Luke 12:29-31). While God’s providence is upon all of humanity, He has promised those truly living for Him special providence. Let us pursue righteousness and put the kingdom first in this life.

5. Accept things you can’t change

“Which of you by worry can add one cubit to his stature?” (Matthew 6:27; Luke 12:25). Some translations take this as a reference to height (KJV, NKJV). Others take this as a reference to length of life (ASV, NASB, ESV). The point is the same, either way. There are some things we cannot change. “God give me the strength to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference” (Reinhold Niebuhr). Let us realize that worry itself will change nothing.

6. Live in the present

“Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own trouble” (Matthew 6:34). This is not suggesting that it is wrong to plan for the future (Genesis 41:33-51; Proverbs 6:6-8; 1 Timothy 5:8). However, some people are so overly concerned about the future that they fail to live in the present. They make themselves and others miserable. Let us live in the present. “I don’t know about tomorrow, I just live from day-to-day; I don’t borrow from its sunshine, for its skies may turn to gray. I don’t worry o’er the future, for I know what Jesus said; and today I’ll walk beside Him, for He knows what is ahead. Many things about tomorrow I don’t seem to understand, but I know who holds tomorrow, and I know who holds my hand” (Ira Stanphill).

While some are overly concerned about the future, others won’t get beyond the past. Their past mistakes, and sins haunt them, and even paralyze them in the present. Paul once persecuted the church. Yet, while he never forgot what he had done, he did not allow such to hinder his productivity in the present. He wrote, “forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14). Let us repent of the things we need to repent, and let us live to the glory of God in the present, and let us reach for the prize.

7. Caution about fear-mongers

The world is filled with fear-mongering. Their sensational words grab headlines and air-time. Their words raise money. Their words can also create needless worry, discourage, and even paralyze productivity.

Consider some stories from the past: (1) The headline of April 28, 1975 Newsweek was, “The Coming Ice Age.” In it, Peter Gwynne wrote an article entitled, “The Cooling World.” It reported that the temperature in the Northern Hemisphere had dropped ½ a degree F between 1945 and 1968, and that growing seasons had been shortened by 2 weeks since 1950 (Sweetness – light/archive/Newsweek-1975). I was taught in school that an Ice Age was coming. Now they speak of global warming. (2) The January 1970 issue of Life said, “In a decade, urban dwellers will have to wear gas masks to survive air pollution... by 1985 air pollution will have reduced the amount of sunlight reaching the earth by one half” (Sweetness-light.com/archive/13worstpredictions-from-earth-day-april22-1970). (3) Paul Ehrlich said in 1970, “In 10 years, all important animal life in the sea will be extinct. Large areas of coastline will have to be evacuated because of the stench of dead fish” (Covnews.com/archive/41466). (4) He also predicted that “In the 1970s and 1980s hundreds of millions will starve to death” (Sowell, *The Vision of the Anointed*, p. 67). The concern was over-population. Thomas Sowell writes, “Now that the 1970s and 1980s have come and gone, it is clear that nothing faintly resembling Ehrlich’s prediction has come to pass. Moreover, such local famines as struck sporadically had nothing to do with overpopulation and everything to do with this disruption of local food distribution systems, due to war or other man-made disasters” (ibid). Many believed that India would surely face starvation. It has not happened. Yield per acre has greatly increased. India is currently a net exporter of grain. (5) In 1972 The Club of Rome warned that the world would run out of gold by 1981, mercury and silver by 1985, tin by 1987, and petroleum, copper lead and natural gas by 1992 (creators.com/opinion/walter-williams/environmentalists-wild-predictions). (6) I have heard of those years are who predicted that with machines taking over more and more work man would not have much to do. He would need to fill his time with some hobby like water-color painting or macramé. I don’t that such has happened. (7) “Remember back in the early 1990s when one of the biggest stories in the news for several weeks was a rash of tourist murders in Florida? Several million potential visitors changed their vacation plans and went elsewhere. They did so without ever doing the make to make an informed decision because the media focused only on twenty-two murders. The reporters didn’t point out that Florida had forty million tourists that year, and if you figure they each stayed an average of one week, the murder rate was only one-third that of the average American city” (Ben Carson, *Take The risk:learning to identify, choose, and live with acceptable risk*, p. 57). (8) “Since any commercial plane crash anywhere in the world makes CNN, the Fox News Channel, the network evening news, plus all the local evening news roundups, we forget that the chances of being killed driving to the airport is far greater than the odds you will die in a life-time of flying” (ibid). (9) ” How many Americans go to the beach every year more concerned about and alerted of a deadly shark attack (which may occur only a time or two or three – if at all – this year on US beaches) than the likelihood of someone in their party drowning (which happens thousands of times every year, year after year)?” (ibid, p.58)

Mark Twain once said “I’ve seen a heap of trouble in my life, and most of it never came to pass.”

8. Even bad circumstances can be survived.

In battle of Gettysburg there were 70,000 Confederate troops and 94,000 Union troops. The Confederate troop losses: 4,400 dead, 12,950 wounded, 5,350 missing. The Union troops losses: 3,150 dead, 14,506 wounded, 5,165 missing. (Stats from gettysburgstonesesential.com). If I told you that tomorrow you would be a soldier at Gettysburg, you might say “I am a dead man.” Yet 47,300 confederate troops and 71,185 Union troops were neither dead, wounded, or missing.

In the Vietnam War, 58,202 U.S. personnel lost their lives. Yet, there were 2,594,000 who served within the borders of Vietnam between January 1, 1965 and March 28, 1973 and an additional 50,000 who served between 1960-1964 (stats from veteranshour.com/Vietnam-war-statistics). In 1968 alone 563,000 military personnel were present in Vietnam. My point is not minimize the lives lost. But, I do want you to understand that most survived.

Dale Carnegie wrote, “The United States Navy used statistics of the law of averages to buck up the moral of their men. One sailor told me that he and his shipmates were assigned to high-octane tankers, they were worried stiff. The all believed that if a tanker loaded with high-octane gasoline was hit by a torpedo it would blow everyone to bits. But the U.S. Navy knew otherwise, so the Navy issued exact figures showing that out of one hundred tankers hit by torpedoes, sixty stayed afloat; and of the forty that did sink, only five sank in less than ten minutes. That meant time to get off the ship – it also meant casualties were exceedingly small. Did this help moral? ‘This knowledge of the law of averages wiped out my jitters,’ said Clyde W. Mass of St. Paul, Minnesota” (*How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*, pp. 81-82).

The point is this: Things usually are not as bad as you think. Don’t let worry of tomorrow cause you to cease living today, and doing what you should.

9. Faithful have no reason to fear death.

“For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). “To depart and be with Christ is far better” (Philippians 1:23).