

Melva's Corner

The Simplified Soul & Worry Is Like A Rocking Chair

March 28, 2005

Bible Text: Matthew 6: 25, 34 | Peter 5:7 | Philippians 4:7

Central Truth: Worry is like a rocking chair. It will give you something to do, but it won't get you anywhere.

What's your worry style? One of the interesting things about worry is that every person seems to handle it differently. Some people deliberately cultivate a "What? Me worry?" attitude by refusing to face what is really bothering them. Others seem to soak up worries even when they try not to. Then there are those who tend to "**catastrophize**" - a small worry triggers another, then another, until the issue seems unsolvable and the whole world seems to be coming to an end.

Some people are nighttime worriers. They're fine during the day, but when things slow down, usually late at night, those worries creep in and take over. Some people keep their worry inside, building up tension and feeding their ulcers. Others inflict their worry on others with chronic complaining, outbursts of anger, constant nagging, or using their worry to instill guilt. Some even use worry as a source of pride, fooling themselves into thinking they only worry because they "care so much."

Whatever the style, worry does more damage than most people realize. In "How to Stop Worrying and Start Living," Dale Carnegie tells a story about a gigantic tree that lies fallen on a mountain slope in Colorado. The tree was a seedling when Columbus came to America and was half grown when the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock. During the course of its long life, it was struck by lightning fourteen times, stood against many avalanches, and weathered innumerable storms. The tree survived all these onslaughts. However, in the end, an army of beetles attacked it. These small insects ate their way through the bark and slowly, bite by bite, destroyed the heart of the tree. Soon this giant tree crashed in the forest.

Worry can be like that. Little by little, it can send all your dreams and possibilities crashing to the ground.

But God wants so much more for you. Whatever your style of worry, God wants you to give it up. He wants you to give Him all your worries and let Him work things out according to His good and loving Will.

Jesus said it plainly and directly: "Don't worry." In the Sermon on the Mount, He said at least three times; not worrying, **"isn't a suggestion, it's a command."** Worry and anxiety are specifically mentioned twenty-five times in the New Testament alone as something we should avoid.

If you're a chronic worrier, that may be easier said than done. Worry is a habit that can be tricky to break. Here are a few ideas that can help you short-circuit worry and substitute peace and contentment.

Worry Buster #1: Try to Calm Down

When you realize you have begun to fall into that familiar pattern of worry, the first thing to do is to try to calm yourself down. Take a deep breath, then another. Gently stretch the muscles in your hands, your neck, and your shoulders, which are probably tense and tight. Walk around, shake out your hands, and take some more deep breaths. If you have a Bible nearby, read through Matthew 6:25-34 or a favorite passage that usually calms your mind. You might even ask yourself what my grandmother used to ask me as a small child: "What difference will this make a year from now?"

Worry Buster #2: Sort Out Your Concerns

Remember the Serenity Prayer? One of the reasons that little prayer by Reinhold Niebuhr is quoted so often is that it helps us remember that there are situations we can fix and others we must simply live with, asking God for the grace not to crumple. Worry doesn't help in either case. But figuring out which is which can assist you in sorting out the issues that cause you worry.

When worry begins to knot your stomach, stop and take a good look at what is worrying you. It helps to actually write out your

worries so you can see them in black and white. Record them on your "Negative Energy Chart." I also encourage you to talk them out with a trusted friend. **Look for exaggeration that has increased your worry.** Then ask yourself, "Is this something I actually have control over? Is there anything I can do about this problem right now or in the near future?" Remember you can't control others actions. You can only control your reactions.

For the most part it's not the things we **do** that cause us stress; it's the things we **don't do**. You can cut down on a lot of worry if you actually take steps to address whatever is bothering you. Even if you can't immediately solve a problem, you can probably outline the issues, ask advice, develop a plan, or gather information so you can better understand what you're worrying about. If your feelings of anxiety are severe and overwhelming, it's important to see a pastor or counselor to help you seek out and resolve the root causes before they build into something more serious.

What if you find you really can't do anything about an issue that is worrying you? What if it is simply out of your control? Some things you must place in God's hands, knowing that He is Master of all. One of the best tools for that is the "Meditation Process." You can find it in Part IX of "Knowing God's Voice," located on the website.

Worry Buster #4: Turn Your Worries Over to the Lord

"Give all your worries and cares to God," the apostle Peter reminds us, "for he cares about what happens to you." That, in the end, is the only truly effective response to worry. Instead of gnawing at that bone of worry, you need to deliberately and consistently turn your anxieties over to Him and trust Him to work everything out.

When you trust God, the apostle Paul tells us, "you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand." The opposite of worry is peace. In the same verse, Paul goes on to say that God's peace can "guard your heart and mind." What a great promise in an age of anxiety!

Worry Buster #5: When Worries Return, Distract Yourself

Even when you resolve to give all your worries to the Lord, worry can be a persistent habit. Whenever it starts to nag at you, it's important to short-circuit that process.

Whatever you can do to distract yourself from your worrisome thoughts will help. If you're lying in bed worrying, get up, walk around, perhaps read a book or pull out your journal and write down what has been bothering you. If you've fallen into daydreaming about your worries, get up and stretch, take a walk, or play with the dog. Some people even keep a rubber band around their wrist and gently snap it to remind themselves to "snap out of" their worry.

I often quote Corrie Ten Boom, she said, **"Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow; it empties today of its strength."**

Once you've successfully distracted yourself, try to refocus on something else-something positive and encouraging.

Spending time in Scripture can be an especially effective worry antidote because it reminds you again and again of God's power and the importance of trust.

Conversation is also a helpful way to both distract yourself and refocus your attention. That's because interaction with other people pulls you out of your own internal world, where worry and anxiety tend to grow. By keeping you in the present, at least momentarily, social interaction can chase away all worries about the past and the future.

Worry Buster #6: Build Your Trust Muscles

Ultimately, learning to trust God is the answer to any problem. But worry tends to be a stubborn pattern, so replacing it with a habit of trust takes time. It's a process of facing each concern, doing what you can, and then handing it over to God and resisting the temptation to snatch it back.

I will never forget my neighbor Patricia, a twenty-seven-year-old mother of two with a devoted husband, a great job, and a beautiful home. She also had an ulcer, hadn't had a good night's sleep in almost six months, when I met her and rarely smiled. She worried

about everything, and the more she worried, the worse her life seemed to become.

One night, Patricia's heart started pounding so hard it felt as if it would explode. She could barely catch her breath and felt like the room was spinning. Her husband called 911 and an ambulance rushed her to the hospital, where the doctor told them her symptoms were caused by anxiety.

The next day Patricia pleaded with God to show her how to let go of her worries. With the help of her family and a counselor (me), she began choosing to trust God one step at a time. Although it wasn't easy and things didn't change quickly, now Patricia feels like a new person. She still has her stressed-out moments, but life is definitely better. You can tell by her radiant smile.

Even if you are in a season of life where you are barely hanging on, your souls' deep thirst - plus the Lord's leading and a little ingenuity - can help you find a way to welcome God into your day. Everyday.

Memory Text:

" Therefore I tell you, stop being "perpetually uneasy (anxious and worried) about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink; or about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life greater [in quality] than food, and the body [far above and more excellent] than clothing? " (Matthew 6:25) Amplified