

“Casting Off Anxiety”

When I was in my mid-twenties, we purchased a townhouse. It was extremely exciting for us being first-time homeowners in California. The story of getting the house was a flat-out miracle. I will never forget the first night in our new home because I woke up in the middle of the night in a panic. You see, we had always lived in apartments. If something broke or something went wrong, it was a quick phone call and free service. I woke up in the middle of the night and started thinking about all the little details of the house, is the water heater electric or gas? Where is the breaker box? What do I do if this happens? I stayed up pretty much the whole night in a panic. I look back now and laugh but in the moment something that wasn't a problem became a huge issue in my mind and heart.

Today I want to talk to you for a few moments on the topic of worry and anxiety with a title “Casting off Anxiety.” I saw a funny picture online not too long ago. It was a church marquee that said, “Do not be anxious, don't let worry kill you...let the church help!” Anxiety is a very overused word in our society right now. It's everywhere. 1 out of 10 Americans suffer from debilitating depression...they can't function. Women are twice as likely to suffer from depression. Young adults ages 18-24 have the highest prevalence to depression in a generation that is addicted to social media. 22% of Americans suffer from depression that is strong enough to disrupt their daily activities. Dr. Charles Mayo from the famous Mayo Clinic said, “There is a growing mountain of evidence to suggest that worry is the chief contributor to depression, nervous breakdowns, high blood pressure, heart attacks, and early death. Stress kills. I have never known a man to die from hard work, but I have known a lot who died from worry!”

Worry and anxiety are used by the devil to distract and discourage you. One pastor said, “Worry is like a rocking chair. You stay busy but go absolutely nowhere.” Worry will often expose the areas in your heart that you trust God the least.

Today if you are dealing with worry or anxiety on any level, I want to encourage you today with Biblical solutions. Before we get into the Scriptures, I want to breakdown the negative aspects of worry. If you are taking notes, please fill out point number one:

POINT #1 – Worry will Wipe you out.

I love Proverbs 12:25 which says, “Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down, but a good word makes it glad.” The truth is that worry will not eliminate tomorrow's problems, but it will rob you of today's peace. This past week I was battling with not getting enough sleep. I was absolutely exhausted all of last Sunday and I think I had too much caffeine because at 4am Monday morning I was wide awake and never went back to sleep. Then last Monday our little puppy got spayed. Our other dogs came home as if they didn't even have surgery. They were perfectly fine right from the beginning. But our little violent puppy did not handle the anesthesia well. She was loopy all the way until Tuesday afternoon. So Monday night I only got about two and a half hours of sleep because I was so worried about her. Praise the Lord every night since I have gotten solid 8-9 hours of sleep but you know what? Friday afternoon I was struggling. I was so tired. I realized I was still recovering from those two bad nights of no sleep and a lot of worry. All the mental and emotional energy we put into worry will absolutely wipe you out.

POINT #2 – Worry doesn't Work.

There are several studies out there that talk about how much time we spend worrying about things that never happen. Penn State did a study and found that 40% of what we worry about never happens. 30% is concerns about the past. 12% were needless worries about health. 10% were worries about petty issues. 8% were legitimate concerns. So many of these studies show that 91% of what we worry about everyday never happens. It proves that our worry doesn't fix the situation. Worry is an attempt to do God's job and why in the world would we think we can do a better job than the Lord? He can fix the problem, but my worry cannot. Sometimes it is a legitimate problem. If you are running late and might miss your plane, you would worry. Then you would be anxious about flying. Neither one of those would help the situation.

POINT #3 – Worry causes us to Waver.

I read a story about a fishing boat sank in rough, cold waters off Vancouver Island, leaving two men in a life raft tied to the sinking boat by a nylon rope. Neither had a knife to cut the rope, and had the ship sunk, it would have pulled the boat and the men down with it. For an hour, the two men alternated chewing the rope, Minutes before the ship sank, the men finally chewed through the rope and survived. If you don't work at removing worry and anxiety from your heart it will pull you down.

I love the hymn "What a friend we have in Jesus" written in 1855. I wrote a sermon on it not too long ago. There is a line in the song that says, "O what peace we often forfeit, o what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry, everything to God in prayer." It's my prayer that you find some answers for worry today through the Word of God. What I want to do is look at three of the most famous portions of Scripture that talk about anxiety and worry. We are going to see what Peter, Jesus and Paul told us to do about worry. If you have your bibles you can go to the first passage of Scripture found in 1 Peter 5:7:

Winning the War on Worry:

6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, 7 casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. 8 Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9 But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. 10 After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. 11 To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen. – 1 Peter 5:6-11 NASB1995

The Greek word here for "casting" is only used two times in the Bible. The other place it's used is when they threw or cast their cloaks on the colt Jesus came riding in on. It is the idea or throwing upon. Not casting like a fishing pole and expected to bring something back. I also see the spiritual warfare aspect of anxiety with the word casting. You cast our demons not emotions. Notice how Peter says, "casting all your anxieties on Jesus" and then immediately goes into

resisting the devil. So let's look at Peter's formula for anxiety. In your notes, please fill out Peter's Instruction:

PETER'S INSTRUCTION – Be Humble, Be Alert, and Resist the devil.

Humility in the Bible means lowliness in mind. Humility is not thinking of yourself *as* less...it is thinking of yourself *less*. When you worry you are always thinking about yourself. "What am I going to do about this?" It means surrendering to God and looking to Him for the answers not your intelligence, logic, or skill. How can you be more humble...take everything to God in prayer. Next Peter says stay alert. Alert here in the Greek means to be watchful and to guard. The main thing here is to be watchful at what you are hearing. You can only hear a few voices in your head and they all sound like you. You can hear God's voice, your voice, the devil's voice, and angelic voices. They all sound like you so it is your job to discern which is which. God's voice always lines up to Scripture, your voice typically is self-centered, the devil only speaks lies. Renewing the mind for the believer should be as natural as breathing. If you are not disciplined in this area it is going to feel overwhelming at first. But once it becomes a habit it will be as easy as breathing. Then finally, Peter says, "Resist the devil." I have great news for you guys! You don't have to tolerate the devil. You have authority over the enemy, and he has to listen to you because of the blood of Jesus. Not only will renewing your mind help the fight against worry, but taking authority over the enemy will eliminate needless suffering. Turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew 6 beginning in verse 25:

25 "For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? 27 And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? 28 And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, 29 yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! 31 Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' 32 For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 "So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. – Matthew 6:25-34 NASB1995

Jesus says don't worry. I think that's funny. Jesus says "don't worry" without immediately giving a solution. It is almost like bad advice from a friend. You say, "I'm struggling with so much worry" and the friend says, "Have you tried not thinking about it?" The cartoonist for *Peanuts* once said, "Don't worry that the world will end tomorrow: it's already tomorrow in Australia." Jesus actually gives five areas not to worry about: finances, food, fitness, fashion, and the future. Peter used the word "anxiety" and Jesus uses the word "worry." In the Greek however they are the exact same word. The word worry is used six times in this passage. Then Jesus says, "do not worry" three times. Because of how bad anxiety and worry are Jesus *commanded* us not to worry. He didn't suggest, He commanded. So let's take a look at Jesus' instruction:

JESUS' INSTRUCTION – Do not Worry, Trust God, and seek His Kingdom first.

On the night before Jesus was crucified, He was in distress to the point of death and sweated blood. It gives me comfort that even Jesus was not immune to distress. But you know what? He didn't turn that stress into worry. Do you know how He was able to prevent worry and anxiety? He surrendered everything to the Father. He said, "My Father if it is possible remove this cup from Me, yet not My will be done but Yours." Jesus did not have to worry because He trusted the Father. You build trust with God through both your history with God's promises and by building up your faith. In the same way not smoking can help prevent lung cancer, building up your faith can prevent worry. One thing I have learned over the years is that no matter how I am feeling, if I open the Word of God and meditate on it, I will 100% hear the voice of God. But you know what else I am learning? That regardless of what emotion I am facing, I can 100% *praise* God. "God I am so angry and scared; I don't know what to do. But I trust You. God You are so powerful and so merciful." Jesus talks about all these things to not worry about and to trust that the Father can take care of you. But it isn't until verse 33 that He gives us the solution. He says, "Seek first the Kingdom."

Let's look at our final instruction from the Apostle Paul. Go with me to Philippians chapter 4 beginning in verse 4:

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! 5 Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
– *Philippians 4:4-7 NASB1995*

Nikki, Gabriel, and I were running an errand together and Gabriel brought up how the Apostle Paul wrote the happiest book in the Bible from a prison cell. It made me think about it this week. There are times when I think the Apostle Paul was not human. I want you to think about something. Do you remember the scene in *The Passion of the Christ* where Jesus is being scourged? The movie was rated "R" because of how violent it was. But really the scourging scene was rated "G" compared to a real-life scourging. It was way worse than what was shown in the movie. Well, in 2 Corinthians 11:24, Paul is giving a list of all the sufferings he endured. He was scourged *five* times. This guy who faced starvation, beatings, shipwrecked, 24 hours lost at sea, and more says, "Be anxious for nothing" and his remedy was, "rejoice always." He said all of this while in prison potentially awaiting his death. Let's look at his instruction against anxiety and worry:

PAUL'S INSTRUCTION – Rejoice, Pray, and receive Supernatural help.

I want you to notice the sequence Paul gives us. He says to rejoice first, pray second, and receive supernatural help from the Lord third. We want it the other way around. We want to receive God's help first, then thank Him in prayer, and then rejoice. In the natural, rejoicing comes after the answer. In the spiritual rejoicing comes before the answer. The obvious question here is "how can you rejoice and be happy before the answer and while you are overcome with worry?" Do you just fake it until you make it. Do you just pretend to rejoice and be happy even though you

are not? Well, upon closer inspection of verse 4 it says, “rejoice *in the Lord.*” It does not say “rejoice in yourself.” In your worry you can say, “God I delight in You, I rejoice in Your goodness. God I am so happy I serve a God who is going to bring an answer. I rejoice that Holy Spirit is with me and will bring me comfort.” If your worry is so overwhelming and you can even come up with the words to say, that’s when you really are praying in the Spirit. Let the Holy Spirit talk over as you pray in tongues until you have the words. But no matter what, don’t stay stuck in worry. Your biggest problem is not an answer, your biggest problem is worry robbing your worship.

Let me close with this. I heard a story of a man who was dealing with constant worry, so he decided to do something about it. The Scriptures say to cast our anxieties on Jesus and to take everything to God in prayer. So, this man hung a box on the wall and called it his “Worry box.” Any time he was struggling with a situation that brought him worry, he would write it down followed by a little written prayer and put it in the box. The reason he made the box is so that he would do something physical to remind him of what he was doing spiritually. But here’s the kicker. Any time the man went back to worry, he forced himself to fish out the paper of that worry since he was unsuccessful at leaving it in Jesus’ hands. He said, “I am ashamed to say how many times my hands were fishing in the worry box.”

Remember not to stay stuck in your worry. Seek the Kingdom first. Remain surrendered. Receive His supernatural help.