

Have you ever given serious thought to the fact that the Bible addresses not only the matter of the outward acts of the believer, but also his inward thoughts? God requires us not only to exercise control of what we do, but to go further and control the thoughts we think. Holiness is not just an outward thing: it must extend to every part of us. Look, for example, at the passages I have listed below and think about their implications for your thought life.

- Psalm 1:2
- Matthew 5:28
- Philippians 4:8
- 1 Peter 1:13



Referring to these and other passages of Scripture, outline what the Bible teaches about the Christian's thought life.

Often Christians get into difficulties because they have not attended to the discipline of their minds. The most common problem to arise in this way is, in my experience, the problem of worry.

Anxious Thoughts

It is one thing to plan for the future, but it is another thing entirely to worry about it. To worry is to become anxious about the future and painfully ruminate upon anticipated problems in hope of finding solutions that cannot be found. Some say they are afraid to stop worrying in case things become worse and some say they cannot help worrying, but no one likes it, for it distracts the mind, it causes tension and stress, and often it can bring on depression.



In what ways can worry be harmful?

If you want to understand worry and be able to help those who struggle with it, then Matthew 6:24–34 is the place to look. Let me give some points to help you with your study of it.

God Says, “Don’t Worry”

God says you must not worry about anything. You must not worry about tomorrow (verse 34), or about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or your body, what you will wear (verse 25). Now if you are not to worry about these important basic necessities, without which nobody can get by, you must not worry about less important things.



What do people commonly worry about?

Of course, it is not very helpful to say to someone who is grappling with a major concern, “Don’t worry!” I am sure you will agree with that, especially if someone has said it to you. God’s approach is gracious and wise, and when you try to help others who are perplexed by worries you will do well to model your methods on His. God does not just say, “Don’t worry!” He tells us why we should not worry, and in doing so He shows us how to overcome it.

Seven Reasons Not To Worry

- 1. You cannot serve two masters** (verse 24). If your desire and goal in life is really to live for God and serve Him well, then you dare not allow your mind to dwell on the quest for earthly things (and that is what worry entails). If you do you will lose your zeal for Him and you will be led astray by your preoccupation.
- 2. It is futile to worry** (verse 27). No matter how much you worry it will not make the least bit of difference to anything. What a waste!
- 3. Even unbelievers worry** (verses 31–32). You have a heavenly Father who knows just what you need. Should that not make a difference?
- 4. You have a Father who values you** (verses 26 and 28–30). God feeds the birds, which are worth a penny, and clothes the fields, but you are infinitely more precious to Him. Will He deny you any good thing?
- 5. Your Father has promised to provide for you** (verse 33). God has promised that if you seek His kingdom and His righteousness first, He will supply your needs.
- 6. Worry reveals weakness of faith** (verse 30). Do you not believe God’s promises?
- 7. Worry is a denial of God.** When we add all these things together we have to agree that worry is a denial of God. It denies the truth of His Word, it denies the extent of His love, it denies the strength of His power, and it denies His sovereign rule over all things.

So then, whatever way you look at it, worry is sinful. It belongs to the old nature and it must be put to death.



What passages of Scripture would you direct someone to if you were trying to convince him that God is fully in control of a situation that he is worried about?

In giving some further thought to the Lord's words in Matthew 6 you will discern some useful steps which could be applied to help those who worry. Again, allow me to stimulate your thoughts.

Seven Steps To Overcoming Worry

- 1. Have a single eye.** Fix your heart and mind on the things of God: His kingdom and His righteousness. You cannot serve two masters, and if your heart is set upon the things above it will not so readily dwell upon the things of earth.
- 2. Realise that worry is futile.** Once and for all acknowledge the truth that all your worry will achieve nothing. It never makes anything better and it never stops things getting worse.
- 3. Consider how much God values you.** "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? (Romans 8:32)
- 4. Enlarge your vision of God.** Notice God's method. He does not address the problem of worry by focusing on the cause, as we would ("It's not so bad as all that," "Let's try to solve this problem.>"). That always makes worry more intense. Instead He urges us to turn our thoughts away from the problem and on to other things. In particular He directs our thoughts to Himself. So, if you struggle with worry, study and meditate upon God's Word. Be convinced of who He is, His power, His knowledge, His sovereignty and His Fatherly love.
- 5. Strengthen Your Faith.** Apply yourself to all those disciplines by which God enables faith to grow: study, prayer, fellowship, holiness of life and a right response to times of testing, to name a few.
- 6. Focus on today's concerns** (verse 34). Devote yourself whole-heartedly to all that you must do today, and you will not worry about tomorrow.
- 7. Plan wisely.** Nothing I have said should rule out wise planning for the future (Ephesians 5:15–16). The Lord's words in this passage are concerned only with the taking of *anxious thought* about tomorrow. Often much worry is caused by the lack of clear, wisely prepared plans for the future. Remember, one of today's concerns is to be properly prepared for tomorrow. You must train your mind to anticipate what lies ahead, to make careful plans and then, when you have done all that is reasonably possible, to turn back to the other duties of today.

Now you must give some thought to how you can apply these principles in a practical and helpful way.

It Can Be Done

Before leaving the subject of worry, let me emphasise one more thing. Worry very readily becomes a habit. With practice it becomes second nature, and the more it is practised the harder the habit is to break. That is why there are so many who think they cannot help worrying. I hope you can now see that that is not true. There is no one who cannot help worrying but, as with the breaking of all stubborn habits, it may be very difficult to stop. So then, as you think about the principles we have derived from Matthew 6 and how you can apply them to help others, don't forget to also apply the principles we derived in chapter 5 (...The Battle With Sin).



Look back to chapter 10, "Encouraging In The Battle With Sin". How can the principles listed there be applied specifically by those who are battling with sinful thought habits?



Philippians 4:8 sets the standard for a Christian's thought life. What practical advice would you give to someone who wants to achieve that standard?