

How to Win in the War with Worry

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: March 14, 1993

Main Scripture Text: Matthew 6:25–34

“Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?”

MATTHEW 6:25

Outline

Introduction

- I. Recognize the Cause of Your Worry
 - A. Food
 - B. Fashion
 - C. Fitness
 - D. The Future
- II. Realize the Cost of Your Worry
 - A. Worry Is Harmful to Self
 - B. Worry Is Harmful to Other People
 - C. Worry Is Harmful to God
- III. Rely on the Cure for Your Worry
 - A. The Father Factor: Trust in the Lord
 - B. The Focus Factor: Put First Things First
 - A. The Future Factor: Don't Borrow Trouble
 1. It Buries Blessing
 2. It Steals Strength
 3. It Produces Problems

Conclusion

Introduction

Would you take God's Word and find again the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapter 6, we're going to begin reading in a few moments and read right through verse 34. Have you ever worried? Well, I know you do. I do. We all do. But we ought not. As a matter of fact, to worry is a sin: not just a weakness, but a wickedness. I want to speak to you today on this subject: "How to Win in the War with Worry."

All right now, let's begin to read here in Matthew chapter 6 and verse 25. And every worrier—that's us—pay attention. Our Lord is speaking, and He says, "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought"—and the word here actually means, "Don't worry, no

anxious thought”—“*for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?*”—or clothing. “*Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*” (Matthew 6:25–34)

Now worry is a serious problem. The ignorant worry because they don't know enough. The smart worry because they know too much. The rich worry because they're afraid of losing what they have. And the poor worry because they don't have anything. The old worry because they're facing death. And the young worry because they're facing an uncertain future. Back to the old: When we were young, we used to worry that we were getting older. And when we get old, we worry that we won't get older. And so we just continue to worry. And it doesn't matter who we are, and what category we are, we can find something to worry about.

Now, when our Lord says, “*Take no thought,*” the word for “thought” there is a word that may be translated “worry.” It's a root word, which means “to divide.” That is, worry divides our minds. It is a distracting thing. It is a dividing thing. And you remember what the Apostle James said, in James chapter 1 and verse 8, that, “*A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.*” (James 1:8) And there's nothing more destabilizing than worry.

Now, when our Lord says, “*Take no thought,*” He's not talking about not planning ahead. He's not talking about having a flippant, happy-go-lucky attitude that does not provide for tomorrow. As a matter of fact, the Bible takes the ant that provides her meat in the summertime for the winter as an example. (Proverbs 30:25) The Bible teaches that we should remember the law of sowing and reaping. (Galatians 6:7) God is not saying that we ought not make provision for tomorrow. God is not saying that we ought to just go through life in a lackadaisical, happy-go-lucky, flippant way.

It is not foresight, but foreboding, that is forbidden; not foresight, but foreboding, that this passage deals with: three basic things, if you would win in the war with worry.

I. Recognize the Cause of Your Worry

First of all, you must recognize the cause of your worry. What is it that people worry about? Well, it's very interesting here; our Lord has summarized them for us right here.

A. Food

First of all, people worry about food: how they're going to get enough to eat. And maybe that's not your worry, but for many people in many places of the world, that is indeed a very big worry. Look, if you will, in verses 25 and 26: *"Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat,"*—that is, food—*"and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them."* Here's the logic of our Lord: *"Are ye not much better than they?"* (Matthew 6:25–26)

Now, if God Almighty takes care of the birds, and you're so much better than a bird, isn't He going to take care of you? The logic is this: What farmer would feed his barnyard chickens and starve his beloved children? Now He's not telling us that we ought not to work for food. God feeds the birds, but He doesn't throw it in the nest. Remember, we told you that. And the birds must work. The early bird does what? He's the one that gets the worm. And the Lord is not saying not to work. What the Lord is saying is: "Don't worry."

B. Fashion

But not only do we worry about food; we worry about fashion. Look again in verse 25. He tells us there not to worry about raiment, what we shall put on our bodies. (Matthew 6:25) And then, look in verse 28: *"And why take ye thought for raiment?"*—that is, clothing. *"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon..."*—and he was the most opulent, rich, incredibly decked out king that you can imagine—*"even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."* (Matthew 6:28–29)

Now the flowers fade. The flowers bloom today, and then they're cast into the ovens. The women of this day would heat their oven with the grass, the straw, the field. And what our Lord is saying is, "If God takes such care of fading flowers, aren't you worth so much more?"

C. Fitness

And then, not only does He mention food and fashion, but He mentions fitness. Look in verse 27—and this is what so many Americans worry about: *"Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?"* (Matthew 6:27) Now He's probably not talking about making yourself taller. You cannot worry yourself taller. But the word here

stature is translated by many, “lifespan.” What He’s saying is that worry cannot lengthen your life. You just can’t worry yourself into a longer life. Now He’s not saying, again, that you ought not take care of yourself. He’s not saying that you ought not to jog. He’s not saying that you ought not to exercise. He’s not saying that you ought not to eat nutritional food. He’s not saying that you ought not to get proper sleep. He’s not saying, “Don’t do that.” But what He’s saying is that worry won’t lengthen your life. You can worry yourself to death, but you can’t worry yourself to a longer life. That’s what He’s saying. He’s saying, “Now, look”—in the area of food, in the area of fashion, in the area of fitness.

D. The Future

And then, in the area of the future. Now many of us who have the food that we need, and the clothes that we need, and we have the strength that we need today, that’s not enough now, if we say, “But I may not have it tomorrow.” So, look down in verse 34, and He says, “*Take...no thought for the morrow:*”—now He mentions the future. He says—“*for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*” (Matthew 6:34) Now, remember, it’s not foresight, but foreboding, that our Lord says we’re not to do. We’re not to reach out into tomorrow and borrow trouble. We’re not to pull tomorrow’s clouds over today’s sunshine.

Somebody has done a study about what the average person worries about. They took a survey and they found this: that forty percent of what people worry about—forty percent of the things that people worry about—never happen at all. Thirty percent of what people worry about has already happened: it’s in the past. So forty percent’s not going to happen. Thirty percent has already happened. And you can’t do anything about it. Twelve percent of what the average person worries about is in the area of criticism, what people say about you—most of it untrue. Ten percent deals with your health—according to this survey—and worrying would only make that worse. Add all of these together, that’s about ninety-two percent: you only have about eight percent of the things that are considered to be real problems, and even for these, worry will not do any good. But it’s incredible that we worry about a lot of things that are not going to happen, or already have happened—like the little lady who said, “Don’t tell me that worry doesn’t do any good: most of the things I worry about never happen.” So worry really is sort of a futile thing: that’s what our Lord is saying.

I read recently an interesting thing: that in a dense fog—I mean a dense fog, that would cover seven city blocks one hundred feet deep—you know how much water it takes to make a fog to cover seven blocks a hundred feet deep? Less than a glass full—less than a drinking glass full. It is divided up into more than six hundred thousand million little droplets. You could take a couple of jugs of water and put a fog over all of

Memphis, Tennessee.

Worry is not like a thunderstorm where you have rain and thunder and lightning—you can put up an umbrella; you can go inside, wait for the storm to come over. And that happens to all of us. We have storms, and we have to deal with them. That's not worry. But worry is like that fog; it's like that less than a glass of water that just permeates all of our life.

II. Realize the Cost of Your Worry

Now our Lord, first of all, says that we should recognize the cause of worry. And then He goes on, secondly, to help us to understand the cost of worry. Once we recognize the cause, we need to realize the cost. Now worry is a costless thing. The very best thing that you could say about worry—I mean, if you wanted to say something good about it—the best thing you could say is not good, and it is this: that it is useless—absolutely useless.

Look, if you will, in verse 27 again: *“Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature?”*—just by worry. (Matthew 6:27) I mean, it doesn't do any good. It's well been said, there two categories and classes of things we should never worry about: a) those things that we can do something about; and, b) those things we can't do anything about. Now, whether we can do something about it, or whether we can't do anything about it, worrying only makes the matter worse.

*For every evil under the sun,
There is a cure, or there is none;
If there be one, try and find it,
If there be none, never mind it.*

—WILLIAM HAZLITT

“Which of you by taking [anxious] thought can add one cubit to his stature?” Worry never dried a tear. Worry never lifted a burden. Worry never solved a problem. The best thing that we can say about worry is that it is useless.

A. Worry Is Harmful to Self

But worry is absolutely harmful—and harmful, number one, to you, to yourself. There are few forms of dissipation that will do more damage to you physically emotionally and spiritually than worry. Worry will do the same thing to you that sand will do to machinery. And it's not the big things that get most of us; it's the little things.

I read that where a mighty lion may destroy and kill, still little ants will pick the carcass far cleaner than the mighty lion. It's the little ants that seem to nibble at us.

B. Worry Is Harmful to Other People

Worry is harmful to us in every area. Worry is harmful to other people. Have you

known folks that, when they walk into the room, it seems like somebody turned the lights off? You know people like that? I know people like that. They brighten up the room when they leave. These are just the worriers. And not only do they worry themselves; worry is contagious, and they just start spreading this gloom and this worry everywhere. There ought to be a place where they could quarantine these people—just lock them up and let them worry one another.

C. Worry Is Harmful to God

Worry is harmful to the self. And worry is harmful to other people. God deliver us from the worriers in the church. And then, worry is a wound in the heart of God. Do you know how our Lord remonstrates with them? Look, if you will, in verses 30: *“Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you,”*—now, watch this little next phrase here—*“O ye of little faith?”* Do you see what worry says about God? *“O ye of little faith.”* Do you know what an insult worry is to God? Do you see how this worry says, in response to Romans 8:28, that “all things work together for good to those who love God who are the called according to his purpose,” do you see how that points the finger in the face of God and says, “God, that’s a lie”? Verse 31: *“Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?”* Now, watch verse 32: *“(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:)”* (Matthew 6:30–32)

What’s He talking about there? The people of the world, the people who don’t know Jesus. Do you know what our Lord is saying? Beloved brother or sister in Christ, what our Lord is saying is that, when you worry, you’re living like a pagan. That’s what He’s saying. He’s saying that’s pagan; it’s faithless: *“O you of little faith! You’re like the people of this world. You are thinking like the world. You’re not thinking like somebody who has a heavenly Father.”* Worry, I say, is a wound in the heart of God, and it is an insult to the providence of God.

III. Rely on the Cure for Your Worry

All right then, thirdly, let’s move on. Our Lord talks about the causes—and we must recognize the causes; and then He talks about the cost, and the curse—and we must realize the cost, the curse, of worry; but then our dear Lord deals with the cure. And this is not just pop psychology. Our Lord gives us just a very real, very practical, down-to-earth way to win in the war with worry.

A. The Father Factor: Trust in the Lord

Number one—this is so simple: Trust in the Lord. Look, if you will, in verse 32: *“(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father”*—just underscore that phrase: *“your heavenly Father”*—*“knoweth that ye have need of all these things.”*

(Matthew 6:32) You don't have a need in your life but what someone who loves you so incredibly that He gave his dear Son, the Lord Jesus, to die for you, He knows all about it. And so you're just simply trust in the Lord. That's what I call the Father factor—the Father factor.

You have a heavenly Father. If you could fast-forward in the Gospel of Matthew, you'd come to Matthew chapter 10 and verses 29 through 31. Our Lord, again, is on this same subject. He says, *“Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.”* He doesn't say that a sparrow won't fall. He doesn't say that you're not going to have trouble. But He says God is right there. He attends the funeral of every sparrow. And then He says, *“But the very hairs of your head are numbered.”* Friend, He knows things about you that you don't know about you. You think He doesn't understand: you don't understand how much He does understand—how much He does understand. There is not a person here that knows how many hairs you have on your head, except a few guys that I'm looking at right now. *“The very hairs of your head are numbered.”* And then our Lord says, *“Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.”* (Matthew 10:29–31)

*Said the robin to the sparrow,
“I should really like to know,
Why these anxious human beings
Rush about and worry so.”
Said to the sparrow to the robin,
“Friend I think that it must be,
That they have no Heavenly Father,
Such as cares for you and me.”*

—ELIZABETH CHENEY

Are you not worth more than a sparrow?

There is the Father factor. Robert Louis Stevenson used to delight in telling the story about a ship that was at sea on a rocky coast. It was very important that a ship not be washed upon a reef, and it was a stormy, blustery time. There was a sailor and some other sailors that were beneath the waterline in that ship that was being tossed and turned. They knew the danger. They knew that they were in peril and danger. And they were wondering, “Are we going to make it?” One of those sailors beneath the deck could take it no longer. He left his duty, went up to the pilothouse, pushed open the door, and there was the captain of the ship in the pilothouse, steering that ship through those treacherous waters. The captain knew that the sailor was worried. And he didn't say a word to the sailor. He just turned and smiled at him. The sailor went back down below the deck, and he said to his fellows, “Don't worry. It's all right. I have seen the captain, and he smiled at me.”

I like that. You know, I think that's what we need to do: just see the smile of God, don't you? You know that God is in control. Somebody wrote a couplet like this:

*Every morning lean your arms awhile
Upon the windowsill of heaven
And gaze upon the Lord.
Then with the vision in your heart,
Turn strong to meet your day.*

—THOMAS BLAKE

Isn't that what we need to do? Early in the morning get up and see that we have a Father in heaven who knows. He cares. He loves. Friend, He really does. There's the Father factor—there's the Father factor.

B. The Focus Factor: Put First Things First

There's the Father factor. And then there's another factor, which is the focus factor. Do you know that a person who is worrying is a person whose mind is out of focus? Remember what we told you? He's double-minded. Now, what our Lord says is that you need to get your focus back. Look again, if you will, in this passage of Scripture now in Matthew chapter 6 and verse 33: *"But seek ye first"—"first"—"first"—"the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things"*—food, fashion, fitness, future—*"shall be added unto you."* (Matthew 6:33) Just seek God first!

Do you know what many of us do? We try to put things first and God second. Now, we don't exclude God—we don't exclude God—but we just try to kind of add God in. You know, for many people, living the Christian life is doing the best we can with God's help. That's what many of us do: the best we can with God's help. But that isn't the Christian life. Our Lord does not want a place in your life; He demands, deserves preeminence. *"Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."* (Matthew 6:33)

You say, "Pastor, it won't work." Before you tell me it won't work, I'm going to ask you this question: Have you tried it? Have you tried it? Don't tell me it won't if you are not a person who has obeyed the Lord. After the Father factor—your Father knows what you have need of; He knows!—then get your life in focus and *"seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness."* (Matthew 6:33) And do you know what God is saying in this passage? Our Lord is saying, "You take care of my business, and I'll take care of yours. You take care of my business, and I will take care of yours. You put me first"—*'seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness'*—*"and I'll take care of all of these things that are bothering you."* God is more than able to take care of the *things* in your life.

A. The Future Factor: Don't Borrow Trouble

Now here's the third factor. There's the Father factor, there's the focus factor, and there is the future factor. Now look, if you will, in verse 34: "*Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*" (Matthew 6:34)

Now what's He saying? The Father factor: Trust in the Lord. The focus factor: Put first things first. The future factor: Don't borrow trouble! Don't borrow trouble! Don't do it! "Take no thought for the morrow; the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself." (Matthew 6:34) Do you know what you do when you take thought and worry about tomorrow? You borrow trouble. Do you know what worry is? Worry is the interest paid on borrowed trouble. That's what worry is. Worry is the interest you pay on borrowed trouble.

Now what God has done is God has arranged your life with a perfect ecology. We talk about the ecological problems in the world today. Well here's one where people get the concern out of balance. Now what does God do? God engineers your problems. Did you know that God has arranged some problems for you today? God is up there in heaven saying, "Well, I'm going to give her this problem; I'm going to give him that problem. I'm going to give this one that problem. God is preparing some problems for you. You say, "I thought God loved me." Yes, He does, and that is why He gives you some problems. Did you know that we would not come to God, we would not trust God, we would not lean upon God, if we didn't have some problems? Did you know that?

Back in the Garden of Eden, God said to Adam, "Cursed is the ground for your sake." (Genesis 3:17) He didn't say, "For your punishment," but "For your sake." It is trouble that reminds us that we live in a sinful world. It is trouble that tells us, we must come to God. And so God gives us every day some evil: "*Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*" (Matthew 6:34) The evil for what? He doesn't mean sin; He means problems, difficulties. That's the kind of evil He's talking about. We all have it. God gives it to us to cause us to depend upon Him because we are frail human beings, and we need some trouble. All sunshine makes a desert, and so our Lord gives us some trouble.

But with the sufficient trouble, God gives us sufficient grace. So "*sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*" (Matthew 6:34) What God does, God gives us grace for today, not for tomorrow. God doesn't give us grace for tomorrow, only for today. Now, if you begin to reach out into tomorrow, and we said, "You pull tomorrow's clouds over today's sunshine," what you do is you upset that ecology. The Bible says, "As your days are, so shall your strength be." (Deuteronomy 33:25) God did not give me strength for tomorrow.

Now, listen. If you fail to understand the future factor, if you begin to reach out into

the future and drag the future into today, here are three terrible things you are going to do to yourself.

1. It Buries Blessing

What does this do? Well, in the first place, it buries blessing. Did you know that God not only has given every one of us today some difficulty, but God has given every one of us today some great, great blessings? And the danger is that you get the ecology out of balance, and you do not see the blessings of today. There are plenty of blessings around, if you'll just look around and not let worrying about the future blind you to them.

2. It Steals Strength

But not only does worry bury blessings, it steals strength. It steals strength. You see, worry is not just useless—I've already told you—it's harmful. Not only does it take the joy out of today; it takes the strength out of tomorrow. You see, what happens is this, that when you do get to tomorrow, you get to tomorrow out of breath because you have been carrying a double load today. Do you know that the God who designed you knows how much you can bear; He knows your frame? (Psalms 103:14) Do you know that?

A truck—we say that's a ton-and-a-half truck, that's a two-ton truck, a five-ton truck. What do we mean? Not how much the truck weighs, but how much the truck can carry. Now the manufacturer of that truck knows the frame, the chassis, of the truck. And so he says, "Don't ever put a load on that truck that it ought not to bear."

Now your Father, according to Psalm 103, He knows your frame. (Psalms 103:14) And so, "as your days are, so shall your strength be." (Deuteronomy 33:25) God is not going to give you a burden that you cannot bear if you use the strength that God gives you. But what we do is this: We overload today with tomorrow's problems. And therefore, friend, we break down the springs of life, and it's no wonder that we have to call a wrecker to haul us in because what we have done is just simply overloaded our spiritual truck. And not only does it bury blessings; it steals strength! It breaks us down.

3. It Produces Problems

The third thing, and finally, it produces problems. Did you know that the thing you worry about may happen just because you worry about it? You know what Job said? Job said, "The thing I feared"—"the thing I feared"—"is come upon me." (Job 3:25)

Have you ever gotten behind a person driving; they expect every light to turn red? By the time they get there, it has. Have you ever done that? There are people who go through life that way.

Conclusion

And our Lord says, "Listen. Don't worry about tomorrow." He didn't say not to plan for tomorrow. He said, "Don't take anxious thought for the morrow, *the morrow shall take*

thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.’ ” (Matthew 5:34)

Don't let worry bury blessings! Don't let it steal strength! Don't let it produce problems! Live today! This is the day the Lord hath made. I will rejoice and be glad in it. (Psalms 118:24)