

Don't worry — be faithful

Sermon for Sunday, April 4, 2010
by Bruce Fraser

The Greatest Sermon in History is the message given by Jesus Christ as recorded in Matthew 5-7. This series aims to apply Jesus' timeless truths to the situations that people face today. When Jesus rose from the dead on Easter, it demonstrated that his word is truth and can be trusted completely.

Scripture: Matthew 6:25-34

1) The important difference between fear and worry

In the outline of sermons in the bulletin, today's message is about "freedom from fear and worry." I'm going to focus on worry. This is because there is a huge difference between fear and worry. This story will illustrate.

During World War II, General George Patton was meeting with another commander in Sicily. This other officer was in awe of Patton's reputation, and highly praised Patton for his courage and bravery. Patton replied, "Sir, I am not a brave man. The truth is, I am a complete and utter coward. I have never been within the sound of gunshot or in sight of battle in my whole life that I wasn't so scared that I had sweat in the palms of my hands." Years later Patton wrote in his autobiography, "I learned very early in my life never to take counsel of my fears."

Fear is normal. When appropriate, fear is healthy. In the Bible, Proverbs 9:10 tells us, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Indeed, lack of fear can get you into a great deal of trouble.

On the other hand, **worry** is what happens when we allow fear, doubts, suspicions other negative thoughts to *control* us. Worry is *never* healthy.

2) Some things God's Word tells us to never worry about

Here are some guidelines given to us. If you practice the principles outlined here, you will find a tremendous burden lifted from your shoulders and your soul. The difference between being burdened with worry, and being filled with peace is exhilarating! God really does have the power to change our lives, if we are willing to allow him to work in us.

After I've finished this list, you can go home and worry all you want about anything I haven't mentioned.

a) Don't worry about material things

Matthew 6:25, New International Version:

"Therefore I tell you: do not worry about what you will eat or drink; or about what you will wear. After all, isn't life more important than food? And isn't the body more important than clothes?"

God created you a special unique person, gave you life and a body. He's not going to forget about you now! In verse 26, Jesus goes on to describe how God makes sure the birds have enough food — and you're much more valuable than they are!

b) Don't worry about things you have no control over

Matthew 6:27, New International Version:

"Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?"

You can take five minutes out of every day, go into a corner and worry about how long you'll live — you'll probably die even sooner because of the stress you're adding!

There are some things in life you can change. There are some things you can't change. For those you can't change, learn to just accept what God has given you, and don't worry about it.

c) Don't cry over spilled milk

You can't change what happened yesterday. Don't worry about your past failures. Learn from them, plan so you don't do them again, then go on and forget them.

Philippians 3:13-14, New International Version:

One thing I do: forgetting what is behind, and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal...

You can't change what has already happened today. Suppose you are rushing to the airport and just barely miss your flight. No amount of worrying and cursing have ever made an airplane turn around and come back. Don't let it ruin your day. Just pick out a book you know nothing about, and read it for four hours until the next flight leaves.

A businessman who lived in North Vancouver was running to catch the passenger ferry which took people across the inlet to downtown Vancouver. As he ran down the dock, he saw the ferry just a meter from the edge. He thought, "If I jump, I think I can make it." He sprinted the remaining distance, leaped off the dock, and landed safely on the ship's deck.

However, when he landed, his heel caught on a chain, and he went sprawling. His briefcase flew threw the air, his pants had a hole in the knee — but he made it! He picked himself up, dusted himself off, looked around at all the other people and smiled.

Ten seconds later the ship docked! Moral: before you start to worry, find out which way your boat is going.

d) **Don't worry about tomorrow**

Matthew 6:34, New International Version:

“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Live one day at a time. We can plan for tomorrow, work and get ready for tomorrow... but don't *worry* about tomorrow.

A hitchhiker with a big, heavy pack was trudging along a country road. A farmer pulling a hay wagon stopped to give the man a lift. He drove on for a while, then looked back to make sure the hitchhiker was all right. He was sitting on the wagon, but the heavy pack was still on his back. The farmer called out, “Take off your heavy load. Have a rest!” The hitchhiker replied, “Oh, I couldn't do that. I'm so grateful for this ride; I wouldn't want to burden you any more.”

Isn't that ridiculous? But that's exactly what many people do: they are lugging around a heavy load of worries about things that haven't even happened yet! And some also add on yesterday's worries on top of it all!

The French philosopher Montaigne summed up his life like this: “My life has been full of terrible misfortunes, most of which never happened.”

There was a woman who for years had an awful time getting to sleep because she was afraid of burglars. One night her husband heard a noise in the house, so he went downstairs to investigate. Sure enough, he did find a burglar. “Good evening,” said the man. “I am pleased to see you. Come upstairs and meet my wife. She has been waiting 10 years to meet you.”

e) **Don't worry about the inevitable**

Sometimes you can look ahead and see that disaster is coming. This may seem like the proper time to worry. Not true! I don't mean to make light of some of the situations that you face — no, indeed, I want to help you and strengthen you.

When you are facing a crisis, there are two questions you can ask that will give you hope and courage. These are questions that have been tested by someone facing death, and they helped her plan how to deal with this problem.

Queen Esther, along with all her fellow Jews, was going to be executed, unless someone — she! — did something. No one else had access to the king to plead with him to stop the executions. But even she could not speak to the king unless he invited her to do so [so much of the Bible's events are in a man's world!].

She asked herself:

- (a) What is the worst possible thing that can happen in this situation?
- (b) What can I do to obtain a better result?

When she realized that:

- (a) I could die, either by execution or by the king's wrath.
- (b) I've got nothing to lose, so I'll take a chance on approaching the king.

Here's how she put it:

Esther 4:16, New International Version:

“I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.”

Asking yourself those same two questions when you are facing a crisis will help immensely. A couple were facing bankruptcy after both of them lost their jobs. It looked hopeless, and they felt the dark clouds of despair overwhelming them. They had an honest look at their situation by asking:

- (a) “What is the worst possible thing that can happen in this situation?” They answered, “We'll lose our home, our cars, our retirement savings, and most of our possessions. But we'll still have each other. We know that God loves us. We haven't given up our integrity. In fact, we still have the most important things in life, the things that really matter.”
- (b) “What can we do to obtain a better result?” “We can always start over again. Those things can be replaced, in time.”

Looking at life's problems honestly and realistically is a great worry-saver. It's when we hide our problems away, pretend it's not really happening — but inside we know it is — that worry takes over and gnaws away, destroying us.

Look at things from the perspective of what *really* matters in life. What really is the source of your joy and

peace and love? With this view, even the prospect of death is not something terrible. Oh, my friends, I hope and pray that you will take comfort in these truths, as you face whatever you come up against.

f) Don't worry about *anything*

I promised you that when I finished this list, you could go home and worry all you want about whatever is not on the list. Surprise — there's nothing left!

Philippians 4:6, Today's English Version:

Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thankful heart. And God's peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe, in union with Christ Jesus."

Some years ago a newspaper carried one of those stories about someone's life. The reporter interviewed a widow who had successfully raised a very large family. In addition to six children of her own, she had adopted 12 other youngsters. Through it all she had maintained stability and an air of confidence. When asked the secret of her outstanding accomplishment, her answer to the reporter was quite surprising: "I managed so well because I'm in a partnership!" "What do you mean?" he inquired. The woman replied, "Many years ago I said, 'Lord, I'll do the work and You do the worrying.' And I haven't had an anxious care since."

This is all true. Maybe you have been tormented by your worries. Some people are literally "worried sick." It doesn't need to be that way. Trust in Jesus as your Saviour and Lord, and he will guide your ways. He has given us his word on this:

Matthew 6:33,

"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."