



Definition of worry:

Worry is mental energy expended on things you can't change or can't change right now.

Trust is the opposite of worry. Trust is a calm certainty that God is overseeing what you can't change or can't change right now.

The root of the common NT word for *worry* (*merizo*) meant *to divide*. Therefore, to worry is *to have a divided mind*.

Solomon's description of worry:

Ecc 2:23. Literal translation: ... *at night his mind does not lie down*.

Prevalence of worry:

Worry is a very common sin among religious people. We who would never fornicate, get drunk, or steal, worry regularly.

Forms of worry:

- endless mental reviews of past conversations or events
- imagining present or future disasters
- irrational fear or panic attacks

The source of worry:

- wanting a good thing too much (a good future for your children)
- wanting a bad thing too much (hoping a sin will not be discovered)

Observation:

Similar to anger and conflict, *worry* results when your heart is *ruled by a desire*.

Five results of worry:

1. Sin.

Matt 6:25. *For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life ...*

Alternate translation: *Stop your habit of worrying!*

Phil 4:6. *Be anxious for nothing ...*

Col 3:15. *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts ...*

2. Bad, fear-driven decisions.

Worry produces *fear-driven* decisions rather than *wisdom-* or *principle-driven* decisions. Example: Abraham in Genesis 12 and 20.

3. Negative effects on physical health.

Prov 14:30. *A tranquil heart is life to the body, but passion is rottenness to the bones.*

Examples: High blood pressure, heart disease, ulcers, and frequent sicknesses. Note: stress exacerbates all other negative physical conditions.

4. Neglecting life responsibilities.

Prov 12:25. *Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down ...*

Fitzpatrick and Hendrickson:

When we spend our days in needless worry and anxiety, we're taking all the grace He's given us for each day's activities and wasting it on trials that aren't even here yet or never will be. (Will Medicine Stop the Pain?, 126)

Point:

The time and mental energy spent on worrying often causes an anxious person to neglect his or her daily responsibilities, usually leading to further worry.

5. Spiritual asphyxiation.

Luke 8:14. *... as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity.*

Luke 21:34. *Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with ... the worries of life ...*

COUNSELLING WORRY

Three basic questions:

1. What is your problem?
2. What does *God* say about your problem?
3. What does God say *to do* about your problem?

Question 1: What is your problem?

Twelve things people often worry about or brood over:

1. Money, success, or work.

*The root of our worry and fear is often ... the love of earthly treasure.
(Fitzpatrick and Hendrickson, Will Medicine Stop the Pain?, 127)*

Ecc 2:22-23. For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun? Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity.

Matt 6:24-25. No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life ...

1 Peter 5:6-7. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

2. Their children's futures.

Prov 17:25. A foolish son is a grief to his father and bitterness to her who bore him.

Prov 28:7. He who keeps the law is a discerning son, but he who is a companion of gluttons humiliates his father.

3. People talking against them.

Ps 119:23. Even though princes sit and talk against me, Your servant meditates on Your statutes.

4. Injustice or crime.

Ps 37:1-2. Do not fret because of evildoers, be not envious toward wrongdoers. For they will wither quickly like the grass and fade like the green herb.

5. Questions that God won't answer.

Job 3:11. Why did I not die at birth, come forth from the womb and expire?

Job 3:20. Why is light given to him who suffers?

6. A lack of information.

1 Sam 10:2. The donkeys which you went to look for have been found. Now behold, your father has ceased to be concerned about the donkeys and is anxious for you, saying, "What shall I do about my son?"

1 Thess 3:5. For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain.

Prov 25:25. Like cold water to a weary soul, so is good news from a distant land.

7. Decision making.

Matt 25:25. I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground.

8. The future.

Illustrated by its opposite:

Ps 3:5-6. I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustains me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me round about.

Ecc 7:14. In the day of prosperity be happy, but in the day of adversity consider—God has made the one as well as the other ...

9. Imagining the worst about other people's motives.

1 Sam 18:8. *Then Saul became very angry, for this saying displeased him; and he said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, but to me they have ascribed thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?"*

10. That a hidden sin will be exposed.

Prov 28:1. *The wicked flee when no one is pursuing ...*

Ps 38:18. *I confess my iniquity; I am full of anxiety because of my sin.*

11. The consequences of past sins.

Gen 50:15. *When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him!"*

Gen 32:6-7. *The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and furthermore he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him." Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed.*

12. Petty details.

Luke 10:40-41. *But Martha was distracted with all her preparations But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things.*

This is fretting over your inability to meet self-created, perfectionistic standards: *I want things to be just right when we have guests over for supper tonight.* Often it is due to worshipping the idol of reputation. It might also reveal a grace-deficient, works-righteousness view of being right with God: *If I don't perform perfectly, God won't love me.*

Two revealing questions to ask those who worry (*Will Medicine Stop the Pain?*, 128):

- What do you most commonly worry about losing?
- What makes you the most happy when you think you have gained it?

Point:

These questions expose the idols of a counselee's heart. We do what we do, including worry, because we want something (James 1:14).

Ineffective solutions to worry:

❖ Medication:

Drugs do not take care of the cause of emotional pain; they only decrease the awareness of it. (Fitzpatrick and Hendrickson, Will Medicine Stop the Pain?, 38)

❖ Alcohol or other "recreational" drugs:

While getting tipsy or "happy" might help a person temporarily forget his worries, his problems won't go away while he is drunk (often they get worse), and he'll have to face his worries again once he is sober.

❖ Demanding or untrusting prayers:

Sometimes Christians misuse prayer as *sanctified worry*, praying in such a way that it is clear that they don't trust God.

Question 2: What does *God* say about your problem?

Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:25-34

1. Worry is disobedience. Matt 6:25
2. Worry is unnecessary. Matt 6:25, 30-31

Most people in Western societies worry about luxuries and abundance, not about basic needs.

Proof that God will provide basic needs—two arguments from the greater to the lesser:

1. Matt 6:25. God gives life; He will provide what you need for life.
2. Matt 6:26, 28-30. God cares for His creatures' needs (birds and flowers); therefore, God will care for you.

3. Worry is useless. Matt 6:27

Possible meanings: Worry cannot add an hour to your *life* or a centimetre to your *height*.

4. Worry is unbelief. Matt 6:30

Worry is unbelief because it is, in essence, doubting God's perfect knowledge, His absolute control, and His loving concern.

5. Worry is ungodly. Matt 6:31-32

In this context, the word *Gentile* referred to a pagan. How does worry encourage pagan thinking about God?

1. God is distracted, capricious, or untrustworthy.
2. God is an elderly grandfather, befuddled by the complexity and fast-moving nature of my problems.
3. God is a Clockmaker who winds up life and then leaves me to manage things by myself.

6. Worry is distracting. Matt 6:34

Worry keeps you from dealing rightly with your immediate responsibilities.

Question 3: What does God say *to do* about your problem?

Summarised: Replace worry with ...

- trusting attitudes (Prov 3:5-6. *Trust in the Lord with all your heart ...*)
- trusting action (Neh 4:9. *We prayed to our God, and because of them we set up a guard against them day and night.*)
- trusting planning (James 4:13-16. *If the Lord wills ...*)
- trusting release (Ps 46:10. *Cease striving and know that I am God ...*)

The Replacements of Worry

Trusting attitudes:

- 1) Think rightly about God.

Ecc 7:14. *In the day of prosperity be happy, but in the day of adversity consider—God has made the one as well as the other ...*

Rom 8:28. *We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*

Is 26:3. *The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You.*

Ps 46:1. *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*

Ecc 3:16-17. *Furthermore, I have seen under the sun that in the place of justice there is wickedness and in the place of righteousness there is wickedness. I said to myself, "God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man," for a time for every matter and for every deed is there.*

Ps 55:22. *Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you ...*

2) Practise Christian joy.

Phil 4:4. *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!*

3) Think about the nearness of God.

Phil 4:5. *Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.*

The word *near* was used in the NT of being either near *in time* or near *in space*. However, Paul used the word only four times, and the other three all refer to physical proximity.

Living with God at your elbow is a big step towards worry-free living: *the Lord is near.*

4) Enjoy God's good gifts.

Ecc 5:18-20. *Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward. Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God. For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart.*

Ecc 8:15. *So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils throughout the days of his life which God has given him under the sun.*

See also Ecc 9:7-9; 11:10

- 5) Live one day at a time—don't spread today's grace across tomorrow's problems.

Matt 6:34. Do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Lam 3:22-23. The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning.

Point:

Don't try to spread the grace that God gave you for today across tomorrow's problems. Apply today's grace to today's problems, and trust God for tomorrow.

*God's grace is perfectly sufficient to tackle the challenges of the day He gives that grace. But His grace will always prove inadequate if you try to spread it across tomorrow's problems as well. It's like buttering bread—the dab of butter that's more than adequate to cover one slice gets a bit thin if you try to spread it over a whole loaf. In the same way, don't try to spread God's strength for today over tomorrow, next month, or next year. (Joel James, *Help! I Can't Handle All These Trials*, 14)*

- 6) Keep an eternal perspective.

John 14:1, 3. Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.

Living with one foot in heaven will help you combat worry.

Trusting actions:

- 1) Memorise and meditate on Scripture.

Ps 119:165. Those who love Your law have great peace ...

Ps 119:133. Establish my footsteps in Your word, and do not let any iniquity have dominion over me.

Fitzpatrick and Hendrickson:

Medicines can't teach us to think differently; they can only suppress the feeling we have in response to our thoughts. But God's word can teach us to think differently, leading to feelings of joy and peace instead of depression or anxiety. (Will Medicine Stop the Pain?, 57)

Ps 56:3-4. *When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You. In God, whose word I praise ...*

When your mind is repeatedly distracted during the day:

Ps 119:164. *Seven times a day I praise You, because of Your righteous ordinances.*

When you wake up in the middle of the night:

Ps 119:62. *At midnight I shall rise to give thanks to You because of Your righteous ordinances.*

2) Pray trusting prayers.

Phil 4:6-7. *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

1 Peter 5:7. *... casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.*

3) Pray thankful prayers.

Phil 4:6. *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*

Often our failure to sprinkle our prayers liberally with *thanksgiving* is what keeps us from experiencing God's peace.

Col 4:2. *Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.*

Col 3:15. *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.*

4) Don't torture yourself by imagining a host of worst-case scenarios.

Phil 4:8. *Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.*

Spurgeon's observation:

Many of God's people are constantly under apprehensions of calamities which will never occur to them, and they suffer far more in merely dreading them than they would ... if [the calamities] actually came upon them. (quoted in Fitzpatrick and Hendrickson, Will Medicine Stop the Pain?, 123)

2 Cor 10:5. ... *taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.*

Phil 4:8. ...*whatever is true ... dwell on these things.*

Prov 3:5-6. *Trust in the LORD with all your [thinking] and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.*

5) Learn to talk good theology to yourself.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones:

Have you realised that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself? Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them, but they start talking to you, they bring back the problems of yesterday, etc. Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? Your self is talking to you This [psalmist's] treatment was this; instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself.

The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, preach to yourself You must go on to remind yourself of God, Who God is, and what God is and what God has done, and what God has pledged Himself to do. (Spiritual Depression, 20-21)

Point:

Worriers need to learn to *talk* good theology to themselves, rather than *listening* to the bad theology of their fears.

Two examples:

❖ Psalm 3:1-3

In the midst of Absalom's rebellion, David lectured his worries, rather than letting his worries lecture him.

❖ Psalm 33:6-21

Three attributes of God that helped this man face the war situation of v. 16-17 without worry.

- God's power (v. 6-9)
- God's sovereignty (v. 10-12)
- God's omniscience (v. 13-15)

6) Do what you can do about the situation.

Neh 4:9. *We prayed to our God, and because of them we set up a guard against them day and night.*

Divine sovereignty works in concert with legitimate human responsibility. Acting positively to address a worrisome situation is a great alternative to fretting or brooding.

Jay Adams:

Brooding is thought without action. It is self-talk that does not focus upon God's solutions. It can have only bad effects. (The Christian Counselor's Manual, 372)

A note on scheduling:

Worriers will often be benefited by writing out and sticking to a schedule. Constructive, ordered action helps avoid the wasted time and distraction of brooding.

7) Take a holiday (or a walk—a twenty-minute holiday).

Mental exhaustion often makes problems seem insurmountable and worry easier. Problems that seem invincible have a way of shrinking to manageable proportions when you're fresh and rested.

Mark 6:30-31. *The apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught. And He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while." (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.)*

Trusting planning:

1) Plan ahead; don't worry ahead.

Prov 6:6-8. *Go to the ant, O sluggard, observe her ways and be wise, which, having no chief, officer or ruler, prepares her food in the summer and gathers her provision in the harvest.*

Prov 21:5. *The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, but everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty.*

2) Plan well, but trust God with the results.

Prov 16:9. *The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps.*

Prov 21:31. *The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but victory belongs to the LORD.*

Ecc 11:6. *Sow your seed in the morning and do not be idle in the evening, for you do not know whether morning or evening sowing will succeed, or whether both of them alike will be good.*

Trusting release:

1) Consciously turn over to God situations and people that you can't change or influence.

Ps 46:10. *Cease striving and know that I am God ...*

A three-step way to combat worry:

Step 1: Write down all the things that you are worrying about.

When I do this, I inevitably find that there are always fewer things to be anxious about than my worry led me to believe—thirty things are actually three.

Step 2: Divide what you're worrying about into *three categories*:

1. Things I can do something about *right now*.
2. Things I can do something about *later*.
3. Things I cannot do something about *at all*.

Step 3: Address each category with biblical wisdom.

1. *Things I can do something about right now.*

Get to work on them immediately with a God-dependent attitude.

2. *Things I can do something about later.*

Offer them to God in trusting, thankful prayer, and then refuse to think about them. They are written down; you won't forget them.

When you can do something about them, give them your full and undivided attention.

3. *Things I cannot do something about at all.*

Consciously entrust those situations or people to God with thankful, trusting prayer.

King David's example: Psalm 131:1-3.

great matters. The Hebrew word referred to something that was *wonderful or too difficult to understand* (cp. Prov 30:18)

As king, David was perpetually involved in complicated situations and he had to make weighty decisions every day. However, he showed his humility by entrusting to God the things he couldn't do anything about.

Homework suggestions:

- Wayne Mack's homework manuals
- *Trusting God* by Jerry Bridges
- *Anxiety Attacked* by John MacArthur
- *Taste and See That the Lord is Good* by Joel James
- Thankfulness "push-ups"

Have the person make a list of all the things in her life that she is thankful for (starting with something as simple as the forks in her silverware drawer).

- A worry journal listing worries (what, why, when, where, and how) and their replacements
- A Scripture-memory program