

Worry or Concern?

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I want us to consider something that produces gray hair, wrinkles, irritableness, hinders our daily tasks and shortens our lives. It is worry. We live in perilous times. Currently, the world, our nation, and our brethren are facing the various challenges that the Covid -19 has brought. I don't have all the answers, but the Bible gives us some principles on this subject that we can live by and confidently build our lives on. God has not left us without counsel from above. We all at some time in our lives have found ourselves worrying—whether it be over loved ones, family difficulties, financial matters, when vehicles don't run as we expect them to, when we have to deal with health issues, when we have deadlines that we must meet, and the list can go on and on.

What is the difference between worry and concern? The two can be confusing, and sometimes it may seem the two are the same. Worry and concern do have some similarities: they both are mental activities, they can take a lot of energy and effort, and they both have the potential of focusing us on important issues. However, there are some profound differences. As a general principle, worry is based in fear—often fear of the unknown or fear of things that are beyond our control. Concern, on the other hand, is when we see a problem and can make plans or preparations (within reason) for the future. We see a specific need that we can meet and make necessary efforts to do so. Concern is a close cousin to compassion. Concern does what is reasonably possible, and what it cannot do must prompt faith in and reliance on the capable hands of the Lord.

What does God have to say about worry? Some words the Scriptures use are “fret” and “anxious.” Some of the clearest teaching on this topic is given by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount, in **Matthew 6** beginning in **verse 25**: “*do not worry about your life.*” Did Jesus forbid us to plan ahead? NO! Planning for tomorrow can be time well spent, where worry about tomorrow is time wasted. We do have a responsibility and a part, as other Scriptures teach. What benefits if any does worry give? “*Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?*” (**6:27, NIV**). We must be careful; worry can choke our joy and be a primary source of stress. Worry depletes our strength and deceives us by painting a picture that appears hopeless. David, inspired by God, said, “*Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret — it only causes harm*” (**Psalms 37:8**).

Fretfulness and worry only cause harm; they immobilize us, reduce our productivity, and can negatively affect the way we treat others. They can and do harm spiritually—they weaken our faith and ability to trust God. For example, consider the ten Israelite spies who lost sight of God, His power, and faithfulness, and rebelled against God (**Numbers 13**). Worry, much of the time, places the focus on us, and our weaknesses and inabilities. Concern often places the focus on others, and God's abilities and faithfulness. After worry, we still have the same problems; they haven't gone away, but now we have added to our problems—gray hair and problems we cannot see internally. Jesus says we need to prioritize. “*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you*” (Matthew 6:33). “*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths*” (**Proverbs 3:5-6**).

How can we overcome this monster we call worry? Paul gives us great counsel in **Philippians 4:6-8**. Notice how it begins with “*don't be anxious*” or “*don't worry*” (verse 6). Then he gives us a prescription for worry.

1. “*but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.*” Always start with seeking the Lord and His will. We can pray for the Lord's wisdom, and seek His assistance (**James 1:5**). “*Count your many blessings, name them one by one. Count your many blessings, see what God has done!*” When meditating on all the blessings God has bestowed upon us, we are reminded of His constant care, His great faithfulness, and His abiding love. Since He has provided in the past, won't He also provide for today and in the future?
2. The Lord offers sweet peace. That doesn't mean He will take away the problem, but we can be in harmony with Him through the problem. He provides calm for our souls, when we wait on Him. “*But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint*” (**Isaiah 40:31**)!
3. Replace our worry with “*...whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things*” (**verses\ 8**). This describes God Himself, His word, and all of the precious promises that He has offered to His children! Meditate, take thought, and set your mind on these things.

Let us not worry, but from a heart of compassion do what we can, and what we cannot do, let us wait and trust in the Lord. *“Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you”* (1 Peter 5:6-7).