

How To Win Over Worry

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Life As It Was Meant To Be Series

Matthew 6.25-34

Today, as we continue in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, we are going to hear from Jesus regarding the subject of worry. Are any of you worriers?

My wife, Marlene's, family are world class worriers. If there was an Olympics event for worriers, they would win the Gold Medal! One time they picked up Marlene and I at the airport and a man, who I will call Jim, said on the way to the baggage claim, "I hope they didn't lose your bags. Maybe I should run up ahead and see if your bags are there." I said, "Jim, [at the time he was 75 years old] you don't need to run up ahead. I think the bags will be there." He said, "Well, we really ought to rush. Someone might steal them." I said, "Jim, it is OK. We'll get there before the bags even come onto the baggage claim carousel. It will be OK."

As we were walking towards the baggage claim area, Jim said, "Maybe I should pull the car around. It might rain." I said, "Jim, it is not going to rain. You don't need to pull the car around. We can walk up together."

Well, we got our bags and Jim said to me [this is absolutely true], “You know, maybe we should carry the bags up the stairs. We don’t want to get stuck on the elevator if it breaks down.” I thought to myself: You are 75 years old and you are going to walk up five flights of stairs with suitcases in order to avoid the elevator? I said, “Jim, the elevator won’t get stuck. Let’s just get on the elevator and we’ll go up to the 5th floor.”

Do any of you hear the story of Marlene’s relative, Jim, and say, “That sounds pretty reasonable to me!”

Garrison Keilor, years ago on his radio show, *Prairie Home Companion*, used to have a segment called “Worse Case Scenario.” Someone would ask Garrison Keilor a question like: I am planning to go to the movies today. What is the worse case scenario? Garrison Keilor would say something like this, “Well, you are walking up the aisle with your bucket of popcorn and your coca cola when your feet get stuck to some gummy bears on the floor. You trip and the bucket of popcorn and coca cola tips over on a large woman sitting in a row. In an effort to help her out, you frantically begin to brush the popcorn off of her front. She screams that a man is molesting her. A newspaper photographer happens to be there and snaps a picture of you grabbing this woman. The photograph is splashed across the front page of the local newspaper. Your boss sees it and fires you from your job. Your wife divorces you. Your kids will not speak to you. You are tossed out of your house and you are reduced to picking up newspapers

and soda cans along the highway and selling them for scrap. That is the worse case scenario.”

Do any of you have worse case scenario mindsets?

There is nothing more common in life than worry. Business people worry about the competition moving into the city. Restaurant owners worry when a new restaurant opens. Mothers worry about their children. Single people worry about whether they will be married. Older adults worry about retirement. Students worry about their exams. People around the world worry about whether they will have enough to eat. Farmers worry about the weather. After September 11th, Americans worried about safety.

The Wall Street Journal recently wrote an article about European countries’ campaign to curb the use of anti-anxiety drugs. One out of every four French women regularly downs a prescription pill to calm her nerves and lift her spirits. The average Belgian consumes 7x as many sedatives as the typical American. The Irish are world champions of anti-anxiety medications. The use of anti-anxiety drugs in the US has sky-rocketed over the last decade. Pharmaceutical companies are, of course, marketing anti-anxiety drugs directly to consumers – drugs like Xanax, Paxil, Effexor, and Valium.

Now, before we look at Jesus' counsel regarding how to win over worry, I want to make one simple distinction for you. Today I am dealing with what you could call "generalized anxiety" with a kind of worry that we all struggle with as we look out at the future and are worried about our finances, or our jobs, or our marriages. I am dealing today with the kind of worry that might arise in a woman when she discovers a lump in her breast, or receives a diagnosis of cancer. I'm talking about the kind of worry that might arise in a man when he discovers blood in his stool. I'm talking about the worries that many of us have regarding one of our children who may be making disastrous choices or worry about a parent who is showing early signs of Alzheimer's.

If you suffer from more serious anxieties, the kind that psychologists may classify as panic disorders or severe phobias; if you are the kind of person that hyperventilates in a grocery store, or you feel yourself trembling like you are going to faint, or you feel totally immobilized by being in public or being around strangers, or being in a closed in place – you feel like you are going to lose control or die, then you absolutely need to seek counseling. We have a number of professional counselors here in the Vineyard who can assist you to get to the roots of these deep and life-controlling problems. I do not want to suggest to any of you who are suffering from some acute kind of anxiety disorders that if you simply listen to today's message and try to apply it and it doesn't work, that you should continue to suffer. There are many severe problems that we do not get

past unless we get some outside help. That is true in marriage. That is true in child raising. That is true with addictions and it is true with anxiety disorders.

Having said that, what I am going to deal with today is a problem that 99% of us struggle with. It is not the extraordinary debilitating phobias or regular panic attacks, but the fruitless mental activity that the Bible calls worry. If you are a worrier, Jesus has a strategy for you to win over your worry. That is the title of today's talk, "How To Win Over Worry." Let's pray.

SLIDE – Matthew 6.25-34

Mt 6:25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?"

Mt 6:26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

Mt 6:27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? ⁵

Mt 6:28 "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.

Mt 6:29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

Mt 6:30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?

Mt 6:31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

Mt 6:32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

Mt 6:33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Mt 6:34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Now, what is worry? In the original Greek, the word is a compound word which suggests the divided soul, or the divided mind. A worrier is someone whose mind is divided, or whose attention is divided. That's why it is so hard to talk to someone when they are in a state of worry or anxiety, because only half of them is paying attention to what you are saying, but there is this other thing going on. It is like trying to talk with someone when their baby is crying in the background. Have you ever tried to talk with someone while they are watching TV, or they are listening to the radio or they're humming? They are distracted. Their attention is divided.

I think that this idea that a worrier is a person with a divided mind shows us why praying about our fears, whether we are talking about financial fears, or health concerns, or fears regarding our kids, or whether you are able to conceive, or whether you will be married – I think this shows why praying about our fears often doesn't relieve our sense of worry. You see, if you have a divided mind when going to God, only half of you is praying to God. The other half is already plotting, planning and strategizing regarding what you are going to do when God doesn't answer your prayer. You have this war going on inside. A part of you is saying, "Give us this day our daily bread; help me with my bills; rescue me in my marriage; save my niece, nephew, boyfriend, or child; find me a husband" but the other part of you is saying: "Well, I know my prayer is likely going to go unanswered, so I need to put together a contingency plan in the event that God

doesn't give me my daily bread, find me a job, or save my kid, or heal my marriage."

You say, "How do I know whether or not I am a worrier?"

Let me share with you some of the symptoms of worry. One of the symptoms is that no matter what someone says to you about your situation no matter how wise the counsel is, or no matter how much self-talk you engage in regarding your situation, you respond with "yes, but." You see, the other person doesn't seem to understand the depth of your problem.

- Yes, I understand that I have a job today, but what about tomorrow?
- Yes, we have income now, but what happens if the stock market goes down and we lose our retirement money?

If you are a worrier, your mind is constantly manufacturing "yes, but" responses to whatever someone might say to you, or whatever your self-talk suggests. Worry comes to us like a power. For those of you who particularly struggle with worry, you know that worry comes to you almost like a person. You get in the grip of this power and you can't escape.

Sometimes worry can be characterized by circular thinking. You just keep coming back to the same point over and over again and you never move forward towards the solution. You just spin around in your mind as you toss and turn in

bed in a process that results in mental exhaustion and emotional incapacitation. You know you worry feels like a spiral and you are digging around in the same place going further and further down into yourself.

Let me describe this process to you. You are a student and you are facing an exam the next day. This is a crisis event for you. Your thinking starts off this way: "I have to get an A on the test tomorrow. If I don't get an A, I am not going to be able to keep this grant that is based on academic performance. If I don't keep this grant, then I don't know how I'm going to stay in school. If I don't stay in school, I don't know what's going to happen to me. If I don't stop thinking this way, I won't be able to concentrate enough to be able to study. I've got to get an A on the test tomorrow." And then we start down the same cycle again.

Are any of you in touch with the kind of emotionally exhausting thinking that keeps you from being able to focus, or been able to sleep, or being able to work? The kind of distracting thoughts that wear you out? Worry may cause you to lose sleep or to have headaches or stomach problems. Where does worry come from?

The reason why most people do not win over worry is they think that worry and anxiety come from outside of themselves. That is it comes from the various pressures and problems that they're facing. Some of you think that your worry is

the result of having a pressurized life, having an overloaded life. Let me give you a picture of what you might feel like.

I read a story by a former member of the Chicago Bears defense. He played in the secondary about 20 years ago. Apparently, in the Chicago Bears locker room when one of the little guys annoyed one of the really big guys, the big guy would “splash” the little guy in the locker room. “Splashing” was basically a really big guy would grab the little guy who annoyed him and fall on him. So the 180 pound player named David Tate talked about a time when Refrigerator Perry, all 350 pounds of him, grabbed David Tate and sat on him. Then on top of Refrigerator Perry was 275-pound defensive lineman Richard Dent. And on top of him was 275-pound Dan Hampton. And on top of *him* was 275-pound Steve McMichael. So this little guy, 180 pounds, David Tate had 1200+ pounds laying on top of him.

That is the way some of you feel. You’ve been “splashed” by life. You feel like you have 1200 pounds of problems sitting on your chest. You have a problem with your finances. There are job cutbacks in your workplace. A family member has a drug problem. One of your closest friends is going through a divorce. Mom is in the hospital. Jesus tells those of you who are being splashed by life three times in this text, “Do not worry.” V. 25,

SLIDES

Mt 6:25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear.

Mt 6:31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’

Mt 6:34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Now, before we dismiss this three-fold injunction of Jesus, “Do not worry, do not worry, do not worry” as hopelessly unrealistic to someone who is buried under responsibilities and pressures, we need to remember who is speaking these words. One of my favorite preachers, Dr. Helmut Thielicke, preached through the Sermon on the Mount in Stuttgart, Germany in 1946 immediately following WWII. He talked about the scream of the air raid sirens that alerted people to more bombings, devastation and death, dropping down on them from the skies above just in the past year. Thielicke said,

SLIDE

“We know the sight and the sound of homes collapsing in flames...our own eyes have seen the red blaze and our own ears have heard the sound of crashing, falling, and shrieking. Against this background the command to look at the birds and the lilies might seem hollow. Nevertheless, I think we must stop and listen

when this man, whose life on earth was anything but birdlike and lily-like points us to the carefreeness of the birds and lilies. Were not the somber shadows of the cross already looming over this hour of the Sermon on the Mount?"

Jesus lived anything but a trouble-free, pressure-free life. He was constantly hounded from one town to another, falsely accused. Financially struggling, he said in Matt. 8.20,

SLIDE

Mt 8:20 Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

His own family thought that he was deranged. He was misunderstood by his closest friends. It doesn't matter what you are going through, external circumstances do not create worry.

The apostle Paul was certainly splashed by life. He lived with more than 1200 pounds on his chest. Here is what Paul said in 2 Cor. 11.23

SLIDE

I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.

2Co 11:24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.

2Co 11:25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea.

2Co 11:26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own people, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers.

2Co 11:27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

2Co 11:28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

And yet with all of this, the apostle Paul, while he was in prison, said to the Philippians, (Phil. 4.6)

SLIDE

Phil 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything,

Do not worry, do not worry, do not worry, do not be anxious about anything. Worry, in other words, does not come from outside of you. Worry comes from inside of you. And if you are going to win over worry, this is the first thing you need to understand: worry comes from inside. Indeed, many of the things we struggle with, Jesus tells us, do not come from outside, but from inside. That is what we read in Mark 7.15; 20-23,

SLIDES

Mk 7:15 [16] Nothing outside you can defile you by going into you. Rather, it is what comes out of you that defiles you."

Mk 7:20 He went on: "What comes out of you is what defiles you.

Mk 7:23 All these evils come from inside and defile you."

Now, I want to underline this for you. It is not circumstances that create your worry. It is not what your son or daughter are doing, or what your boss is doing, or on your job, or what is happening in your body or bank account. It is what's happening inside your heart that you need to focus on, if you are going to win over worry. You see, Jesus addresses worry as if it is a choice.

Now, Jesus never commands his people to do anything that is impossible. So Jesus never commands you to have no financial problems. Sometimes that is outside the realm of choice. He never commands you to not get sick. That's also outside the realm of choice. He doesn't command you to have a trouble free life. But he does command you to not worry. He addresses worry as a problem of faith, a failure of trust. That phrase, "you of little faith," is actually one Greek word,

SLIDE

Oligopistoi = little faith one

It literally means "little faith one." Jesus is saying to us, "Will God not feed you and clothe you, little faith one, or you faith midget?" Ten times in the New Testament Jesus calls his followers "faith midgets." We might call it "faith dwarves." Jesus is saying that you and I are faith munchkins. The reason why

you get so worried about everything is because you are a faith munchkin. It is not your circumstance.

Remember the story of Jesus and the disciples crossing the Sea of Galilee in a boat? We read in Mark 4.37-38 these words:

SLIDE

Mk 4:37 A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.

Mk 4:38 Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

Jesus is asleep in the stern like a baby, curled up in the lap of his mother. The storm is going on all around him, but Jesus is sleeping peacefully. When the disciples flip out, Jesus not only rebukes the storm, dealing with the circumstance, but he also rebukes the disciples,

SLIDE – Mark 4.40

Mk 4:40 He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

The ultimate source of worry is a choice in your heart – a choice to not trust God with this circumstance or this problem with that person. And Jesus addresses that choice as being a sinful choice, revealing a lack of trust in God.

So, how do we win over worry? Let me share with you two inadequate strategies.

You don't win over worry by psychology. Jesus is not exhorting us to positive thinking. He is not saying, "Don't worry, just try to be happy." You know, don't worry, be happy, think positive thoughts.

You also don't win over worry by probabilities. Jesus is not saying, "Don't worry. What you're afraid of happening will probably never happen. You will probably not get Alzheimer's. What are the chances that you have cancer?" Probability doesn't help. If you are worrier, you say to yourself, "Well, it may happen." What are the chances the plane may crash? Well, even if they're very small, if I'm on the one that crashes, I'm going to die.

It is not psychology. It is not probability. Let me share with you Jesus' winning strategy in defeating worry in your life. I'm going to share with you eight affirmations. These are not platitudes. But one or more of them may really connect with you. One or more may be really helpful.

You say, "I need to pray this truth into my life. When I find myself facing that choice, am I going to worry or not, whether I'm going to trust God with this problem or not, when I see myself going in this downward spiral of circular thinking, I'm going to arrest the process by reminding myself of what Jesus said.

If I can just remember one or two of these things, I am not going to worry anymore about my health, my friends, or my money or whatever.”

Here is the first affirmation:

SLIDE

My life is more than [and you can fill in the blank.]

You see woman worrying about their faces. “Oh my goodness, I’ve got this wrinkle. I’ve got this pimple. I’ve got to rush out to the store and buy all these creams. I’d better get Botox treatments.” Jesus says: Women, your life is more than your face.

Your car is breaking down. It has brake problems. It has transmission problems. Jesus says: “Son, your life is more than your car. There are better things to give your emotional energy to than your car.”

Your life is more than your career. Your life is more than your home or your kids. Indeed, there is only one life or death issue for you, friend. It is not your face; it is not your car; not your job; not your bank account; not your son, daughter, boyfriend or girlfriend. The only life or death issue for you and me, friend, is what are you going to do with Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul nailed it in Philippians 1 when he said in v. 21.

SLIDE

Phil 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

There is only one thing I can say my life is not more than and that is my relationship with Jesus Christ. Whatever you are worrying about, your life is more than that.

Here is the second affirmation:

SLIDE

I am more valuable than crows.

V. 26,

SLIDE

Mt 6:26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

Jesus is outside preaching in a field. Around here he could have said, "Look at the geese," or "look at the rabbits eating up your garden right now," look at the raccoons that are eating your trash." But in Galilee he said, "Consider the birds."

In the parallel text in Luke, it is considered the ravens. They were probably crows, and God feeds them.

Now, Jesus is not painting some romantic picture here. He is not saying, “Look at how God feeds the cute little canaries.” He is not saying that God is like a mama bird feeding her cute baby robins worms. Consider the crows. They are filthy birds. They are noisy and obnoxious. They are scavengers. How does God feed them? He feeds them with road kill and with trash that they pick through. They come and raid your crops. God feeds the birds, even the trash birds, one of the Old Testament’s unclean animals. God feeds birds that live on dead animals and road kill and theft.

If God takes care of crows, how much more will God take care of you. Here is the second affirmation.

SLIDE

I am more valuable than a crow.

You can believe that about yourself, can’t you?

Here is the third affirmation:

SLIDE

I will stop trying to control the uncontrollable.

V. 27

SLIDE

Mt 6:27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

Now, it is unclear whether the original text ought to read:

SLIDE

Who of you by worrying can add a single cubit to his height,

Or

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

Jesus is getting at a really important issue here. At the heart of worry is the attempt by you and me to control the uncontrollable. Central to the problem of worry is the illusion that you are really in control when you are not.

- You know, if you can only get your retirement right, you can control the future.
- If you can only get your diet and medicine right, you won't get cancer.

- If you can only figure out the right child raising technique, if you can only find the right form of discipline, the right school, and say the right things to your child, then you will guarantee that your children will turn out alright.

Friend, there is a God and he's not you! You are not the sovereign one. You are not in control.

Worriers always have control issues. Would you not agree? Instead of trusting in God's control, we try to control something that is uncontrollable and when we can't control it, we worry about it. I can't make myself grow any taller, I've tried.

Here is a fourth affirmation:

SLIDE

I must look and listen to God's creation.

Vv. 28-30

SLIDE

Mt 6:28 "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.

Mt 6:29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

Mt 6:30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?

The Bible regularly tells us to pay attention to nature, to pay attention to God's creation because God reveals himself through the creation. The psalmist regularly points out how creation is a medium for getting in touch with God. For example, Ps. 19.1 says this:

SLIDE

Ps 19:1 a The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

And in Ps. 104.10-14

SLIDE

Ps 104:10 He makes springs pour water into the ravines; it flows between the mountains.

Ps 104:11 They give water to all the beasts of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst.

Ps 104:12 The birds of the sky nest by the waters; they sing among the branches.

Ps 104:13 He waters the mountains from his upper chambers; the land is satisfied by the fruit of his work.

Ps 104:14 He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for people to cultivate—
bringing forth food from the earth:

Worrier, take time to walk through one of our city parks. Look around you and pay attention to the birds flying, or the squirrels climbing a tree. Listen. Pay attention. Slow down. Look for God. Every once in a while, one of those bushes that you're looking at can, for you, become a Burning Bush, a place of meeting between you and God.

Martin Luther said this regarding paying attention to nature:

SLIDE

You see, Jesus is making the birds our school masters and teachers. It is a great and abiding disgrace to us that in the gospel a helpless sparrow should become a theologian and a preacher to the wisest of men, and daily should emphasize this to our eyes and ears, as if he were saying to us: "Look you miserable man! You have house and home, money and property. Every year you have a field full of grain and other plants of all sorts, more than you'll ever need. Yet you cannot find peace, and you are always worried about starving. Though we are innumerable, none of us spends his living days worrying. Still God feeds us every day."

Luther goes on and says:

SLIDE

Whenever you listen to a nightingale, therefore, you are listening to an excellent preacher. He sings all night and practically screams his lungs out. It is as if he were saying: "I prefer to be in the Lord's kitchen. He has made heaven and earth, and he himself is the cook and the host."

Look and listen to nature.

Here is the fifth affirmation:

SLIDE

I am not a Gentile.

vv. 31-32,

SLIDE

Mt 6:31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

Mt 6:32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

The pagans, the people who are outside of covenant relationship with God, don't know what is written in this book. They don't know that there is a God in heaven who loves them. The pagans, those who are cut off from the community of God's people, don't know the revelation that God so loved the world that he sent his only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have life eternal. They don't know anything about the blessings that flow from the blood of Christ. They don't know that Christ died on a cross and satisfied God's judgment and wrath. They don't know that they can be forgiven as a gift of God's grace.

The pagans, those who are outside the community of God's people, don't know that there is someone good and loving in control of the universe. They think that life is accidental and random. They don't know that God is purposefully working toward the bringing of his reign and rule into this world. They don't know that. The pagans don't understand that this life is not all there is. That because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, those who are united to Christ in faith and repentance will one day rise from the dead in transformed bodies. We are going to be part of a new creation, living forever on a new earth, with a new heaven.

Jesus says: You are not a pagan! You are not a Gentile! The Sermon on the Mount is preached to people for whom the kingdom of God has come. The Sermon on the Mount is preached to people who God has laid hold of, God has grabbed a hold of you. This is for people who have received the gospel. The Sermon on the Mount is for kingdomized humanity.

So you say to yourself: I am not one of those folks who is ignorant of the blessings that flow from Christ's blood. I am not one of those people who believe life has no rhyme or reason. I believe life is under the sovereign rule and control of my Father in heaven.

The sixth affirmation:

SLIDE

I have a relationship with the God of surprises.

Vv. 30-32,

SLIDE

Mt 6:30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?

Mt 6:31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

Mt 6:32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

Mt 6:33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Mt 6:34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

You know, often we who are of little faith, faith midgets, faith munchkins, don't find any relief in praying because we say to God, "Here is the process by which you must answer my prayer. I need a job and the way you are going to meet my need is that you are going to give me such-and-such-a job."

"I want to see my loved one saved and the way that you are going to do it when I bring my loved one to this meeting, they are going to respond at that moment."

Pagans try to control the God they worship. They try to control God by rituals, incantations and magic. But those of us who are children of our Father in heaven understand who God is. Ps. 135.6 says:

SLIDE

Ps 135:6 The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths.

The God of the Bible is the God of surprises. If you want to grow your faith and win over worry, you need to start trusting in the God of surprises. God almost never follows the script that we lay out for him. Instead, he comes along and surprises us. In fact, he seems to delight in surprising us with gifts we never imagined. I mean, ladies would it surprise you that if at age 90 you gave birth? Abraham worried for decades about the fact that his wife, Sarah, wasn't getting pregnant, and then surprise, she gives birth to a son at age 90.

The children of Israel worried about their enemies the Egyptians coming towards them. They thought they were surely going to be killed. Surprise! The Red Sea parts and they never would have guessed it.

The disciples were worried and discouraged about their future when Jesus' body was laid in the tomb. The women went to anoint Jesus' dead body. Surprise! Easter Sunday Jesus is risen from the dead. He's alive! God is a God of surprises. He loves to surprise his children.

Worrier, maybe you can't figure out how the difficulty in your life is going to be resolved, or how will this loved one be saved, or how will your loneliness be

healed? What process God is going to use. Have you ever thought that maybe God wants to surprise you? Have you ever been surprised by God? Protected from something you thought you wanted and God saved you from your own foolishness? Given a gift that is far beyond what you could have ever asked for or thought or imagined?

The seventh affirmation:

SLIDE

I need to be preoccupied with God's kingdom.

Worriers are so caught up with the things of creation – my food, my finances, my relationships, my family, my health. Jesus says, "Seek first God's kingdom." God is king and he has inaugurated his saving reign in and through Jesus Christ. To seek first God's kingdom means that we first of all want to bring our lives under the reign of Christ.

Friend, is Jesus Christ your king? Is he your ruler? Are all the various parts of you under his reign? Would you say that right now I am a fully surrendered disciple of Jesus. I am not holding anything back from Christ. I am aware of nothing that God wants of me that I am not giving him. There are no shadows. I have a death grip on something that I know God wants me to release, but I don't want to turn it over to him. Seek first God's reign in your life. Seek first God's

reign and rule in your family and with those you are in touch with. Lord, help me to share the message of salvation with those with whom I have influence. I want to see your reign and righteousness, justice and right relationships in the public school system, and right relationships and justice regarding race in this country. I want to see you reign and righteousness and justice in the work place. I'm going to seek the reign of Christ. Help me to not be preoccupied with "x". Help me to be preoccupied with your kingdom.

Last affirmation:

SLIDE

I need to live day by day.

V. 34,

SLIDE

Mt 6:34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.

Each day has enough trouble of its own.

People who win over worry live in today. People who win over worry let go of the mistakes of yesterday, and they don't worry about tomorrow. They live fully now in this moment. What about tomorrow, you ask? The God of surprises will be there tomorrow, just as the God of surprises is with me today.

Which affirmation, friend, do you need to remember? What one or two things will help you when you are tempted to choose to worry? What you need to hide in your heart when you're tempted to not trust God. Let me go through these affirmations again. Try to circle one or two and say: I really want to hide this in my heart:

SLIDE:

My Life Is More Than [BLANK] (Mt. 6.25)

I Am More Valuable Than Crows (Mt. 6.26)

I Cannot Control The Uncontrollable (Mt. 6.27)

I Must Look And Listen To Nature (Mt. 6.28-30)

I Am Not A Gentile (Mt. 6.32)

I Am A Child Of The God Of Surprises (Mt. 6.32)

I Need To Be Preoccupied With God's Kingdom(Mt. 6.33)

I Need To Live Day By Day (Mt. 6.34)

How To Win Over Worry

Rich Nathan

April 22-23, 2006

Life As It Was Meant To Be Series

Matthew 6.25-34

I. The Symptoms Of Worry

- A. Divided Minds
- B. Circular Thinking

II. The Sources Of Worry

- A. External Pressure
- B. Internal Choices (Mt. 6.25, 31, 34)

III. The Strategies For Winning

- A. My Life Is More Than [BLANK] (Mt. 6.25)
- B. I Am More Valuable Than Crows (Mt. 6.26)
- C. I Cannot Control The Uncontrollable (Mt. 6.27)
- D. I Must Look And Listen To Nature (Mt. 6.28-30)
- E. I Am Not A Gentile (Mt. 6.32)
- F. I Am A Child Of The God Of Surprises (Mt. 6.32)
- G. I Need To Be Preoccupied With God's Kingdom(Mt. 6.33)
- H. I Need To Live Day By Day (Mt. 6.34)