

January 26, 2003 (Part 1) / February 3, 2003 (Part 2)
AM Service
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“Help With Stress & Worry” (Part 1 & 2)
Matt 6:24-34

24 "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

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

28 "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 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, O you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

The photographer for a national magazine was assigned to get photos of a great forest fire. Smoke at the scene was too thick to get any good shots, so he frantically called his home office to hire a plane.

“It will be waiting for you at the airport!” he was assured by his editor.

As soon as he got to the small, rural airport, sure enough, a plane was warming up near the runway. He jumped in with his equipment and yelled, “Let's go! Let's go!” The pilot swung the plane into the wind and soon they were in the air.

“Fly over the north side of the fire,” said the photographer, “and make three or four low level passes.”

“Why?” asked the pilot.

“Because I'm going to take pictures! I'm a photographer, and photographers take pictures!” said the photographer with great exasperation and impatience.

After a long pause the pilot said, “You mean you're not the instructor?”

Today I would like to talk to you about stress and worry.

We are a stressed out people with a lot to worry about. We worry about job security. We worry about our finances. We worry about our children. We worry about the future. We worry about our health. We worry because we want things to go well. We worry about how much we worry. We worry about all the things we have to get done. We are so busy and we are training our children to be very busy too. Our children are involved with soccer, baseball, dance lessons, music lessons ... and that's just Mondays!

What Defines Worry?

The Greek word for worry, *merimna*, probably connected with *merizo*, literally means "to draw in different directions, distract," (to divide) hence signifies "that which causes this, a care, especially an anxious care,"

(From Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright (c)1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

The word describes the effects of worry; that is what worry does to us. Worry itself is concern over the future. Worry, therefore, is concern about something that we can do nothing about, and cannot even be sure about. Worry is concern over the unknown and uncontrollable future that tears one apart. Besides anxious concern the Greek word came to mean the concern that is right (As I mentioned last week, emotions were given to us by God to enable us to mobilize the forces of our body and mind to focus upon and solve a problem). Concern is a God-given emotion that is not wrong but right when properly used according to God's will. But worry focuses on tomorrow which we can do nothing about and so energy is wasted and the body is frustrated. Energy is poured into the body, but not used. It cannot be released in action because we cannot act upon the future.

Chemicals that are released and meant to help become harmful. Worry activates energy that is unused, some of which in chemical form may eat away the lining of the stomach.

What can we do about Worry?

Listen to Jesus; He has the answer. First He says (v31), "... do not worry...." But He does not leave us there. He tells us how to overcome worry. Look at His very significant words in verse 34 ("Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."). Jesus is making it clear that what is wrong with worry is that it is the wrong focus on life. Jesus says it is wrong to let tomorrow's possible problems tear us apart today. "Each day has enough trouble of its own." In these words you have God's answer to worry. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Don't focus your concern upon tomorrow's problems; there are enough problems to handle today. Tomorrow always belongs to God. Tomorrow is in His hands. Whenever we try to take hold of it, we try to steal what belongs to Him. God has given us only today. He strongly forbids us to become concerned about what *might* happen. God doesn't tell us not to plan for tomorrow. He doesn't tell us not to think about tomorrow or prepare for tomorrow; He forbids us to worry about tomorrow. We can plan but as James warned (James 4:13-15) Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a

mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

You can plan but then you must put your plans in God's hands and say, "Lord, here is what I'm thinking. But Lord, I submit these plans to You for Your alteration. You can change them if you wish. If it is your will I will do this or that. Your will is always best. Your will be done." What is there to worry about if you have put your best plans in God's hands? Jesus does not ask you to cease from being concerned (you can't turn off an emotion); instead, He tells you to redirect your concern. Concern ought not to be focused on tomorrow (what ifs). If you have laid your best plans in the Lord's hands, you can turn your attention away from *tomorrow*. You need no longer be concerned about that; instead take all your concern, effort, energy and all you have and pour it into *today*. Do what you can do right now instead of worrying about things you can do nothing about. If you focus on today, then energy is not wasted, but used as it should be. Your energy can be used to solve problems rather than worry about them. That is what Jesus is saying. Take care of today's problems. Take care of one day at a time or perhaps one moment at a time. Take care of what you have to handle now. Concern for today's problems does not tear you up, because you can get a handle on them. First look at the problem then ask, "What does God want me to do about it. Make a tentative plan, putting it in the Lord's hands through prayer. Then look at today and ask: "What can be done right now?" The worrier can't do anything because he is working on tomorrow's problem. That boils down to no work at all. The future belongs to God you can't take it and control it (Worry is like rocking in a rocking chair; you expend a lot of energy but you don't get anywhere). But something can always be done about today's problem. Even if you can't change a thing outside of yourself, by the help of God your attitude toward the problem can change. You can change. When you feel anxiety coming over you, pray, put the situation in God's hands, then you can have peace as you do what you can do at the moment and leave the future where it belongs...with God.

Phil 4:6-7 - Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

We all have concerns and cares but anxious cares, the wrong kind of worry can distract us and paralyze us from doing what we should. We can be so much in thought about the "what ifs" that we are not doing what we should because we are too "busy" thinking and worrying about things we can't do anything about. It can even lead to a sinful denial of God's presence and grace in our lives. Scripture teaches that we find rest from inappropriate worry when we admit we can't control the future and entrust ourselves, our loved ones and our circumstances or situation to the God who is in control.

What Causes Worry?

25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life ... 27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ... 30b-33 O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Worry comes when we are not trusting God
Worry becomes sin when it prevents His word from taking root in our lives.
Worry comes when we are not remembering or trusting God's promises.
Worry comes when we are not placing our cares in Jesus' hands. And
Worry loses its grip on us as we focus on His Kingdom and its priorities.

Now, when I mention to stop worrying about tomorrow and do what you can do today I don't mean stay busy.

What Causes Stress?

We are a busy people and our busyness stresses us out. I believe it is because our busyness has wrong motives. For example we are busy because we "can't" or won't say "no" when asked to do favors. But many times the underlining motive is to be liked and we are exhausted because we work so hard to be liked. Or we get exhausted because we are anxious to prove our worth. We are working all the time to prove we are worth something.

This problem began and was recorded in Gen 3:4-5 ("You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. 5 "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."). The basic lie here is that God can be replaced! This leads directly to the tempting delusion of self-sufficiency: We replace God with our own ingenuity and resourcefulness. Living this falsehood is what leads to our exhaustion. Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters"

What is the Good News about Stress?

So here is the good news (yes, the good news) about stress. Stress can be good news because it pushes us out of our love affair with comfort. Christians are built not for comfort but maturity. It is one thing to not want stress and to desire peace. It's another thing to *demand* it. What I read from Gen 3 was the falling of humans away from God to trust in their own self-sufficiency. This foolishness resulted not only in the fall of human beings but in the corruption of the whole world as God intended it to be. And the simple truth is that our souls are not designed for a fallen world full of evil, disease, and natural disasters. We long for a paradise that has been offered but not delivered...yet. Our souls are pushed far from what they were made to experience and what will be ours in Heaven. Am I saying that we can never be free from stress in this life? Am I saying that we can never find complete comfort in this world? That is exactly what I am saying. And God is not going to take away the ache you feel inside, not on this side of Heaven. And am I saying that is *good* news? Not exactly good, not in itself. But the ache is there because we are not home with God yet. And God uses the ache to tell us that if we will listen. He is not only letting you know you are far from home but also that He has come looking for you. After the fall, caused by the man and woman being convinced they did not need God, God put a curse on them and the land. Why? Because if He didn't we would never see our need for Him and for Heaven. What a tragedy that would be. This is why the Bible invites us to enter suffering (a more intense word for stress). This is why James for example says (James 1:2-4) Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops

perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Here we see that trials (another intense word for stress) test our faith. Faith, in turn, produces perseverance (endurance), and perseverance moves us toward maturity. Exhaustion comes with prolonged stress. We grow weary under trials. Trials, then, amplify our ache. That ache becomes an opportunity to respond with foolishness and sin or to respond well – for it is a call for faith. God invites us through stress and its exhaustion to faith which, in turn, leads to endurance. Exhaustion, then, becomes a stage in the development of faith. Exhaustion brings perspective, repentance and dependence on God. When we reach our human limits (which are the essence of exhaustion), we conclude that we must find rest in God who alone can touch the ache in our souls.

Let's go back to the meaning of the Greek word translated worry or anxious care. Its original meaning was to draw in different directions, to distract. Worry and stress is the concern for the wrong things distracting the heart from the true object of life...God. But seek first ... God and His kingdom. Have, not the wrong kind of concern, but concern for the things of the Lord, doing His will living with the hope of the Kingdom of Heaven.

In Luke 10:39-42 Jesus visited at Mary and Martha's house:

Mary, ... sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Because Martha was worried and troubled (stressed) about many things, she was not making time for what was most important -- clearly shown in Mary's attitude. Jesus wanted Martha to rearrange her priorities.

v42 There is really only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it-- and I won't take it away from her."

What causes stress?

Stress comes when we sin, don't trust God or spend time with Him in prayer in the Word. But when we respond to stress with faith it builds character

Matt 6:33-34 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

When worry, stress and exhaustion come respond with faith put your concerns in God's hands (John 16:33 NLT I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome

the world."). This will build endurance as we wait for what we don't have yet...Heaven. Focus not on what you can't do but on God and what *He* wants you to do right now.

2 Cor 4:1, 6-10,16-18

Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart (we never give up).

6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God (as revealed) in the face (in the Person) of Christ.

7 But we have this treasure (this light and power [of God through Christ] that now shine within us) in jars of clay (that is, in our weak bodies) to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us (our glorious power is from God and is not our own).

8 We are hard pressed on every side (by troubles), but not crushed (and broken); perplexed, but not in despair (we don't give up and quit);

9 persecuted, but not abandoned (God never abandons us); struck down, but not destroyed (we get up again and keep going).

10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus (suffering as He did), so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed (or seen) in (and through) our body.

16 Therefore we do not lose heart (never give up). Though outwardly we are wasting away (our bodies are dying), yet inwardly (our spirits) we are being renewed day by day.

17 For our light and momentary (temporary) troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

(So we don't look at the troubles we can see right now; rather, we look forward to what we have not yet seen. For the troubles we see will soon be over, but the joys to come will last forever).

Seek God! Put Him first and all these things will be given to you as well.