

Worry

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This time of year is usually stressful for obvious reasons: upcoming final exams. Particularly when the chips are down, the temptation to worry can be nearly irresistible. Although Jesus didn't preach any sermons about final exams specifically (at least none I am aware of), he did preach about worry. An account of his teaching on that subject is found in Matthew 6:25-34. In this passage, Christ told us not to worry about the things we need or about what tomorrow will bring. At first this seems counter-intuitive, perhaps even absurd. Shouldn't we worry about our needs (as opposed to wants) most of all? Shouldn't we be preoccupied with the events of the very next day? It might seem that way, but Christ had a number of very compelling arguments explaining why we should think otherwise.

My favorite is a simple question he posed that exposes the futility of worry. He asked "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" Not only does this question highlight the futility of worry, but it implicitly defines it. Worry is not preparation, or study, or hard work, or perseverance. Those can actually affect change in our circumstances and the world. Worry, by definition, is needless fretting that cannot produce the outcomes we might desire. In fact, the opposite is often true. Worry can rob us of contentment, strain the relationships we have with those we love, and even degrade our health. There are people who have literally worried themselves to death! Worry just doesn't work. It cannot help us.

In addition to its ineffectiveness, Jesus also pointed out the irrationality of worry. Christ

reminded us that our heavenly Father knows there are things we need, and that He takes good care of lesser creatures. God sees to it that the birds are fed and that field lilies are beautifully "dressed." Are we to seriously believe that God, who loves us so much that He sent His only Son to die for our salvation, is more concerned with birds and flowers than with the well-being of His beloved children? That type of thinking just would not be logical.

I think Christ's argument here is very instructive on another level as well. You don't need to be an expert naturalist to know that birds do not wake up every morning, turn their beaks skyward, and wait for worms to simply fall into their waiting mouths. God certainly does take care of them, but they do have to look for and act on the opportunities He provides. I think the same could be said for us. Things like study, effort, and perseverance are often required of us, but those aren't worry. Worry is something else.

Worry can indicate we do not have our priorities in order. Sometimes we sweat the small stuff so to speak. For example, are we really worried about having clothes to wear, or are we actually worrying about what brand our jeans are? It can be easy to get distracted from what really matters in life. Jesus advised us in verse 33 to seek God first; not only will we find Him, but He will see that our earthly needs are met as well.

Christ concluded by telling to us not to worry about tomorrow and ended this passage with a very practical observation: "Each day has enough trouble of its own." The implication seems to be that when we worry we needlessly burden ourselves with the (sometimes entirely hypothetical) troubles of tomorrow in addition to those of today. We can make life so much harder than it needs to be.

As you face your coming finals, study and prepare yourself, but please do not worry.

Worry is futile, irrational, distracting, and unnecessary. Rest assured that God knows these tests are important to you, and that as always He is right there with you. Perhaps the best thing I can say is "who of you by worrying can add a single point to your grades?" Good luck on your exams!