

Overcoming Worry

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INTRODUCTION

Worry is a common weakness; all struggle with it to some degree. It takes different forms: fretting over the past, frustration with the present, fear of the future.

There are two types of care, one is good, the other bad. Thoughtful concern, careful planning, and prudent foresight are commendable. Yet, we often demonstrate a spirit of uneasy foreboding, anxious agitation, and troubled anxiety. The former is healthy, the latter is unhelpful.

In this lesson, we consider the word family used in the New Testament that communicates the concept of worry, and consider how it applies to the Christian life.

The Greek noun μέριμνα [merimna], of uncertain origin, means “care, anxiety” [Thomas 3308].

BDAG say it refers to “anxiety, worry, care.”

Louw & Nida say it signifies “a feeling of apprehension or distress in view of possible danger or misfortune. The term may refer to either unnecessary worry or legitimate concern” [25.224].

This word occurs 6x in the NT (Matt. 13:22; Mark 4:19; Luke 8:14; 21:34; 2 Cor. 11:28; 1 Pet. 5:7).

*Matthew 13:22 (NASB95) — 22 “And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the ***worry** of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.*

*Mark 4:19 (NASB95) — 19 but the ***worries** of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.*

*Luke 8:14 (NASB95) — 14 “The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and 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 (NASB95) — 34 “Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the ***worries** of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap;*

*2 Corinthians 11:28 (NASB95) — 28 Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of ***concern** for all the churches.*

*1 Peter 5:7 (NASB95) — 7 casting all your ***anxiety** on Him, because He cares for you.*

The Greek verb μεριμνάω [*merimnaō*], derived from *merimna* [care, anxiety], means “to be anxious, to care for” [Thomas 3309].

BDAG define it as “(1) to be apprehensive, have anxiety, be anxious, be (unduly) concerned; (2) to attend to, care for, be concerned about something.

Louw & Nida say it means “to have an anxious concern, based on apprehension about possible danger or misfortune” [25.225].

This word occurs 19x in 17 Bible verses (Matt. 6:25, 27, 28, 31, 34; 10:19; Luke 10:41; 12:11, 22, 25, 26; 1 Cor. 7:32, 33, 34; 12:25; Phil. 2:20; 4:6).

*Matthew 6:25 (NASB95) — 25 “For this reason I say to you, do not be ***worried** about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?*

*Matthew 6:27 (NASB95) — 27 “And who of you by being ***worried** can add a single hour to his life?*

*Matthew 6:28 (NASB95) — 28 “And why are you ***worried** about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin,*

*Matthew 6:31 (NASB95) — 31 “Do not ***worry** then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’*

*Matthew 6:34 (NASB95) — 34 “So do not ***worry** about tomorrow; for tomorrow will ***care** for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

*Matthew 10:19 (NASB95) — 19 “But when they hand you over, do not ***worry** about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say.*

*Luke 10:41 (NASB95) — 41 But the Lord answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are ***worried** and bothered about so many things;*

*Luke 12:11 (NASB95) — 11 “When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not ***worry** about how or what you are to speak in your defense, or what you are to say;*

*Luke 12:22 (NASB95) — 22 And He said to His disciples, “For this reason I say to you, do not ***worry** about your life, as to what you will eat; nor for your body, as to what you will put on.*

*Luke 12:25 (NASB95) — 25 “And which of you by ***worrying** can add a single hour to his life’s span?*

*Luke 12:26 (NASB95) — 26 “If then you cannot do even a very little thing, why do you ***worry** about other matters?*

*1 Corinthians 7:32 (NASB95) — 32 But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is ***concerned** about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord;*

1 Corinthians 7:33 (NASB95) — 33 but one who is married is ***concerned** about the things of the world, how he may please his wife,

1 Corinthians 7:34 (NASB95) — 34 and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is ***concerned** about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is ***concerned** about the things of the world, how she may please her husband.

1 Corinthians 12:25 (NASB95) — 25 so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same ***care** for one another.

Philippians 2:20 (NASB95) — 20 For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be ***concerned** for your welfare.

Philippians 4:6 (NASB95) — 6 ***Be *anxious** for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

The negated form ἀμέριμνος [*amerimnose*], a compound of the negative prefix and *merimna*, signifies “free from care” [Thomas 275]. BDAG say this noun, which means to be “free from care,” is used (a) of persons and (b) of personal characteristics.”

This word occurs 2x in the NT (Matt. 28:14; 1 Cor. 7:32).

Matthew 28:14 (NASB95) — 14 “And if this should come to the governor’s ears, we will win him over and ***keep** you ***out of *trouble**.”

1 Corinthians 7:32 (NASB95) — 32 But I want you to be ***free from *concern**. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord;

WARNING AGAINST WORRY

We Should Not Worry Because God Provides

He cares for the birds (Matt. 6:25-26; Luke 12:22-24; cf. Psa. 104:10-13).

Matthew 6:25-26 (NASB95) — 25 “For this reason I say to you, do not be ***worried** about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 “Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?

Luke 12:22-24 (NASB95) — 22 And He said to His disciples, “For this reason I say to you, do not ***worry** about your life, as to what you will eat; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. 23 “For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. 24 “Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; they have no storeroom nor barn, and yet God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds!

Psalms 104:10-13 (NASB95) — 10 He sends forth springs in the valleys; They flow between the mountains; 11 They give drink to every beast of the field; The wild donkeys quench their thirst. 12

Beside them the birds of the heavens dwell; They lift up their voices among the branches. 13 He waters the mountains from His upper chambers; The earth is satisfied with the fruit of His works.

He clothes the flowers (Matt. 6:28-30).

*Matthew 6:28-30 (NASB95) — 28 “And why are you ***worried** about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, 29 yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. 30 “But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!*

He cares for His own (Matt. 6:31-33).

*Matthew 6:31-33 (NASB95) — 31 “Do not ***worry** then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ 32 “For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

He answers prayers (Phil. 4:6-7; 1 Pet. 5:6-7).

*Philippians 4:6-7 (NASB95) — 6 ***Be *anxious** for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*1 Peter 5:6-7 (NASB95) — 6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, 7 casting all your ***anxiety** on Him, because He cares for you.*

He aids in trials (Matt. 10:16-20; Luke 12:11-12).

*Matthew 10:16-20 (NASB95) — 16 “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. 17 “But beware of men, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues; 18 and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. 19 “But when they hand you over, do not ***worry** about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. 20 “For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.*

*Luke 12:11-12 (NASB95) — 11 “When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not ***worry** about how or what you are to speak in your defense, or what you are to say; 12 for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”*

We Should Not Worry Because Such is Futile

Worry is ineffective (Matt. 6:27; Luke 12:25-26; cf. Psa. 39:5-6).

*Matthew 6:27 (NASB95) — 27 “And who of you by being ***worried** can add a single hour to his life?*

*Luke 12:25-26 (NASB95) — 25 “And which of you by ***worrying** can add a single hour to his life’s span? 26 “If then you cannot do even a very little thing, why do you ***worry** about other matters?*

Psalm 39:5-6 (NASB95) — 5 “Behold, You have made my days as handbreadths, And my lifetime as nothing in Your sight; Surely every man at his best is a mere breath. Selah. 6 “Surely every man walks about as a phantom; Surely they make an uproar for nothing; He amasses riches and does not know who will gather them.

Worry is detrimental (Matt. 13:7, 22; Mark 4:18-19; Luke 8:14; Luke 21:34-36).

Matthew 13:7 (NASB95) — 7 “Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out.

*Matthew 13:22 (NASB95) — 22 “And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the ***worry** of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.*

*Mark 4:18-19 (NASB95) — 18 “And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, 19 but the ***worries** of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.*

*Luke 8:14 (NASB95) — 14 “The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and 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 21:34-36 (NASB95) — 34 “Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the ***worries** of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap; 35 for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. 36 “But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”*

VICTORY OVER WORRY

We Should Maintain Proper Balance

We should maintain proper balance, focusing upon the present, and not fretting over the future (Matt. 6:34).

*Matthew 6:34 (NASB95) — 34 “So do not ***worry** about tomorrow; for tomorrow will ***care** for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

Martha and Mary provide a contrast between the physical and spiritual realms, and their related responsibilities (Luke 10:38-42).

Luke 10:38-42 (NASB95) — 38 Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord’s feet, listening to His word. 40 But Martha was distracted with all her

*preparations; and she came up to Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." 41 But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are ***worried** and bothered about so many things; 42 but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."*

We Should Evidence Proper Concern

We should maintain proper concern for our physical families (1 Cor. 7:32-35; cf. 1 Thess. 2:10-12; Job 1:4-5).

*1 Corinthians 7:32-35 (NASB95) — 32 But I want you to be ***free from *concern**. One who is unmarried is ***concerned** about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; 33 but one who is married is ***concerned** about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is ***concerned** about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is ***concerned** about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. 35 This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.*

1 Thessalonians 2:10-12 (NASB95) — 10 You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; 11 just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, 12 so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

Job 1:4-5 (NASB95) — 4 His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. 5 When the days of feasting had completed their cycle, Job would send and consecrate them, rising up early in the morning and offering burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, "Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.

We should maintain proper concern for our spiritual family (1 Cor. 12:14-26; 2 Cor. 11:23-29; Phil. 2:19-24).

*1 Corinthians 12:14-26 (NASB95) — 14 For the body is not one member, but many. 15 If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. 19 If they were all one member, where would the body be? 20 But now there are many members, but one body. 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; 23 and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, 24 whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, 25 so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same ***care***

for one another. 26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

*2 Corinthians 11:23-29 (NASB95) — 23 Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. 24 Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. 26 I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; 27 I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of ***concern** for all the churches. 29 Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?*

*Philippians 2:19-24 (NASB95) — 19 But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. 20 For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be ***concerned** for your welfare. 21 For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. 22 But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father. 23 Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me; 24 and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly.*

CONCLUSION

Consider the following summary, found in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, and translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley:

The NT realizes that life is swayed by care. Concern is unavoidable but it is given a new orientation. Liberation from it comes as one casts it upon God, not because God grants every wish, but because prayer grants freedom from care. To be anxious about food or clothing is opposed to concern for the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:26ff.). Naturally we have to work (1 Thess. 2:9, etc.), but we cannot secure life by care; our concern must be for the kingdom. To care for the world is to fall victim to it. If care gains control over us, it leads to apostasy (Luke 21:34). We must focus on the one thing needful (Luke 10:41-42), confronting worldly ties with a *hōs mē* (1 Cor. 7:29ff.). We belong to the coming aeon and must be ready for it (Luke 21:34). But this entails care for others as members of the same body (1 Cor. 12:25).

In Matthew 6:25ff. *merimnán* is self-concern relative to the future. The questions show that worry is what is meant. It is this that makes a proper concern foolish by fostering the illusion that concern for the means of life can grant security to life itself. The future is not in our hands. We cannot add one cubit (either length of days or stature) by worrying. The right course is to seek first the kingdom, and God will see to other things, not removing uncertainty, but taking the worry out of it. A bit of secular wisdom drives home the point in vs. 34. It is ridiculous to add tomorrow's worry to that of today (Kittel 584).

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