

Overcoming Worry

By Mark Mayberry

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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 *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).

The Greek verb *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).

The negated form *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).

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). He clothes the flowers (Matt. 6:28-30). He cares for His own (Matt. 6:31-33). He answers prayers (Phil. 4:6-7; 1 Pet. 5:6-7). He aids in trials (Matt. 10:16-20; Luke 12:11-12).

We Should Not Worry Because Such is Futile

Worry is ineffective (Matt. 6:27; Luke 12:25-26; cf. Psa. 39:5-6). Worry is detrimental (Matt. 13:7, 22; Mark 4:18-19; Luke 8:14; Luke 21:34-36).

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

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

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).

Works Cited:

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