

## ‘Growing through worry’. (1)

It was a cold, rainy Sunday evening in the North of Scotland. The preacher was standing at the front of the building and as he looked around the building there was only him and a scruffy looking guy right at the back of the church. When six o’clock struck, the preacher walked over to the man and said. ‘Look, it’s cold, it’s wet; it’s only you and me. Do you think we should just cancel the service?’ The guy looks up at the preacher and says, ‘Son, I’ve farmed in this area for thirty years. Hail, rain or shine, I go out to feed my sheep. I don’t worry if one turns up or a hundred turn up. I do my job and feed the sheep’.

This upsets the preacher, so he storms down the front, marches into the pulpit and preaches solid for an hour and a half. When he finishes, he walks smugly up to the man at the back and says, ‘Well, what did you think of that then?’ The shepherd looks up at the preacher and says, ‘Son, I’ve farmed in this area for thirty years. Hail, rain or shine, I go out to feed my sheep. I don’t worry if one turns up or a hundred turn up. I do my job and feed the sheep. But, son, if only one turns up, I don’t dump the whole load on it!’

Cast your minds back to the first of **January 1999**, do you remember people getting hyped up for, one, singular event? It wasn’t just the start of a New Year, it wasn’t just the start of a new decade, it wasn’t even the start of a new century but the beginning of a New Millennium. For me, one of the most used phrases of that year was, ‘**The last ‘whatever’ of the millennium**’. The last Chelsea flower show of the millennium. The last eclipse of the millennium. The last opening of Parliament of the millennium. The last, last night of the Proms of the millennium. But then, we moved onto this lists, the best 100 films of the millennium. The top 100 songs of the millennium. The top 100 writers of the millennium and so forth.

But, what was the one thing that was going to concern us most, in this New Millennium, that was going to be a worry and as a country we were worrying? Simply because of the ‘**millennium bug**’, because no matter what precautions had been taken, we were still not certain what was going to happen just seconds into **January 1<sup>st</sup> 2000**.

On a personal level though, what is the one thing, you are afraid will hit you hard? A financial crisis? A job crisis? A relational crisis? A spiritual crisis? What is that one thing you are most afraid of happening to you, this week? I believe that one of the most difficult commandments found in the Bible is found in **Philippians 4:6** ‘**Do not be anxious**’.

Are you like me? You could break that commandment several times before you even get out of bed in the morning. ‘**Do not be anxious about anything**’ it says. But how many times have you heard someone say that they are worried sick? Do you know that doctors are prescribing more and more drugs for anxiety than any other illness? And do you know that the single most sin that will steal our joy is the sin of worry?

Today, instead of going to our own doctor, let’s go to the Great Physician. Please open your Bibles to **Matthew 6:25-34** and let’s go ahead and read it. Jesus has just finished talking about storing up treasures in heaven and He goes to say in **Matthew 6:25-34** “**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 than food, and the body more than clothes? 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? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. 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? 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. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.**”

Every time we read a familiar passage of Scripture like this one, I believe we always get something new out of it. Now before we look at the text I read an article on this text by one brother who was trying to suggest that Jesus is teaching us that we shouldn’t be worrying about paying our household bills and debts. Loved ones, Jesus isn’t talking about paying off your mortgage or mobile phone bill, He’s addressing the basic needs of every day life, like food, drink, clothes, etc.

Now look at the first few words in **verse 25**, ‘**Do not worry about your life**’. Have you ever considered this?

Worry is the fine we pay when we look for life in all the wrong places. When we look for life in things that weren't intended to give life, worry will be the tragic, yet the inevitable result. Notice in the passage that Jesus admits that we are all going to be seekers. We will all pursue something with a great deal of zeal. We're all created by God to need something to live for; something to give meaning to our existence and something to set our hearts upon.

Notice, Jesus didn't say in [verse 33](#) 'Stop seeking'. That's not the issue, the issue is, [what are you going to seek this week?](#) Jesus says in [verse 34](#), 'Let me tell you about pagans'. [What makes a pagan is neither their language; nor how many verses they have never memorised or read?](#)

What makes a pagan is that they look for life in the [external](#), instead of the [eternal](#), remember that. The pagan might be the politest mannered, kind, decent person you have ever met but, he's a pagan and he's looking for life in all the wrong places. If you do that, you will be a worrier, if you are trying to find life in the external, you will worry and here's why. It's because you are unable to control tomorrow and in tomorrow, there exists the possibility of a threat, to that which you are trying to find life in.

[Are you trying to find life in your health? Are you trying to find life in your career? Are you trying to find life in your investments? Are you trying to find life in a special event you are planning for later this year?](#) Tomorrow could take away any of those things because we can't control tomorrow. If you are trying to find life in the wrong places you will be a worrier, because you can't control that which threatens that which you are trying to find life in.

[Thomas Carlisle](#), the famous writer used to write in an attic room to get away from distractions. [One thing did bug him, a neighbour's cockerel, which crowed three times daily. This drove Carlisle nuts. So he went to his neighbour and complained. The neighbour couldn't see the problem, the cockerel only crowed three times a day and Carlisle said that 'it was the suffering he endured waiting for it to crow'.](#) And that's what worry does, we suffer while we wait for something we fear might be coming.

There's something unique about worry, because worry is a pain. It can steal our joy and it can make us miserable. Some things will come this week that we can't predict, but we will just have to handle. But there's a difference in what we can't predict and worry because worry is a self-inflicted pain. Worry is a pain we inflict upon ourselves, that does not have to be there. It can't make us one inch taller, it can't make us live one day longer according to [Matthew 6:27](#) although it can shorten our lives considerably.

[What good is it going to do us to worry?](#) We are inflicting ourselves with a pain that is absolutely useless and does not help us one iota. The fact is that all of our worrying will not give us control of [tomorrow](#), it will only make us miserable [today](#).

Jesus has an even sharper rebuke against the sin of worry. Yes, it's useless, yes it shortens our lives but there is something more condemning about the self-inflicted pain of worry. Here's what it is, ['worry is a sign'](#), and it's a sign ['that our goals are too small'](#). Life is so much more than what we worry about and worry indicates that I am allowing the [external](#) to dominate the [eternal](#) on my priority list.

Here's what Jesus says in [Matthew 6:25](#), ['You are more than just a body; you were created for more than just eating and dressing.'](#) Worry betrays a false view of human beings, as if we were only machines that need to be fuelled and lubricated. We are bombarded daily with adverts that intentionally create anxiety, with the message that we are nothing more than complex machines. It tries to convince us that it took us millions of years to evolve out of some [lava pond in central Africa](#), and that all we really are is machines that require maintenance.

You need a new coat of paint, you need a new brand of Cornflakes, you need new clothes, you need a new car, you need a different shaped tea bag. And if you buy these things and take care of your machine, you might get a few more miles out of it before it claps out. And we are allowing ourselves to buy into a very [reductionist view](#) of what a human being is.

Jesus is here to tell us that we are more than that, we are more than just a machine to be maintained. If we were only here today and gone tomorrow, then I would tell us all to go out and eat, drink and be merry, go for it. Because we only go around once and if that's true, just go all out for all the materialism you can handle and worry yourself to death, about whether or not you will have any tomorrow.

[Is that true?](#) Pagans say, ['Yes it's true, you only go around once in life'](#), but Jesus says ['that's not true'](#).

He says that kind of orientation is absurdly unworthy of what a human being really is and He is calling us to a higher ambition. Jesus says, **'We are much more than something to be fed and dressed'**. In **Matthew 6:33**, He tells us the thing we should want most and that is God's kingdom and doing what God wants. We will worry tomorrow, not because our problems are too big, but because our goals are too small.

We were meant for more than just preserving the body beautiful; we were created to enjoy and to promote the Rulership of God in the world. If that is our priority, we can see that goal, this by the way is the only goal, which is truly worthy of what a human being really is. We can seek that goal no matter what happens, **illness** can come and we can still seek the goal of enjoying and promoting the kingdom of God. We can **lose our job**; **an investment can go wrong** but nothing can happen to us tomorrow that can keep us from the goal that is worthy of who we really are.

God is bigger than whatever we might try to find life in. We worry because our **'goals are too small'** and also it's a sign that our **God is too small**, it says we don't understand who God is or what He's like. I'm counting on God not to change His mind on Judgement Day, to keep His promise. If I count on Him not to change His mind on Judgement Day, **why do I live like He's going to change His mind tomorrow about what I need?** We act like we believe in a God that can provide salvation, but nothing else.

In spite of the fact, that He gives testimony through nature, that He can provide. In the months ahead we will see the grass grow and the birds fly and the flowers bloom and the trees bud. God has given us a magnificent testimony to each and every one of us, He can take care of **anything** He creates. **Psalm 145:16** says, **'You open your hand, and you satisfy the desire of every living thing.'** The Bible says we are in the hands of God, He opens up His hands and provides every living thing with what it needs and we are in good hands with God.

The problem with worry is it **'makes us forget the promises of God'**. **Romans 8:32** **'God didn't spare his own Son but handed him over to death for all of us. So he will also give us everything along with him.'** That doesn't mean we still don't work, working is one way God gives us the ability to provide, He gives us the ability to work. It doesn't mean we ignore other's needs.

When we see a need we shouldn't say, **'Trust in God, He'll meet your needs'**, God could be meeting that need through our generosity. When Jesus says don't worry about food or drink, He's not saying don't work and don't share. He's not even saying we won't have problems; He did say every day has its own troubles in **Matthew 6:34**.

**What He did mean is this?** God knows what we need and God is faithful, God will see to it that we have everything we need to put His kingdom first. We will not have any excuses tomorrow to put His Kingdom first because we needed something we didn't have. God's going to make sure everything we need to be what He's designed us to be and to pursue what He wants us to pursue, we will have. He will keep His promise on that.

Next week we will worry about those parts of our lives where God is not in charge and the first step to stop worrying is, to **'make Jesus Christ the Lord of your life'**. You might say, I made Jesus Lord of my life years ago. **Could it be there is a part of your life where He isn't Lord?** We are not born worriers, worry is a learned habit and since it is learned that means it can also be unlearned. When worry knocks on our doors tomorrow, we don't have to let it in, just because we let it in, in the past.

In education today, the buzzword is **coping strategies**. Let me suggest to you some coping strategies for worry. Talk to God about your worry, if there is one resolution we should make for tomorrow, not just at the New Year, let it be, to improve our prayer lives. I'm not suggesting for one minute, that we don't pray just now, I'm simply asking us to look at how we can improve on it. The biggest room in the world is the room for improvement.

**Can you imagine what would happen if we spent time praying instead of worrying?** We would have much less to worry about. God will always listen to any of our problems and by improving our prayer lives we are recognizing that it's God that controls tomorrow, not us.

Something else will happen, when we pray we receive the greatest cure for worry, because we experience the touch of the eternal. **Philippians 4:6** says **'Do not be anxious'**, but look what else it says, **'But in every situation let God know what you need in prayers and requests, while giving thanks.'** God is going to respond to our prayer when we talk to Him about our concerns.

He will respond in 2 ways. He will do something about that concern if it's in accordance with His will and He is going to send us a peace that cannot be explained away. God will touch us with the eternal. Look at **Philippians 4:7** 'Then God's peace, which goes beyond anything we can imagine, will guard your thoughts and emotions through Christ Jesus.'

When we pray, God sends us a peace that we simply cannot understand because it's beyond our understanding. God protects us from unnecessary worry, then we have to turn the worry over to God. Give it to Him in prayer, but remember when we are finished praying, don't take your worry back because that defeats the purpose of finding peace, leave the worry with God.

In **Psalm 55:22** it says, 'Turn your burdens over to the Lord, and he will take care of you. He will never let the righteous person stumble.' Perhaps this is what Peter had in mind when he wrote in **1 Peter 5:7** 'Turn all your anxiety over to God because he cares for you.' You see loved ones that word 'worry' or 'anxiety' is the Greek word 'merimna' and it means 'distraction'. And what Peter and Jesus are both saying is, don't let your basic everyday needs distract you from seeking God's kingdom today. To turn it over to God means to let go of it, let God take care of our distractions because He's not going to get distracted from meeting your needs.

Oh you will still have those things on your mind, but when you give them to God, you won't be controlled by your anxieties because you trust God to take care of them for you. Let's get in the habit of turning our worries over to God. When Satan tries to creep up on us to remind us of our distractions, just tell him, 'Satan, I gave that to God, that's His worry now'. We might as well give our worries over to someone who can do something about tomorrow, because we can't. Talk to God about it and turn it over to Him and trust Him with today.

That's what Jeremiah says in **Lamentations 3:22+23** "Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." How often does he share His compassion with us? Every day, every morning. When the Israelites were in the desert how often did God supply the manna for them? **Exodus 16:4** "Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day." The Lord supplied their food needs every day. Jesus said earlier in **Matthew 6:11** "Give us this day our daily bread."

Finally, trust God and enjoy today in His Kingdom. How many times have we missed today's blessings by worrying about tomorrow's possibilities? Worry is a sin, because it makes us miss today's grace. God gave us food today, He gave us clothes today, He gave us friends today and a place to worship in today. Are we missing our reason to rejoice today because of something that might happen tomorrow?

Don't let tomorrow keep you from living today fully. We've got today to hug our kids or kiss our wife or husband. We've got today to give someone a smile. We've got today to make a new friend or do something for an elderly person. We've got today to read our Bibles and get down on our knees to worship God. We've got today, don't let tomorrow waste it.

Jesus says listen, don't let food, drink, clothes or even tomorrow distract you from serving God today because He'll take care of those things for you. **Psalm 118:24** says "This is the day the Lord has made. Let's rejoice and be glad today!" I don't know what will come to each and every one of us tomorrow. I don't know what distractions will come our way but I do know that when worry knocks, we don't have to let it in, we can let faith in instead.

And we let faith in by reminding ourselves of the chorus which says, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning, great is Thy faithfulness. The Lord is my portion says my soul. Therefore, I will hope in Him'.

Now if you're not a Christian you've got to ask yourself an honest question. What are you worrying about? What's happening in your life which is stopping you making Jesus Lord of your life? Wouldn't it make more sense to give your worries and your life over to Someone who can control tomorrow?

You can't control tomorrow, politicians can't control tomorrow, your friends and family can't control tomorrow but God can. Let me encourage you to speak to someone today before you leave about how Jesus can remove all your anxieties and help you live your life for Him one day at a time.