

How did you get on with 'De-accumulation' this week? Was it a struggle to let things go, or actually a relief?
*Our Lent series is looking at a series of narratives which contrast the life that Jesus advocates and the narratives that influence us in popular culture. This week: 'learning to live without worry'. **Read Matthew 6: 25-34.***

Worry: something in the Human Condition.

The vast majority of us, from all ages and stages in life, worry: children worry about friendships, teenagers about exams and adults worry about marriages, health, finances, jobs, children, aging relatives; the list is endless. In fact, no matter how hard life gets, worrying about it has no effect on the outcome. The word 'worry' is rooted in a Germanic word meaning 'to strangle'. Worry steals joy, affects sleep, drains energy and wastes time.

1. So why do we worry?

- Our lively imaginations and even past experiences mean we can foresee 'what might happen next'.
- Worries are rooted in fear: for our families, of the unknown, of our own inadequacies, of pain or failure.
- It comes from anticipating disaster, fearing losing what we have or not getting what we want.
- **Our culture that says we should be 'in control' of our lives. So when we are faced with uncertainty:**
 - We try to think through all possible scenarios and work out how to handle them.
 - Then when none of the above happens, our brain connects worry with preventing harm and we end up with the subconscious conclusion that it was a good thing that we worried.
- **'We only worry because we care'** becomes: 'if I don't worry it means I don't care'
- **Superstition creeps in:** Worrying may lower the chance of a dreaded outcome.
- Worry is about protecting ourselves from our fears: God doesn't want us to live fearful lives.

3. Jesus' narrative about worry. Matthew 6: 31-33

- Jesus could have worried about His country's instability, His refugee status, where His food was coming from when the fishermen had a bad night and about all the criticism His Message was attracting. He agonised so much in Gethsemane that His sweat was as 'drops of blood': He knew about life's troubles.
- Seeking first the Kingdom of God doesn't mean we shouldn't work hard, or care about anything or anyone, it means facing troubles with trust in a God who knows what we need. **1 Peter 5: 7.**
- Faith doesn't insure us against life's difficulties but we have God's assurance in **Isaiah 41: 10.** The world is a scary place unless you can say, 'I am a child of God, one in whom Christ dwells and I am living in the unshakeable Kingdom of God'. (JBS 'The Good and beautiful Life' page 181.)

4. How do we find time to 'Seek God's Kingdom and His righteousness first?'

- A time with God should take first priority in our lives. We have to choose to come to Him.
- Talk to God in prayer throughout the day, ask for His guidance in decision-making and read His Word, the Bible. As we walk with the Lord, we will become aware of His deep love for us and His hopes for our lives.
- Worrying chokes the word of God, distracting us from Him as in the parable of the Sower, **Mtt. 13: 1-9, 22**
- Look for God at work throughout your everyday life and trust Him for one day at a time. **Mtt. 6: 34.** This is a principle found elsewhere in the Bible: the wandering Israelites were provided with manna for one day at a time and in the Lord's Prayer we pray 'for our daily bread'. "Be still and know that He is God".
- Instead of worrying, pray: **Philippians 4: 6 – 7.** Then the peace of God will guard your hearts.
- **God has already taken care of your biggest problem: getting you into heaven! He sent Jesus to die for you so that if you believe and trust in Him you can have eternal life. Romans 8: 31b – 32 – 39.**

Soul Training Exercise: Prayer.

Philippians 4: 6-7 makes a direct connection between prayer and worry: when we pray our worries diminish and the peace of God comes to our hearts instead. Once we have done all we can in a given situation, we simply turn the matter over to God and leave it there.

JBS suggests we start a prayer journal: set aside 10-15 minutes in the morning to: identify your worries; write them in your journal; ask what you can do to remedy them; make a note to do what you can; **turn everything else over to God; write down your request to God and be specific.**

Questions throughout Chapter 10 of 'The Good and beautiful Life' by James Bryan Smith and on pages 244-247.