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Don't Worry, Worship

By Heath Lambert

Worry is a sin. That statement is one of the most controversial I have ever made. I would not know how to describe the number of people I have angry with me over making such an observation. That is too bad for a couple of reasons. The first reason is that I do not like to say things that are controversial. I have never been joyful about saying things that are upsetting to anybody—much less many people. In fact, I have something of a rule: and that is that I only make controversial statements if they are explicitly warranted from Scripture.

That gets to the second sad reality about the negative reaction I get when I say that worry is a sin. The Bible is clear that worry is a sin. We run from this reality in our culture. We prefer to medicalize worry, saying that it is a biological issue requiring medical treatment, or we minimize it saying that it is not a big deal—God, I've heard many say, understands when we worry a

little bit. The problem here is that when we speak that way, we speak in a way that is not informed by Scripture. In fact, the most common command to appear in the pages of Scripture is God's demand to "fear not." God thinks worry is a massive issue and He commands us to avoid it more than any other thing.

One place where we see God's command to avoid worry is from the lips of Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus commands his disciples three times to avoid the sin of worry (Matt 6:25, 31, 34). More than giving the command to avoid worry, Jesus also explains in his sermon why worry is such a big deal. Worry, Jesus says, is at odds with faith (Matt 6:30). We know that without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6). Fear explicitly undermines this faith in God by doubting His good care for us. That is why Jesus can say that people who engage in the sin of worry are guilty of having "little faith."

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus does not merely remind that worry is a sin, and He does not only explain why it is a sin. He also shows how we can fight worry.

Jesus encourages us to fight worry with worship. Let me explain.

Jesus does not merely issue the command to avoid worry, He explains some very tangible truths about God that work to undermine worry. First, Jesus talks about the sovereignty of God in making provision for the natural world. He points out that the birds of the air and flowers of the field are more than adequately provided for by the sovereign God of the universe (Matt 6:26, 28-29). Second, Jesus makes it clear that God's love for His people is much greater than his love for any bird or flower (Matt 6:26, 30).

Jesus is fueling our worship. He knows that worriers characterized by small faith need to turn their eyes on the sovereign God of the universe who has complete control over His creation, and who is determined to direct that control towards His people that He loves so much. Jesus is saying, in effect, "Don't worry, worship."

This column, written by Dr. Heath Lambert, originally appeared in the print edition of the Florida Baptist Witness.

A Biblical Response to Panic

This is a transcript from Dr. Lambert's podcast interview on "Truth in Love with David Powlison

One of the most persistent human struggles that we all encounter is the problem of worry. Everyone knows what it is to confront this problem. Some struggle with the sort of low grade fever of worry over whether they will have enough money to pay their bills at the end of the month, while others face the more extreme kinds of anxiety that lead to the labored breathing and chest pains of a panic attack. Whether the problem is on the mild or extreme end of the spectrum, we all face it and that means that we must have a biblical response for it.

This is particularly important because many different voices undercut a biblical response to panic. On the mild end of the problem, many excuse it as not so big a deal. Anxiety is one of the problems which Jerry Bridges identifies as the kind of respectable sin which Christians have wrongly learned to tolerate. On the extreme end of the problem of worry, many excuse panic attacks as a physical problem that only requires medical treatment. While it is true that some do need medical attention for extreme panic, we cannot reduce the problem to being merely a medical problem.

The response of Jesus to worry is not either of those extremes. In Matthew 6:30, Jesus grounds the problem of worry in the presence of, to use His words, "little faith." This is a loving and powerful reminder from Jesus to His people that we must fight our fears, however mild or extreme, with faith in Jesus Christ. That means that

whatever else we do, those of us who worry must grow in faith in the kind care of Jesus our Shepherd. David Powlison is joining us on the podcast today to help us think through this important issue. David is a counselor certified with ACBC and serves as the executive director of the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation. He is also the editor of their journal, *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*. Awhile back, I caught up with David Powlison and asked him about this, here is what he said:

“Let me just say a word to you, if even right now you are experiencing panicky feelings, that experience is one in which you are probably familiar with. It’s perhaps a very well-known enemy arising from within your very own heart; which of all enemies is the most distressing kind. If I had to say one thing, it’s that however alone and isolated that experience of fear feels, the reality which wraps around us is that you are not alone. There is someone who describes Himself in words that say, ‘I will never, never leave you or forsake you. Never. Never. Never. You are not alone.’ It’s not as though hearing that said is some kind of magical answer. It’s one of those things that sometimes gets worked into our hearts more effectively during a moment when we are not feeling anxious or panicky, but it is the reality on which you can build your life.”

“When you really think about the world we live in, we have many, many good reasons to feel fearful. We are in fact incredibly vulnerable and fragile beings. There is a passage in Romans 8 that doesn’t

tend to get the airplay it deserves, but where Paul says, the Spirit – and the Spirit is the One who mediates the presence of God to us – is the One in whom we are not alone. So it says the Spirit helps us in our weakness. It’s really interesting that it doesn’t say, our weaknesses, as if there were a list of perhaps ten areas where I am weak; it says our weakness. Weakness is a fundamental aspect of our humanity which our culture doesn’t like to tell us and often we as Christians don’t like to admit as most fundamental of all realities. By creation we are weak like little children; infants who are utterly dependent on the care of somebody else. We are weak and in need of mercy resulting from our sinfulness and the God on whom we depend must come through for us or we die. Yet, there is this fundamental reality that in our weakness He promises that He will not leave us.”

“The passage that had most deeply spoken to a young man who had come so far in dealing constructively with these feelings of panic was Psalm 121. Psalm 121 is a psalm that is short but at every turn it actually acknowledges our vulnerability. It talks about the things that can threaten us by day and by night. The opening line, “I lift my eyes, where does my help come from” I think is referring to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is actually a little knob of a hill which is in a bowl between higher hills and mountains. Everywhere you look in Jerusalem, you are looking up and an enemy could come over any one of those hills. It’s a picture of being in a place where one doesn’t know which direction the threat could come from during the day or night,

when going out or coming in, now or in the future. Regardless of when it comes, there is one who keeps you and is a shepherd who walks with you. He will not abandon you.”

“In the wonderful metaphor of another shepherdly-keeping Psalm, Psalm 23, it says “...goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life...”(Ps 23:6). It is actually a picture of the way that the shepherd who is taking care of sheep stands behind the sheep, to the side, and to the back so he can keep an eye on those he cares for. The way that the shepherd leads them into paths of life is by his goodness and mercy following his sheep. It is such a good picture that someone has his eye on you, cares for you, will not leave you and has good purposes for you. As you again think of the way in which Psalm 23 and Psalm 121 kind of play off each other and develop different things, I love that in the last line of Psalm 23 after saying that “goodness and mercy shall follow me,” it says that “...I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” I don’t really like the word house; house seems like a building yet what the text is talking about is that the shepherd is taking us home to where He lives. The whole of Psalm 23 and the implication of Psalm 121 are that we are on a journey. We are going somewhere and there is someone who is caring for us and in the end of the journey we come home and we are there forever.”

FUNNIES

A daddy was listening to his child say his prayer "Dear Harold,"

At this, dad interrupted and said, "Wait a minute, "How come you called God, Harold?"

The little boy looked up and said, "That's what they call Him in church. You know the prayer we say, "Our Father, who art in Heaven, Harold be Thy name."

One night Mike's parents overheard this prayer. "Now I lay me down to rest, and hope to pass tomorrow's test, if I should die before I wake, that's one less test I have to take."

A tourist stopped a local in a village he was visiting and asked; “What is the quickest way to the lake?”

The local thought for awhile. “Are you walking or driving?” he asked the tourist.

“I’m driving.” the tourist responded

To which the local declared, “That is the quickest way!”