

I Believe in God...But I Worry a Lot

Welcome/Prayer

Before you begin, pray for understanding of the scripture, enlightenment that the Holy Spirit may guide your understanding, discernment that you may see how this lesson applies to you, and courage to surrender those things that hinder your spiritual growth.

Preparation

As we continue discussing “The Christian Atheist” series, let’s review the underlying premise of the messages, which is that there is more than one kind of atheist in the world. Our sermon series is looking at the “Christian atheist,” who believes in God but lives as though God doesn’t exist. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus plainly noted a behavior that is characteristic of atheists: worry! Specifically, Jesus said, “Only people who don’t know God are always worrying....” (Matthew 6:32a CEV) Who doesn’t worry about *something*? In this discussion guide, let’s share and discover how we, as followers of Christ, can overcome worry by putting our belief in God into daily practices.

Introduction

Worry is explicitly prohibited in the New Testament on at least 10 occasions. Jesus cautions us, “Do not worry about your life. Do not worry about what you are going to eat and drink. Do not worry about what you are going to wear. Do not worry. Do not worry about tomorrow....” (excerpts, Matthew 6:25-34 NIV, emphasis added) Yet, worry is such an integral part of our lives. In fact, it can be debilitating for some of us. But, Christ provides us a well-ordered, logical argument against worry.

Break it Down

When I worry, it keeps me from enjoying what I have.

Worry tries to convince us that life is only about “things” (e.g., food, clothing, other stuff). Read Matthew 6:25 (NIV): “I tell you, do not worry. Don’t worry about your life and what you will eat or drink. And don’t worry about your body and what you will wear. Isn’t there more to life than eating? Aren’t there more important things for the body than clothes?” Although Jesus asks a rhetorical question, His point is clear—our focus should be on “more important things,” such as our relationship with God and with others.

1. What do you consider the most important things in life?
2. How does worry distract you from your relationship with God?
3. When has worrying about the past or some future event kept you from enjoying God’s blessings in the present?

When I worry, it makes me forget my worth.

God created us in His image. “He created [humans] to be like himself.” (Genesis 1:27b ERV) His love for us—the unfathomable *worth* He *designed* in us—is demonstrated by His sacrifice of His very own Son. We have a heavenly Father who cares for us, but worry makes us forget.

1. When have you witnessed God’s care for His created world?
2. How has God demonstrated how much you mean to Him?

When I worry, it is a waste of time and energy.

“Can you add even one hour to your life by worrying?” (Matthew 6:27 NIV) There are probably hundreds of studies that indicate the physical toll that worry takes on a person’s health and well-being. Worrying is hard work! It occupies our time and robs us of energy. Pastor and author, Vance Heavner, said, “Worry, like a rocking chair, will give you something to do, but it

won't get you anywhere." Since we have a limited quantity of time and energy, it would behoove us to return our focus on the Lord.

1. What is something you've worried about that never came to pass?
2. How has worry kept you from being productive or distracted you to the point of wasted time?

When I worry, it demonstrates my lack of faith.

Read Matthew 6:28-30 (NLT): "And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing.... And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?" According to Jesus, worry and faith cannot exist together—we either trust in God, or we don't. Worry stands in direct opposition to genuine faith. But, as with any sin, we can overcome worry by God's grace and the power of His Holy Spirit.

1. Do you think worry is a sin? Why or why not?
2. How is worry evidenced in your family?
3. What strategies are effective for you to overcome worry?

Instead of worrying, I will live one day at a time.

For those familiar with recovery programs, you might recognize one of the mantras, "ODAT," or "One Day at a Time." It serves as a strategic reminder that overcoming something (an addiction, a sin, a bad habit) is a process to be taken one day at a time. Tackling worry is no different. Eugene Peterson's translation of Matthew 6:34 (The Message) is a helpful reminder, "Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, [today], and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow...."

1. How does living in the present help us overcome worry?
2. What can you do today that will prevent you from worrying about tomorrow?

Instead of worrying, I will focus my attention on the Lord.

"Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need." (Matthew 6:33 NLT) For us, this is a choice. It takes practice, and it takes a commitment on our end. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul proposed this course of action: "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7 NLT) Choose to see worry as an alarm...a signal to you that it's time to pray...and feel the peace of God.

1. Share about a time that you turned over your worry to God and experienced His peace as a result.
2. What is one thing that you're presently worried about that you will turn over to God in prayer?

Conclusion

It's probably fair to say that everyone worries about *something* at some point in life. However, when we allow worry to separate us from God, to live as Christian atheists, then we are in danger of spiritual demise. As followers of Christ, we worship a God who loves us through our worries when we cast them upon Him so that He can receive the glory. "With his love, he will calm all your [worries]. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs." (Zephaniah 3:17 NLT)

Close in Prayer