

OVERCOMING WORRY

A **MANNAHOUSE** RESOURCE



INTRODUCTION

Worry is one of the most common dilemmas confronting modern man. We have all experienced repeated bouts with worry. Occasionally, our worry is minor and short-lived, while at other times it is severe and long lasting.

Though we have all experienced some degree of anxiety, some individuals are more prone to worry. They have established a habitual pattern of worry which lasts for a lifetime and progressively dominates every area of their lives.

It may be easy to understand why unbelievers suffer from worry, but it is sometimes difficult to comprehend why Christians suffer from its torturous effects, especially when they have the support of God and his Word at their side.

This counseling booklet is designed to help Christians overcome worry. It offers a comprehensive yet concise examination of this disturbing subject, and presents the liberating insights and scriptural solutions for obtaining a worry-free life.

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WHAT IS WORRY?

Though each of us are familiar with the sensation of worry, many of us would have difficulty defining it. Simply stated, **worry can be defined as “a state of mental and emotional agitation and distress resulting from undue concern over something impending or anticipated.”**

Worry involves an uneasiness of mind or a brooding anxiety about a real or imagined situation or possibility. It is an unresolved feeling of fretful apprehension and mental unrest which is a close companion of fear, anxiety, stress, insecurity, and tension.

In the Bible, the word which characterizes worry is translated “anxiety or care.” For example, the scriptures declare, “*Do not be anxious (worried) about anything*” (Phil. 4:6, NIV). It is taken from a Greek word which literally means, “to divide, rip, or tear apart.” It aptly describes the torturous effects of worry which tears at our heart, mind and emotions.

WHO SUFFERS FROM WORRY?

Everyone! Feelings of worry are so prevalent and widespread in today's society that they have reached epidemic proportions. **Worry is one of the greatest problems affecting mankind.**

Everyone experiences worry in some degree of intensity and duration during their life. No one is exempt or totally immune. Worry afflicts both young and old, children and adults, men and women, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, healthy and unhealthy, godly and ungodly. It is a universal problem which cuts across every conceivable social, economic, and racial barrier.

Worry is such a commonplace problem that it has been referred to as the "official emotion of our age", and "the most pervasive psychological phenomenon of our time." It stands out as one of the greatest sources of human suffering and distress.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF WORRY?

Worry can produce a wide variety of destructive symptoms which can aggravate our mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. These can include the following:

- *mental and emotional fatigue*
- *drug and alcohol dependence*
- *loss of appetite*
- *lack of concentration*
- *stomach problems*
- *ulcers*
- *frequent headaches*
- *backaches*
- *insomnia*
- *skin rashes*
- *high blood pressure*
- *migraines*
- *hypertension*
- *heart problems*
- *nervousness*

Worry can paralyze us with fear, confusion, and insecurity. It can cripple our faith and undermine our joy, peace of mind, and our sense of contentment. Worry can destroy our physical, mental, and spiritual enthusiasm, motivation, and energy. It can cause us to withdraw from life, become antisocial, and sink into depression. It can stifle our creativity, dull our personality, and distort our judgment. As we can see, worry breeds a whole host of harmful consequences which can hinder our well-being if not handled properly.

COMMON CAUSES OF WORRY

1. UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THE FUTURE

An anxious anticipation about future uncertainties is a major cause of worry. Jesus indicated this fact when He cautioned, “...do not worry about tomorrow” (Matt. 6:34).

We live in a world of constant change, unrest, and instability. The current climate of international tension generates a constant undercurrent of apprehension. This tends to reinforce an atmosphere of worry, insecurity, and uncertainty concerning the possibilities of tomorrow. The arms race, the threat of nuclear holocaust, the growing crime rate, the ever-changing economic scene, political upheaval, and the “doomsday” forecasts both within and without Christendom create a mental environment conducive for breeding worry and apprehension.

Whether our worry involves the minor consequences of life or major life changing possibilities, our ability to pay a bill or our chances of surviving a nuclear holocaust, the uncertainty about the conditions of tomorrow stands out as the greatest, single source of worry.

2. THE CARES OF THIS WORLD

Christ cautioned us about being overly concerned with the cares of this life. (Lk. 21:34)

The carnal concerns of this present life often intensify the potential for spiritual unrest, anxiety, and worry.

This is especially true in our materialistic age. We live in a world of carnal value systems, demands and expectations. Christians are constantly harassed and bombarded by secular enticements and influences which promote carnal cares and encourage us to measure up to the standards of success and security which the world embraces.

Some Christians succumb to unnecessary worry because they are overly anxious and agitated about the affairs of this present life. Instead of confidently trusting God as their provider and establishing a priority of “*seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness*” (Matt. 6:33), they are overwhelmed with worry about making a living, acquiring possessions, saving for the future, achieving material expectations, or “keeping up with the Joneses.”

3. THE PRESSURES OF LIFE

The pressures of life are a close companion to the cares of this world. **The challenges, concerns, and complexities of modern life exert tremendous pressures upon us which can overwhelm us with worry and anxiety.**

The unrelenting demands of our pressure cooker world, the constant crush of responsibilities, and the never-ending strain of meeting deadlines, achieving goals, or fulfilling expectations can often create a state of stress and worry concerning our ability to meet the obligations of life.

The Bible gives a clear example of the worry which can arise when we fail to handle the pressures of life in a scriptural manner. This can include even the pressures of ministry and service to Christ. In the story of Martha and Mary (Lk. 10:39-42), Jesus gently reproved Martha for her agitation and anxiety. He challenged the worry which had gotten out of control in her rush to fulfill the responsibilities and meet the deadlines confronting her.

4. PAST INFLUENCES AND EXPERIENCES

A person's present worries are often the result of past conditioning. Many are victimized by repeated episodes of worry due to the contributing factors from their past. **Yesterday's worries often lay the groundwork for today's anxieties. Previous fears, insecurities, disappointments, traumas, and problems can create a sensitivity in certain areas of our life which manifests itself in the future through recurrent bouts of worry.**

Children can subtly acquire a specific pattern of reoccurring worry due to repeated exposure to their parent's influence. For example, if their parents suffered from financial distress and upheaval, a child may grow up with a tendency to nurse financial insecurity and worry. If the parents were overly anxious about health problems, a child may grow up with exaggerated anxieties and hypochondria in this area also.

Whatever the cause or source of past worries, our failure to specifically resolve them can result in a prolonged pattern of repetitious worry which can linger for a lifetime and end up reinforcing itself as the years pass.

5. SELF-DEPENDENCE

When we focus our attention upon ourselves and our own natural abilities to cope with the challenges and responsibilities of life, we begin to prepare the groundwork for worry.

Worry is often the direct result of failing to trust in Christ and depend upon the power of God to confront life's problems. When we assume that we possess the capabilities to solve our problems or manage the challenges and decisions of life, we quickly fall prey to mounting feelings of worry. **When we try to shoulder the burdens of responsibility for our life, we are left to our limited resources and the inevitable consequences of frustration and worry set in.**

Worry is often the result of self-dependence and self-sufficiency. This is a common pitfall which many fall into. Leaning upon our own understanding is hopelessly inadequate. When we fail to surrender our cares to Christ, our burdens grow heavier and our worries gradually intensify.

6. SATANIC ATTACK

Satan is often the indirect source of our worry. He recognizes that worry is an extremely effective weapon for undermining our spiritual well-being and bringing us into mental bondage. He is the great instigator behind much of our anxiety. Satan is only too willing to agitate our thinking and encourage us to worry. He knows that if he can direct our attention away from Christ's sufficiency and provision, he can stifle our confidence and faith. He endeavors to focus our attention upon our problems, ourselves and our natural understanding rather than upon God's counsel, answers, and assistance.

He often paints grim pictures of foreboding possibilities and embellishes our worries with additional suggestions, insights, considerations, and fears in order to further fan the flames of insecurity and worry. Those whose character and temperament are prone to worry are especially susceptible to his attacks.

THREE REVEALING FACTS ABOUT WORRY

1. Most of our worries are based upon groundless, imaginary, unsubstantiated fears. The overwhelming majority of our worries are based on “what ifs” rather than reality.

2. Worry accomplishes nothing beneficial. It is not constructive but destructive. It is not a help but a hindrance. It is not part of the solution but part of the problem. One of the greatest arguments justifying worry is the deceitful lie that worry can help us solve our problems. Worry solves nothing. It only complicates and intensifies our dilemmas. Even Jesus challenged the uselessness of worry when He stated, “*And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?*” (Lk. 12:25).

3. Worry breeds worry. The more we dwell upon our worries, the more worries we have to dwell upon. When we preoccupy ourselves with our worries, they become bigger than life and eventually consume us. The more we focus upon our insecurities, fears, and anxieties, the more distorted and exaggerated they become until God fades from the picture and they completely dwarf the scriptural solutions for our problems.

IS THERE HOPE?

Absolutely! **God did not intend for worry to be a normal part of the Christian experience.** For this reason the Word of God exhorts us, “*Do not be anxious about anything*” (Phil. 4:6, NIV).

Whether we seldom worry about anything or are chronic worry warts who spend most of our waking hours looking for something to worry about, it is not God’s will that we worry. Whether our motto is “Don’t sweat it” or “Come worry with me,” we can take comfort in the awareness that God’s Word provides scriptural solutions for the problem of worry.

The Bible offers a number of liberating guidelines for achieving a permanent victory over anxiety and maintaining a worry-free lifestyle. On the following pages we will carefully consider the scriptural steps which lead us to freedom from worry and anxiety.

1. REPENTANCE

It may come as a shock to some but worry is actually a sin. Worry is a spiritual problem involving distrust and a lack of faith in Christ. The Bible reveals that “*whatsoever is not of faith is sin*” (Rom. 14:23, KJV).

Before a Christian can overcome worry, he must recognize that it is a sin. Repentance is a crucial first step in successfully waging warfare against our worry. We must not attempt to apply superficial, cosmetic remedies to our worry until we have first dealt with the root problem.

Instead of ignoring or bypassing this underlying problem, we must take prompt, decisive action. We must sincerely ask God to forgive us and cleanse us from our doubt and spiritual unbelief. When we have laid this proper foundation, we can move on to the other essential steps for victory contained in God’s Word.

2. WE MUST PRAY

“BE ANXIOUS FOR NOTHING, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7).

Prayer is one of the most effective antidotes against worry. It is also one of the greatest safeguards against recurring worry. Prayer represents God’s scriptural alternative for anxiety and worry. Prayer is God’s channel of release, relief, and resolution.

A great deal of our worry is the result of shouldering the burdens of life without turning to the Lord in prayer. We have instant access to “*the peace of God*” when we release our burdens to the Lord. For this reason, the scriptures exhort us about “*casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you*” (1 Pet. 5:7). When we fail to focus upon Christ through prayer, we begin to experience increasing amounts of anxiety. Prayer is the answer to much of our worry.

3. WE MUST DISCIPLINE OUR THINKING

One of the greatest contributing factors in our worry is our thought life. **Many individuals slip in to habitual worry ruts because of their unrestrained thoughts.** Then tend to magnify, distort, and perpetuate their worries through a failure to control their thoughts.

In order to overcome our mental anxieties we must discipline our thinking. If we focus our minds upon godly realities and truth, we will reinforce faith and security. However, if we dwell upon our fears, yield to our insecurities, or indulge in our worries, we will blow them out of proportion and undermine our spiritual well-being. We must not allow our minds to drift into anxious meditation.

Though the scriptures admonish us to pray instead of worry, they also exhort us to rivet our minds upon those things which are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of a good report (Phil 4:8). **Mental discipline and restraint, working in cooperation with prayer, is an important safeguard for securing the peace of God and maintaining it.**

4. TRUST IN GOD'S WORD

We must confront our worries with God's Word. We must discipline our anxious thoughts with the absolutes of scriptural reality instead of dwelling upon our worries, fears, and insecurities.

The truth of God's Word counteracts the faith-defeating effects of unrestrained worry. The Bible not only supplies solutions, but it also instills faith: *"faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (Rom. 10:17).

The promises and assurances of God's Word provide a powerful antidote for the specific areas of worry we are experiencing. If we will search the scriptures for scriptural solutions and then confront our problems, uncertainties, and dilemmas with them, we will effectively overcome a great deal of the anxieties we encounter. When we firmly fix our confidence, reliance, and faith upon God's answers to life's problems, we achieve a victory over our worries.

5. WE MUST EXERCISE FAITH

The ultimate answer to worry is faith: *“without faith it is impossible to please God”* (Heb. 11:6). Without faith we will never achieve a decisive victory over our worries. For this reason the Bible declares: *“And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith”* (1 Jn. 5:4). Faith is often the missing ingredient for victory.

Faith does not have to involve feelings. It is an act of our will in obedience to God’s Word, whether we feel good or not. The power of faith does not reside in ourselves or in faith itself, but in God. The power of faith is in focusing upon God’s power, ability, and desire to meet our needs rather than upon our self-defeating doubts, insecurities, and fears.

Faith involves a reliance in the absolute reality of God’s Word. We must stand upon the truth instead of our worries. If God says *“I will never leave you nor forsake you”* (Heb. 13:5), we must believe it. If God says He will *“supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus”* (Phil. 4:19), He means it. Therefore, we must confront our fears with that quality of confident faith which trusts in God and rests in His Word.

6. RENEW A PROPER PERSPECTIVE

An important key for overcoming our worry is to renew a godly perspective of our life situation. If we fail to perceive our life situations, at any point, as God perceives them, then we become susceptible to worry.

Worry is a common by-product of unbelief. Unbelief is a failure to see God as a loving, compassionate, all-powerful being who is in absolute control of the universe. Faith arises when we see that God is still in control of our lives and that everything we experience has a divine purpose.

One of the greatest truths a Christian can embrace is the scriptural revelation that **"ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD TO THOSE WHO LOVE GOD"** (Rom. 8:28). **This liberating truth can free us from much of the self-imposed worry, insecurity, and fear we experience.** Why fall prey to worry when God is in control of our life and working everything together for good? If we will embrace this fact, we will lay hold of a dynamic faith-builder which will undermine much of the worry we experience.

7. SEEK A SPIRITUAL REFRESHING

“REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS. *Again I will say, Rejoice! . . .*
Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, WITH
THANKSGIVING, *let your requests be made known to God”* (Phil. 4:4, 6).

A great deal of our worries can be alleviated when we obtain a spiritual refreshing. **Spiritual refreshing comes as a result of spending quality time with God in worship, praise, and rejoicing.** When we touch God’s Spirit through worship, we often discover a powerful release from the self-imposed bondage of mental anxiety and agitation, for *“where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty”* (II Cor. 3:17). **Instead of dwelling upon our self-reinforcing worries, we should separate ourselves unto a time of spiritual communion. This will cause us to rise above our worries and will usher us into a conscious state of anointed confidence, victory, and freedom from our worries.**

8. CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

An often-overlooked solution to much of the worry we encounter is found through Christian fellowship and involvement with others. Fellowship often provides a healthy means of release from our anxieties and worry fixations.

Contact with others sometimes serves as an effective distraction which diverts our attention away from our self-focusing worries. Fellowship, and involvement with Christian friends, provides access to a wealth of godly insight, encouragement, counsel, positive exhortation, and comfort which helps relieve the pressures of worry.

The scriptures declare, “*As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend*” (Prov. 27:17). Fellowship with Christian friends is often the missing ingredient needed to relieve the dulling effects of anxiety and sharpen our spiritual focus, perspective, and discernment concerning God’s answers to our worries.

CONCLUSION

We have carefully examined the subject of worry. The scriptures reveal that it is not God's will that we suffer from anxiety and worry. Not only does the Bible admonish us to "*Be anxious for nothing*" (Phil. 4:6), but it also provides the practical insights needed to achieve a worry-free live. If we will apply the following steps, we will overcome our present worries and effectively prevent future recurrences.

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|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Repentance | 5. Exercise faith |
| 2. Prayer | 6. Renew a proper perspective |
| 3. Discipline our thinking | 7. Seek spiritual refreshing |
| 4. Trust in God's Word | 8. Christian fellowship |

For a brief overview of the main points in this booklet, please re-read the boldly printed words on each page. We also recommend that you read the Mannahouse booklets entitled, "Victory in Affliction" and "Fighting Fear".



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