

HOW TO WORRY AND LIKE IT - PART 1

Dr. John Allan Lavender

Matt.6:29-31

My roommate at the Seattle Convention was Dr. Curtis Nims, one of our fine members who is, as you know, my successor as American Baptist Evangelist, serving as minister-at large to some 6,000 American Baptist Churches. When people of common background, interest and concerns get together, the bull sessions are apt to extend far into the night, which happened on many occasions at Seattle.

I remember one evening, or should I say morning, in particular. We were talking about the matter of guidance and how we, as Christians, can best handle the problems and perplexities of life as we are asked to live it in a world where the deck seems to be stacked against us and where the trump cards appears to be in our opponent's hand.

I had been lying on my bed looking at the ceiling listening to Dr. Nims, when suddenly a great conviction swept over me with tremendous impact. I rolled over on my side, shoved the pillow up under my arm, looked at my friend and said:

“Curtis, I know very little about the present and nothing about the future, but of this one thing I am absolutely sure: God has something better for us than we can plan for ourselves.”

If what I said to Curtis Nims that night in the Olympic Hotel in Seattle, Washington, is true, and with all of my heart I believe it is, then I have a message for you this morning which is worth hearing, remembering and using. For when we build our lives upon the premise that “God has something better for us than we can plan for ourselves,” the future immediately becomes as bright and beautiful, as serene and secure as the all-mighty, all-knowing, all-merciful and loving God in whom we believe.

This morning we begin a series of summer sermons dealing with “Four Skeletons From Every Christian’s Closet: Worry - Gossip - Criticism - Fear”. These four earth demons plague us all. It is imperative, therefore, that we face a fundamental fact:

What we think about God is of supreme importance.

What you believe God is like not only determines your relationship to Him, but your attitude towards the problems and possibilities of life today and eternity tomorrow.

Let me see if I can show you what I mean. This last week I called in the home of some dear people who recently lost a loved one. They were naturally concerned about heaven and its provision, and what becomes of those who die in Christ. One of these dear friends said:

“Pastor, what do you believe happens to us when we die?”

My answer went something like this:

“What I believe about death and life after death is colored completely by what I believe about God. Because I believe in a personal God whose love and concern is towards me as His Child...because I believe Jesus Christ is God couched in human flesh and as the Son of God is a perfect picture of what God is like...and because Christ was compassionate, loving and kind, and said, ‘He that hath seen me has seen the Father’; I therefore know God is compassionate, loving and kind.

“Furthermore, I have proved by personal experience that what Christ said about this life and the way we should live it, is true. The only times I have run into trouble have been those times when I tried to cut my life by a pattern other than His. Because I have found Him faithful and true at every turn in *this* life, I am willing to accept what He says as faithful and true about the life to come.

“And Jesus said: ‘In my father’s house are many mansions. If it were

not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you that where I am there ye may be also.'

"He said: 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'

"He said, 'My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow Me, and I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish...and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.'"

Then I went on to say,

"Everything about these words of Jesus is personal. He is talking about real people in a real relationship with a real and living God. And because I believe in that kind of personal God, I also believe in that kind of personal Heaven— whatever it may be like—and that those who die in Christ are 'absent from the body and present with the Lord' to live in a personal relationship with Him forever."

In substance, that was my answer. I have given it to you this morning to illustrate what I'm trying to say. What I believe about God is fundamental. It is basic. It is bedrock. It colors everything else I say and think and do. That is true of anyone.

H. G. Wells discovered that early in life. When perplexed by the problems he saw about him, he said,

"I don't believe there is a kind, loving God and Father running this world."

He built his life upon that premise. At the conclusion of a life experience built upon the belief that there is no personal God, he wrote his book Mind At The End Of Its Tether. In it he was forced

to say:

“The end of everything is close at hand and cannot be evaded. There is no way out, or around or through the impasse. It is the end. Our universe is not merely bankrupt, it is going clear out of existence. And the attempt to trace a pattern of any kind is absolutely futile.”

Then he went on to describe this wonderful world in which you and I are engaged in the difficult process of living, and he called it

“a convey lost in the darkness off an unknown, rocky coast, with quarreling pilots in the chart rooms.”

What led H. G. Wells to take such an utterly futile and chaotic attitude toward life? It was the premise upon which he began. When a man starts with the assumption that there is no God, or the God that *is* has no personal concern for his needs, desires or dreams, then inevitably he arrives at the conclusion that life is without meaning or purpose, design or destiny, save utter darkness and despair.

That's what accounts for people like William Ospen, the great painter who, at the close of his days, said to a group of people:

“I am a joke, you are a joke, he is a joke. We are jokes, you are jokes, they are jokes.”

Well, life *is* a joke if there isn't any plan or purpose to all these experiences through which we pass. If people are only

“animals with a backbone and highly developed sewerage system”, as someone has described us...if he is only

“a little form of cellular life on our way to the manure heap”, as someone else had said...or if we are

“fighting a long fight against the vast indifference and life which is the

penalty we pay for crime of being born”...
then life is a joke. A great, big, horrendous joke which isn’t very funny!

That’s the inevitable conclusion to which you must come if you fail to see that

“back behind the dark and dim unknown
standeth God, keeping watch above His own”.

Unless you come to know God as a personal Being and, through Christ, enter into a personal relationship with Him, and because of that personal relationship with Him learn to recognize the purpose in life—the master plan behind it all—then you can only build a crude, callous, cheap, and literally Godless philosophy which will make life a mighty sad and sorry thing.

Well, how does one discover there is a purpose? My good friend Dr. Ron Meredith of the great First Methodist Church of Wichita, Kansas, says he does it the same way a scientist makes a discovery of truth.

How does a chemist work out his experiments in the laboratory? He first hazards the guess that this is a lawful universe and if he mixes certain chemicals together under certain conditions, he will get a certain result. He then

“leans his mind out on that guess and puts it to the test.”

He discovers, by experience, that his basic assumption is true. That this is a law-abiding universe and, under certain conditions, if he mixes certain chemicals he will get a certain result *every single time*.

That’s what we must do. We must hazard a guess about God and how he works and then “lean our life” out on it. That’s what a Christian does. He hazards the guess that God is love. He assumes that “like Father, like son”—or as we say of a boy, “he’s a chip off the old block”, meaning he is “the spitting image of his father”—even so, a Christian takes a long look at Christ, who said,

“I and my Father are one” and adds, “like Father, like Son.”

He says,

“Because I know what Christ is like, I know what God is like.”

A Christian is one who goes on to say,

“There is a God who cares about me. Because He cares about me I am going to live my life with a new concept of my worth. I am going to draw upon all of the resources which He has promised to me.”

That's what a Christian is. A Christian is one who “leans his life” out on the guess that God is love and, by experience, proves it true. As a result, he gains the upper hold in this great wrestling match we call life.

You see, it's as simple as that. Dr. Meredith suggests that in religion, as in anything else,

“Ya pays yer money and ya takes yer choice.”

And choose you must! Either there is a God or there isn't. That's all! Either He loves you or He doesn't. That's all! Either He cares about you or He doesn't. That's all! But if He is real, and He is!—with all of my heart I believe that—and if He does love and care for you, and He does!—with all of my heart I believe *that*—then you can face the unknown future in faith and confidence that

“God has something better for you than you can plan for yourself!”

So will you write this down upon the fleshy tablet of your memory:

“What I believe about God determines my relationship to Him and my attitude towards life here and now, and eternity tomorrow. Therefore I am going to square my life away with what I know about God as revealed in Christ. I'm going to begin by hazarding a guess that God is love. I'm going to ‘lean my life’ out on that great assumption. I believe I will prove that God *is* love and thus the future is secure for ‘He has something better for me than I can plan for myself.’”

Are you willing to start there? Please say, “Yes.”

Now then, let us go on to the subject at hand, "How To Worry And Like It!" Because we have a gracious, loving Heavenly Father whose concern is towards us, we have already removed a large part of our worries, for we have committed the unknown future into His almighty hands.

But what about our known problems? What about those very real weights we must bear and those great decisions we must make today? In this sermon I am taking the point of view that worry is not necessarily evil but, as a matter of fact, can be a positive force for good. Therefore we must worry about the right things in the right way.

You see, nothing is really evil in itself. Again let me show you what I mean. Sex is not evil. In fact, the very opposite is true. It is the most wholesome expression of love there is. Only a God with infinite wisdom could have created so profoundly beautiful a plan of procreation as the marriage relationship whereby losing themselves in love for their partner...by seeking to bring contentment to the one they cherish...a man and wife are rewarded, not only by satisfaction for the moment, but by the gift of a little child upon whom they may lavish their love and who, in return, throughout his life, will love them. No, there is nothing evil about sex. It is only when people turn it into a tool to satisfy their lust that it becomes a thing of the street about which we need to blush.

There is nothing evil about killing. When a surgeon applies his knife to the core of a malignant tumor whose tentacles have stretched out like a hideous monster to drain away the strength of someone we love and by killing that cancer, restores life to his patient and to our beloved, that surgeon is doing good and not evil.

When a plague of locusts or grasshoppers descends upon the great wheat plains of our Midwestern states and threatens to endanger the food supply of an entire nation...and the crop dusters come with their airplanes and snuff out the life of those deadly insects with poison gas, they are doing good and not evil.

But when a man, blinded by fury...or motivated by selfishness...or filled with fiery passion...pulls a gun and shoots another human being who, like himself, was created in the image of God...that man has made killing evil. He is a murderer and he must "pay the piper" for his crime.

Nothing is evil in itself. We alone make it so. This is true of worry. It, too, has its negative and positive sides. It can be a tyrant ruling our minds with a ruthless hand, resulting in all kinds of physical and emotional problems. When we allow it to become that, it is evil.

But, put in proper context and allowed to function in its proper way, worry becomes one of the greatest tools for use by the human race which has over been devised. In fact, much, if not all of the progress of civilization is the result of the "worriers of the past" to whom we are indebted.

Worry itself is neutral. We can make it a boon to prod us on to greater heights amid new accomplishments, or we can allow it to become a beast which will destroy us. The burden of this message is that we discover how to worry efficiently and by using it the way God intended us to use it to learn "How To Worry And Like It!"

A few weeks ago the Daily News ran a condensation of Dr. George W. Crane's new book How To Cash In On Your Worries. The thesis of this famous "mind mechanics" book is this: "Don't banish your worries, use them." He begins by saying:

"It's smart to worry. Worry is the sign of surplus I.Q. So encourage worry, don't shun it."

I read that to my secretary and she said,

I didn't realize how smart I am!"

Dr. Crane was not talking about negative worry and neither am I. It is just as great a breach of faith to go on an emotional binge by pampering your fears, both known and unknown, and thus allow yourself to live in an agitated, anxious, neurotic state, as it is to join the cows and pigs of the field whose total lack of intelligence makes it impossible for them to fret, even slightly, over

the problems of life.

There are millions of people, as Dr. Crane points out, living on the ragged edge of life...squandering their pay checks for needless luxuries and then bemoaning the fact that they do not have money for the necessities of life...people who have callously and carelessly anaesthetized themselves against the problems and perils of parenthood, and whose sheer indifference to the hazards of living allows their children to drift into moral and social delinquency. These are they who do not worry enough! As a result, they are part of the disease rather than part of the cure!

Yes, it is important that we worry in the right ways! For it is worry which goads us into self-analysis whereby we become aware of our sin, our inadequacy and our ignorance. And it is worry about that sin and its consequences that goads us into repentance which leads to salvation. It is worry about that inadequacy and its consequences which prods us to hard work which leads to new discoveries and new inventions and better living. And it is worry about our ignorance and its consequences which makes us study which then leads to wisdom and accomplishment. So you can see, it is good to worry in the right way.

Now I've run plumb out of time and we haven't even scratched the surface of our subject. But I wanted to clearly establish the basic premise upon which these summer sermons will be built! What we believe about God is of supreme importance. Would you like me to finish up next Sunday? Please say, "Yes."

Well then, like the radio announcer who says

"Will Mary marry John? Will the twins escape from the perils of La Brea Tar Pits? Tune in next week and find out. Same time. Same station."

If you wish to know how to turn your worries into a positive force for good... if you would like to know how to use them effectively, as a means of solving your problems and

overcoming your perils...

if you wish to know how to release the anxiety and tension which robs you of energy and reduces your productiveness...

if you would really like to learn “How To Worry And Like It!” then come next Sunday. Same time. Same church. And, Lord willing...same preacher.

In the meantime, may I leave you with a true story about a man who discovered the truth of what I have said to you this morning: God always has something better for us than we can plan for ourselves.

He began his business on April 14, 1902, with \$500 in cash and a million dollars in determination, by opening a dry goods store in a little mining town in Wyoming.

At the start he lived with his wife in the attic above the store, using a large empty dry goods box for a table, and smaller boxes for chairs. When their first baby came, the young wife wrapped the baby in a blanket and let him sleep under the counter while she helped her husband wait on customers. Today he heads the largest chain of dry goods stores in the world. Over 1600 of them, covering every state in the union, bear his name, J. C. Penny.

If you'd like to read a thrilling story, a kind of spiritual autobiography, let me loan you my copy of Jim Penney's book Fifty Years With The Golden Rule.

His life, however, was not without problems. Prior to the crash in 1929 he had made some unwise personal commitments and overnight his vast fortune of literally millions of dollars was wiped out. He was left absolutely penniless.

Like so many of us, he blamed everybody else for his problems and he was so harassed with worry he couldn't sleep and developed an extremely painful ailment known as shingles. Finally, he went to a doctor who ordered him to bed immediately, assigning day and night nurses to the

case.

Describing the situation, J. C. Penney writes:

“I was filled with panic. The plain fact was that I did not have money to pay for such care. The doctor prescribed rather strong sedatives to give me a chance to sleep, but nothing seemed to help. I got weaker day by day. I was broken, nervously and physically, filled with despair, unable to see even a ray of hope. I felt as if even my family and friends had forsaken me.

“One night the doctor gave me a sedative, but the effect soon wore off and I awoke with an overwhelming conviction that this was my last night on earth. Things I wanted to say to my wife and children rushed into my mind and I got out of bed, turned on the light and wrote several letters. When they were finished I sealed them, turned out the light and returned to bed, thinking that I would sleep now, never doubting that when the morning came I would no longer be alive.

“But in the morning I was alive. To awaken again was a strange kind of surprise and in some vague way I knew there must be a reason. I got up, put on my clothes, and wandered downstairs thinking I could get some breakfast, but the dining room was not yet opened. I felt as though an immense aloneness had closed me in. I stood there uncertain in an emptiness that seemed to me to have no horizon.

“It was then I heard the thread of an old familiar hymn: ‘Be not dismayed what’er betide, God will take care of you...’

“It seemed to be coming from a part of the building which contained the chapel. Without even knowing it, I moved slowly toward the

sound. The music grew clearer and the words distinct,
‘All you may need he will provide,
God will take care of you.’

“I entered the chapel, sank down in a seat in the back as the song continued:

‘No matter what may be the test,
God will take care of you.
Lean, weary one, upon his breast,
God will take care of you.’

“Quietly, someone read a passage from scripture:

‘Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am meek and lowly in heart and ye shall find rest for your souls; For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.’

“A prayer followed and in myself I spontaneously groaned:

‘Lord, I can do nothing. Will you take care of me?’

“The next few minutes something happened. I cannot explain it. I can only call it a miracle. I had a feeling of being lifted out of an immensity of dark space into a spaciousness of warmth and brilliant sunlight. The thought flashed through my weary mind that if I had held myself responsible for my success, then I was also responsible for my failure. “But the great thing was that now I knew God with His boundless and matchless patient love was there to help me. God had answered me when I cried out:

“Lord, I can do nothing. Wilt You take care of me?”

This was his answer.

“A weight lifted from my spirit. I came out of that room a different man. I had gone in bowed with paralysis of spirit, utterly adrift. I came forth with a soaring sense of release from a bondage of gathering death to a pulse of hopeful living. I had caught a glimpse of God.”

That is what I offer to you this morning: A glimpse of God! Jesus said:

“I and my Father are one. He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.”

Will you take a long look at Christ this morning and see Him for what for He is: the Savior of all mankind? Then will you hazard a guess that God is like Christ? Will you “lean your life” out on that guess, and put it to the test?

If you will work that experiment in the laboratory of your soul, I promise your fears will subside, your cares will be taken away, because your sin will be forgiven. The “gone wrongness” in your life will be corrected. You will be at one with God and you will find this true through all of life’s experiences:

God has something better for you than you can plan for yourself!