

HOW TO WORRY AND LIKE IT - PART 2

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Matt.6:25-34

During one of our Crusades in the state of Maine, I was asked by the pastor to talk to a young couple who were facing a series of rather critical events. I spent about an hour with them and, as they got up to leave, the young man who was just learning to “roll with the punches” life had dealt him, turned and said,

“Sir, wouldn’t it be heavenly if we could banish all our worries?”

His wife, who was blessed with maturity beyond her years, smiled and said something like this:

“No, I think the very opposite would be true. I think this would be a terrible world if we never had to worry about anything. Because, through worry we grow.”

Then she gave her young husband a cute, little, dimpled smile and, with a twinkle in her eye added

“Of course, I know what you’re talking about, honey. You are talking about doing away with all our senseless worries. All those silly little fears and anxieties which keep us on edge all the time. If we could learn how to get rid of those, it would be heavenly!”

What she said was profoundly true. This would be a hellish world if there were no problems to be solved.

No mountains to be conquered.

No horizons to be broadened.

One of the things which really makes life worth living is the fact that this is a world which could be much better than it is and part of our responsibility is to make it so.

A soldier who had seen a great deal of life in his 18 or 19 years was complaining to his pastor

about the abysmal state of our world. What he had seen of man's inhumanity to man had filled his heart with venom. And, with a sneer of cynicism on his lips, he lashed out at God.

"He sure did a lousy job when he made this earth. Talk about situations being all fouled up! Man, this one is really a mess! Even I could have made a better world than this!"

His pastor smiled and said,

"Son, did it ever occur to you that's why you're here? God put you on this planet for the specific purpose of building a better world!"

The pastor had a good answer, didn't he! There is such a thing as creative anxiety which leads to action. Worry of the right kind results in work which often ends with a solution. As that young wife up in Maine said,

"It's through worry that we grow."

She was also right, however, when she suggested what we really need is to get rid of our "senseless worries and silly little fears"...those parasites of the soul which sap our energies and reduce our delight in living.

Well, the purpose of this second half of my sermon is to help us do just that. To learn how to make worry work for you and allow you to thus enjoy abundant life which Christ promised. There are five suggestions I want to make. If you follow them, you will not only stop worrying needlessly, you will start living abundantly.

My first suggestion is that you --

Compartmentalize Your Worries.

That's a \$10 word meaning, "Take One Day At A Time," or budget your worries.

There's nothing new about that idea. Thirty years before Christ was born, the Roman poet

Horace wrote:

“Happy the man, and happy he alone,
He, who can call today his own.
He, who’s secure within, can say:
‘Tomorrow, do thy worst,
For I have lived today.’”

Pretty good advice, even though it is 2,000 years old. Most of us are guilty of the cardinal sin of living for tomorrow and thus missing out on today.

If I could give one word of advice to young people, kids still in their teens, it would be this:

Make Use of Today!!

If you think you have some athletic ability, try out for the team today. Don’t wait ‘till next season when you think you’ll have a better chance.

If you want to be an actress, join the drama club today; don’t wait ‘till you’re a senior.

If there is a “special girl” you’d like to be friends with, ask her for a date today; if she’s the girl you think she is, tomorrow will be too late! Some other eager beaver will beat you to her.

If you have some great ambition that has been with you since you were a child, start on it now.

Do something about it today! Don’t make the mistake of so many of your elders who were always looking to tomorrow and now, as a result, look back at the past only to discover they have been existing instead of living. In place of real accomplishments, they find their unrealized dreams lying shattered at their feet like bits of broken rainbow.

Stephen Leacock came at this same idea with a paragraph whose poignancy pierces through all the cobwebs of our procrastination in living. He wrote:

“How strange it is, our little procession of life! The child says,
‘When I’m a big boy.’ But what is that? The big boy says, ‘When I
grow up.’ And then, grown up, he says, ‘When I get married.’ But
to be married, what is that after all? The thought changes to,

‘When I’m able to retire.’ And then, when retirement comes, he looks back over the landscape traversed; a cold wind seems to sweep over it; somehow, he has missed it all and it is gone. Life, we learn too late, is in the living, in the tissue of every day and hour.”

What a powerful statement that is.

“Life is in the living, in the tissue of every day and hour.”

How we ought to burn it upon our minds and engrave it upon our hearts. Repeat it with me:

“Life is in the living, in the tissue of every day and hour.”

Therefore, live today! For

“This is the day which the Lord hath made, let us rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118:24).

Sir William Osler, the founder of the world famous John Hopkins School of Medicine, a man who was knighted by the King of England and the recipient of the highest honors ever bestowed on a medical man in the British empire, was well aware of making the most of today. As a constant reminder that the only real life we know is the moment in which we are living, William Osler kept this poem on his desk where he could always see it.

“Look to this day! For it is life,
The very life of life.
In its brief course lie all the verities and realities of
Your existence:
“The bliss of growth. The glory of action.
The splendor of achievement.
For yesterday is but a dream
And tomorrow is only a vision,
But today, well lived, makes every
Yesterday a dream of happiness

And every tomorrow a vision of hope.
Look well, therefore, to this day!
Such is the salutation of the dawn.”

What does all this have to do with our worries? The answer is quite simple. Because we can only live today, there is nothing else really worth worrying about *but* today! So, compartmentalize your worries by being concerned only with what concerns today.

Thomas Carlyle put it this way:

“Our main business is not to see what lies dimly at a distance, but to do what lies clearly at hand.”

In the verse which is our text, Jesus said in twenty-six words what modern psychiatry is now echoing nearly 2,000 years later:

“Take no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought of the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

Many a hard-headed, practical business man has sloughed off these words of Jesus as foolish and fantastic. The jibberings of a demented dreamer.

“I must take thought for tomorrow,” he says, “I must plan for the future. I must provide for my family’s protection. To take no thought for tomorrow would be idiotic.”

Of course! And that’s not what Jesus is saying. The translation as we have it in the King James Version is unfortunate, for what Jesus really said, as J. B. Phillips points out in his brand new translation of the gospels is

“Don’t worry about tomorrow. Tomorrow can take care of itself.
One day’s trouble is enough for one day.”

Certainly we must think about tomorrow and plan for tomorrow, but what Jesus said is

“Don’t get anxious and agitated about tomorrow.”

That is, “Live One Day At A Time.”

Rev. John Homer Miller, author of Take A Look At Yourself, tells of a parrot which was kept in a cage hanging over the doorway at a hunting lodge in Pennsylvania. As the members of the club passed through the door, the parrot repeated over and over the only words he knew:

“One at a time, gentlemen, one at a time.”

That’s how we ought to handle our problems, “one at a time, gentlemen” and, one day at a time!

To take the potential perils of tomorrow and the past mistakes of yesterday and add them to the present problems of today will make an intolerable load and even the strongest will falter. So we need to learn to “live in day tight compartments”, as someone has said. We need to learn how to budget our worries, facing today’s concerns today, “letting the dead past bury its dead” and leaving the unknown future in the hands of our heavenly Father who has something better for us that we can plan for ourselves.

So, my first suggestion is to “compartmentalize your worries.” Turn your back on the past and, in every healthy way, close your eyes to the future. Learn to say with John H. Newman who, beset with fear, perplexed by doubt and distraught with worry, finally learned the secret of abundant living when he wrote, “One step enough for me.”

“Lead, kindly light...

Keep Thou my feet:

I do not ask to see

The distant scene

One step enough for me.”

My second suggestion is next of kin to the first --

Capitalize On the Divine Directive to Rest One Day in Seven.

In other words, “Take time off from your worries!” The good Lord worked six days and then rested. When we try to improve upon that plan, we’re in trouble.

Dr. George W. Crane points out that along with its spiritual implications,
“respect for the Sabbath has both a psychological and medical
advantage.”

If we spend our Sundays and holidays worrying about our work-a-day problems, if we carry our burdens to bed with us and allow them to rob us of our badly needed sleep, we're well on our way to a first class neurosis.

If we're going to learn How to Worry and Like It, then we've got to take a vacation from our worries once in a while. We've got to learn how to use Sunday the way God intended us to use it: for worship, rest and recreation. And we've got to learn to lay down our troubles when we go to bed at night.

Dr. Crane uses the illustration of a man carrying a suitcase and points out that when he stops to converse with a friend, he usually sets the suitcase down. When he gets on the train or plane, he doesn't wear himself out by holding it throughout the trip. In much the same manner, he suggested that “efficient worrying” means we must learn to lay down our worries at regular intervals in order that we may catch our breath.

“Some problems cannot be solved in an hour or even a day.”

So, suggestion number two is capitalize upon the divine directive to rest one day in seven and, whatever your problem, lay it down at bedtime and on Sunday.

Now, when you begin to learn How to Worry and Like It, you'll discover there are some things even you can't change. So my third suggestion is –

Cooperate With The Inevitable.

I don't mean we must become fatalists, like the Muhammadans and Hindus who blame all the tragedies and difficulties of life upon the whims of a ruthless God against whom it is useless to strive. No! As long as there is the slightest possibility we can salvage the situation, then let's

give it a try! But when common sense tells us we are up against something which cannot be changed, then let's quit beating our heads against the wall.

Henry Ford put it this way.

“When I can't handle events, I let them handle themselves.”

K. T. Keller, former president of the Chrysler Corporation, said

“When I'm up against a tough situation, if I can do anything about it, I do it. If I can't, I just forget it.”

Epictetus, the Roman philosopher, said something similar 19 centuries ago:

“There is only one way to happiness, and that is to cease worrying about things which are beyond the power of our will.”

All these men are simply saying: “Cooperate with the inevitable” or, as the Mother Goose rhyme puts it:

“For every ailment under the sun,
There is a remedy, or there is none:
If there be one, try to find it.
If there be none, never mind it!”

None of us is so endowed with emotional and physical energy that we are able to wage war on both the inevitable and that part of our life which can be changed. Therefore, we must

“either bend with the inevitable sleet storms of life or resist them
and break.”

I have a friend out in California by the name of Bud Estes. He holds a black-belt in jujitsu which means he has achieved the highest possible excellence in that art. Bud was giving me a few lessons in the fine art of self defense, which has come in handy a time or two in some of our family disputes, and I remember he said the basic secret of jujitsu is found in the maxim

“Bend like the willow, don't resist like the oak.”

That's what we must do with our worries. We must learn to “roll with the punches” life hurls at

us. We must “bend like the willow” for if we resist, we will create inner tensions and conflicts which will destroy us. We must cooperate with the inevitable.

Reinhold Niebuhr, the famous theologian, cut right through to the heart of the matter in this little prayer which he wrote and which Alcoholics Anonymous has adopted as its official statement of faith.

“Grant me the serenity,
To accept the things I cannot change:
The courage to change the things I can;
And the wisdom to know the difference.”

If you would learn How to Worry and Like It, you must not only Compartmentalize your worries, and Capitalize upon the divine directive to take a vacation from them once in a while, but you must Cooperate with the inevitable. The fourth suggestion is that you --

Come at Your Problems With a Logical Plan of Attack.

Dale Carnegie has a wonderful book entitled, How To Stop Worrying And Start Living. If you would like to read something which is both inspirational and instructive, I highly recommend it. He has a knack of saying what others have said in such a succinct way it hits you right in the solar plexus with a Sunday punch which says, “That makes sense! Why didn’t I think of it before?”

A number of the ideas I’m offering to you this morning are gleaned from his book and this is one of them. Actually, it’s a combination of two ideas which I picked up when I first read the book back in my college days and which I have tried to put into practice ever since. I guarantee that if you follow this “magic formula” it will carry you a long way toward your goal of learning How to Worry and Like It!

It consists of seven simple steps.

1. What is the problem? Write it down! Writing it down serves two purposes. First of all, it

clears up your fuzzy thinking and helps you see what you're really up against. Secondly, it cuts the problem down to size. The very act of writing it out often makes it much less formidable. As Charles Kittering puts it, "A problem well stated is a problem half solved."

2. What's the worst that can possibly come out of this? Accept it! The key word there is "accept". Lin Yutang, the famous Chinese philosopher, said, "Peace of mind comes from accepting the worst." Why is that? Well, when we accept the worst as a very real possibility and adjust our thinking accordingly, we suddenly wake up to the fact we have nothing more to lose or, in other words, we have everything to gain! More than that, we also often discover the worst thing that could possibly happen is not so bad after all. Have you heard the story of the fellow who said:

"Why worry! There are only two things which can happen. Either I'm well or I'm sick. If I'm well, there's nothing to worry about. If I'm sick, there are only two things to worry about. Either I get better or I get worse. If I get better, there's nothing to worry about. If I get worse, there are only two things to worry about. Either I live or I die. If I live, there's nothing to worry about. If I die, there's only two things to worry about. Either I go to heaven or I go to "the other place". If I go to heaven, there's nothing to worry about. If I go to "the other place", I'll be so busy talking to my friends I won't have time to worry!"

So the second simple step in our plan of attack is to accept the worst as a real possibility.

3. What can I do to improve upon that worst? When you get that far you've already stopped worrying and started thinking and are ready to go for the fourth step.

4. What is the cause of the problem? Write that down, too, so you have something concrete before you which you can carefully analyze. Then take Step 5.

5. What are all the possible solutions to this problem? Write them down. When you get this far, you may reach a blind alley and find you can't think of any real solutions. That's when you ought to put your subconscious to work.

How do you do that? Any one of several ways. If it's late at night, go to sleep. It will surprise you how many times you will wake up in the morning with the answer right on the tip of your tongue.

If it's in the day, find a comfortable chair and sit down or, better yet, lie down on the living room sofa if you're home. Close your eyes and try to put your mind in neutral. Believe it or not, that won't be easy. But try to block out every thought in your head and pretty soon your subconscious mind will begin to toss ideas and impressions and past experiences up into your conscious mind. Things which you have long ago forgotten which apply directly upon your problem. After you have written down all these possible solutions, take Step 6.

6. Which one, or combination, of these alternatives shall I take? And then

7. Get busy! You see, so much of our problem is not ignorance, but inaction. The good Lord will never do for you what you can and should do for yourself. So once a course of action has been decided, get busy and, as it were, "work out your own salvation."

Maybe you have a better formula. If so, use it! The important thing is *not* that you do what I suggest but that you come at your problem with a logical plan of attack.

My final suggestion is --

Count Heavily Upon God.

Here we go back to our original premise given in last Sunday's sermon. Because of what we believe about God we can rest assured He has something better for us than we can plan for

ourselves.

Dr. William James, who was professor of philosophy at Harvard University, said

“The sovereign cure for worry is religious faith. It is one of the forces by which men live. A total absence of it means collapse.”

One of the most distinguished psychiatrists of any day is Dr. Carl Jung, and in his monumental work Modern Man In Search Of A Soul, he says

“During the past thirty years, people from all the civilized countries of the earth have consulted me. I have treated many hundreds of patients. Among all of my patients in the second half of life, that is to say over 35, there has not been one whose problem, in the last resort, was not finding a religious outlook on life. It is safe to say that every one of them fell ill because they had lost that which the living religions of every age have given to their followers. And none of them has been really healed who did not regain their religious outlook.”

The Psalmist said,

“Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in Him and He shall bring it to pass” (Psalm 37:5).

The book of Proverbs adds

“In all thy ways, acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy path” (Prov. 3:6).

If you will place your life in the hands of Almighty God, you’ll find an inner peace and tranquility which will sustain you amid the storms of life.

You’ll become like the ocean, the surface of which may be tossed and torn by the turbulent winds which blow, but the depths of which are undisturbed. Get hold of God. Let God get hold of you. And the hourly vicissitudes of life will seem small and insignificant. You will have a heart-peace

and a soul-calm which will make you ready for any duty the day may bring.

Mr. Carnegie has a touching story on Page 154 of his book which sums up what I mean when I say, "Count heavily upon God." It's a letter from a woman he calls Mary Cushman. In it, she tells how during the depression, her husband's average salary was \$18/week. Many times they didn't even have that because he didn't get paid when he was ill, and that was often. He had a series of minor accidents. He often had mumps, scarlet fever and repeated attacks of the flu.

They lost the little house they had built with their own hands. They owed \$50 at the grocery store and had five children to feed. She took in washing and ironing from the neighbors and bought second-hand clothes from the Salvation Army store and made them over for her children to wear. She was sick with worry.

One day the grocer to whom they owed \$50 accused her 11 year old boy of stealing a couple of pencils. The boy wept as he told his mother about it. She knew he was honest and sensitive and that he had been disgraced and humiliated in front of other people.

That was the straw which broke her back. She thought of all the miseries they had endured and couldn't see any hope for the future. But, let her tell you about it in her own words.

"I must have become temporarily insane with worry, for I shut off my washing machine, took my little five year old daughter into the bedroom and plugged up the windows and cracks with paper and rags.

"My little girl said to me, 'Mommy, what are you doing?' I said, 'There's a little draft in here.' And then I turned on the gas heater we had in the bedroom and didn't light it.

"As I lay down on the bed with my daughter beside me, she said,

‘Mommy, this is funny. We just got up a little while ago.’ But I said, ‘Never mind. We’ll take a little nap.’ Then I closed my eyes, listening to the gas escape from the heater. I shall never forget the smell of the gas.

“Suddenly, I thought I heard music. I listened. I had forgotten to turn the radio off in the kitchen. It didn’t matter now, but the music kept on, and presently I heard someone singing an old hymn.

“What a friend we have in Jesus
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer.

“Oh, what peace we often forfeit
Oh, what needless pain we bear
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!”

“As I listened to that hymn, I realized I had made a terrible mistake. I had tried to fight all my terrible battles alone. I had not taken everything to God in prayer. I jumped up, turned off the gas, opened the door, and raised the windows.

“I wept and prayed all the rest of that day. Only I didn’t pray for help. Instead, I poured out my soul in thanksgiving to God for the blessing He had given me: five splendid children, all of them healthy and fine, strong in body and health. I promised God that never again would I prove so ungrateful. And I have kept that promise.”

“As I look back on that terrible day when I turned on the gas, I thank God over and over that I woke up in time. What joys I would have missed if I had carried out that act. Whenever I hear now of someone who wants to end their life, I feel like crying out, ‘Don’t do it! Don’t! The blackest moments we live through can only last a little time, and then comes the future.’”

And what do we believe about the future? We believe it’s secure for we have a loving, heavenly Father who cares. We know He has something better for us than we can plan for ourselves.

So, let’s worry about the right things in the right way. Let’s do it by following these simple steps.

Lets --

Compartmentalize our worries,
Capitalize upon the divine directive to rest one day in seven,
Cooperate with the inevitable,
Come at our problems with a logical plan of attack, and
Count heavily upon our Lord who said --

“Don’t worry and keep saying, ‘What shall we eat, what shall we drink or what shall we wear?’ That is what pagans are always looking for; your heavenly Father knows you need them all. Set your heart on His Kingdom and His goodness, and all these things will come to you as a matter of course. Don’t worry at all then about tomorrow. Tomorrow can take care of itself! One day’s trouble is enough for one day” (Matt.6:25-34 - J.B. Phillips translation).