



# WORRY OR PRAY— YOU CHOOSE

ROSEMARIE SCOTTI HUGHES

(Luke 12:22-31)



grandmother worries about a 12-year-old grandson with dropping grades and bad friends. When she reads Jesus' words, "Do not worry," she wonders how she can care about him and not worry about his future.

A homeowner sits down to pay a stack of bills. Every month he goes through the exercise of writing checks and then deciding, *if* there is surplus, where that goes. When he reads Luke 12:22-31, he feels a reproach because he worries about finances.

A woman's 17-year-old son is long overdue with the family car, and she's sitting up worrying that he may have gotten into trouble.

An employee is in turmoil considering a company move and promotion. She's worried about uprooting the family and starting over somewhere else. She recently read Luke 12 about not being worried, but she still gets butterflies in her stomach every time she thinks about this move.

Like these people, we all worry about our finances, our loved ones, our jobs, our health, and a host of other life issues. It may be hard to relate to Jesus' words concerning worry. After all, Jesus had no children, no boss, no rent to pay. Jesus never had to grocery shop for a family and make dollars stretch, or car pool kids to sports, try to make the PTA meeting, and put dinner on the table. Jesus never had to take care of his elderly parents and help his teenagers plan for college at the same time. How can we apply His teaching about not worrying to twenty-first-century life?

Actually, these passages are more for us today than ever. In a materialistic, consumption-minded, technological world, Jesus is telling us to order our priorities:

"Seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you" (Luke 12:31). For most of us, however, there is a large gap between managing our day-to-day lives and seeking God's kingdom. In order to achieve the peace of God, to not be overwhelmed by the pressures of life, we have to *change*. We read that we cannot add a single hour to our life by worrying and fretting, but because worrying is what we know best, it's what we do first, especially in stressful situations.

Being concerned can be positive when it propels us to action—such as seeing a doctor when we are ill or a mechanic when the car sounds strange. But worry is unproductive. Worry becomes a negative in our life, taking its toll on our health, loved ones, productivity, and relationship with God. If we have been worried about two or more topics more days than not in the past six months, if we are focusing on situations of worry more than we are the other business of life, and if we are having feelings of our lives being out of control, then our worrying has risen to an unhealthy level.

Take, for example, two "mothers of the groom." For months, the first goes to every dress store in town, anxiously pricing, comparing, buying, and then returning what she bought. At the wedding, still worrying about her appearance, she is frazzled, worn out, and can barely enjoy the day.

Contrast her behavior with the second

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mother, who *first* prays to the Lord to help her find what she needs within her price range and without using a lot of time—and to help her not to worry about it. She finds what she needs in one trip. She puts the situation in God's hands—seeking the kingdom first. The other things fall into place and she is able to enjoy the wedding.

To seek first the kingdom means to pray *first*, releasing our fears and worries to the Lord. A change in behavior and in a particular attitude follows as we make some appropriate changes to our lifestyle. Taking some steps to change our lives will help us bridge the gap between worrying and operating in faith. These changes will ultimately help us live in power, love, sound judgment, self-control, calm, and balance. For example:

- Get facts and expert advice to prevent worrying unrealistically about a situation.
- Set deadlines to make decisions, rather than ruminating forever.
- Limit worrying to a "worry list," and take that list to the Lord in your daily Bible and prayer time.
- Delegate chores and other responsibilities.
- Give yourself permission to relax, and to make mistakes.
- Eat, sleep, and exercise properly.
- Try to see the humor in a situation, to keep a sense of perspective.
- De-clutter and organize, using calendars and to-do lists.
- Realize that you will not please everyone all the time.
- Learn to say no.
- Ask yourself, "What's the worst that can happen—and is it likely to?"
- Mentally put your worries in a box with a lid and put them on the top shelf of your closet. No peeking!

To say that we are waiting on the Lord, and then to go around with a sense of

worry, misery, and dread, is to contradict the truth. Jesus modeled *prayer* when He went to the desert to fast and pray. Jesus also modeled *action* when He healed, taught, and followed God every step of the way. To be walking in peace, in calm, in trust, and in assurance is to find the balance of prayer and action, and ultimately, freedom from worry.

#### FURTHER MEDITATION:

Other passages to study about the issue of worry include:

- Psalm 55:22
- Matthew 6:25–34
- John 14:27
- Philippians 4:6–9
- 2 Timothy 1:7
- 1 Peter 5:7

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To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on worry at Luke 12:22–31 on page 1339. See also the personality profile of Martha on page 1335.

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<sup>28</sup>And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live."

<sup>29</sup>But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

<sup>30</sup>Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup>Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup>Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup>But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. <sup>34</sup>So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

<sup>35</sup>On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' <sup>36</sup>So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?"

<sup>37</sup>And he said, "He who showed mercy on him."

Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

#### MARY AND MARTHA WORSHIP AND SERVE

<sup>38</sup>Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house.

<sup>39</sup>And she had a sister called Mary, who also

10:35 <sup>a</sup>NU-Text omits *when he departed*.



Worry

### PERSONALITY PROFILE

## MARTHA: WORRIED ABOUT MANY THINGS

(LUKE 10:38-42)

Many people bristle at the criticism Jesus leveled against Martha. After all, if everyone was like Mary, we reason, nobody would have a decent meal or a clean house! But there was more to this story than just Martha's desire to feed her guests. Jesus, who knows all, looked deep inside Martha to deal with a problem that could eventually cause her to be ineffective for Him—the problem of worry.

Martha apparently loved entertaining and so probably was good at it. When Jesus arrived in Bethany, Martha invited Him to her home. Martha had a sister named Mary, and a brother named Lazarus (whom Jesus would later raise from the dead). As Martha busied herself with the dinner (most likely feeding Jesus meant feeding His twelve disciples as well), Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened to Him teach. Martha needed help, and so asked Jesus to ask Mary to get up and help her. But Jesus explained that Mary had "chosen that good part" and He would not take it away from her.

Jesus was not condemning Martha for caring about preparing a good meal, nor was He showing a lack of appreciation for her hard work. Martha's efficiency, however, seems to have been fueled by too much concern about appearances or nervous activity. She had become impatient and critical. Jesus wanted to teach her about setting priorities and setting aside worries. Martha obviously had the ability to be hospitable and would do it well no matter how much (or how little) she worried about it. Jesus advised her to set aside the worry and enjoy her guest—namely Himself—for He had much to teach her.

Worry never accomplishes anything—except to make us ill or ineffective. When we find ourselves worrying, we need to change our perspective and priorities, and then, most of all, we need to pray for faith in God's provision. God will shoulder the worry and give us His peace. Then we can focus on "that good part" that Christ promises will never be taken away.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about worry on pages 1340, 1341. See also the key passage note at Luke 12:22-31 on page 1339.

### THE WILDERNESS WAY

<sup>17</sup>Then it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, "Lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt." <sup>18</sup>So God led the people around by way of the wilderness of the Red Sea. And the children of Israel went up in orderly ranks out of the land of Egypt.

<sup>19</sup>And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had placed the children of Israel under solemn oath, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here with you."<sup>a</sup>

<sup>20</sup>So they took their journey from Succoth and camped in Etham at the edge of the wilderness. <sup>21</sup>And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. <sup>22</sup>He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people.

### THE RED SEA CROSSING

**14** Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>1</sup>"Speak to the children of Israel, that they turn and camp before Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, opposite Baal Zephon; you shall camp before it by the sea. <sup>2</sup>For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, 'They are bewildered by the land; the wilderness has closed them in.' <sup>3</sup>Then I will harden Pharaoh's heart, so that he will pursue them; and I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD." And they did so.

<sup>5</sup>Now it was told the king of Egypt that the

people had fled, and the heart of Pharaoh and his servants was turned against the people; and they said, "Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?" <sup>6</sup>So he made ready his chariot and took his people with him. <sup>7</sup>Also, he took six hundred choice chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt with captains over every one of them. <sup>8</sup>And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the children of Israel; and the children of Israel went out with boldness. <sup>9</sup>So the Egyptians pursued them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and overtook them camping by the sea beside Pi Hahiroth, before Baal Zephon.

<sup>10</sup>And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD. <sup>11</sup>Then they said to Moses, "Because *there were* no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? <sup>12</sup>Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, 'Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For *it would have been* better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness."

<sup>13</sup>And Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. <sup>14</sup>The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace."

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EXODUS 14:14

13:19 <sup>a</sup>Genesis 50:25

### SOUL NOTE



**Panic or Power (14:10)** The Israelites found themselves trapped between Pharaoh's army and the waters of the Red Sea. In panic, they accused Moses of leading them to their deaths (14:11, 12). By this time, Moses had seen enough of the power of God to respond in confidence. He told the frightened Israelites: "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD" (14:13). Then God miraculously parted the waters (14:21, 22). What unyielding obstacles are you facing? Don't panic. Instead, turn to God and trust in His power to do what seems impossible. **Topic: Worry**

whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

#### YOU CANNOT SERVE GOD AND RICHES

<sup>24</sup>“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

#### DO NOT WORRY

<sup>25</sup>“Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body

more than clothing? <sup>26</sup>Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? <sup>27</sup>Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?

<sup>28</sup>“So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; <sup>29</sup>and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. <sup>30</sup>Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more *clothe* you, O you of little faith?

### KEY PASSAGE



Prayer

## OPENING HEAVEN'S GATES

(6:5-13)

Jesus taught that prayer should arise from people's sincere love for God—not from a love of show or ritual. The prayer that Jesus taught His disciples provides the perfect example of prayer.

- The first words of the prayer express adoration and love for God as Father.
- The next phrases express submission to God and trust in His power and promises: “Your kingdom come. Your will be done.”
- Then the prayer asks God for daily provision.
- The prayer also gives opportunity to express repentance, asking for forgiveness according to how the person praying forgives others.
- Next follows a request for help in resisting temptation and in fighting sin.
- The final sentence recognizes that everything belongs to God and is under His control.

Our prayers should include elements of adoration, submission, petition, repentance, and praise to God.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about prayer on pages 1238, 1239. See also the personality profile of Jesus on page 1252.

### SOUL NOTE



**Mind Clutter** (6:25-34) Worry fills people's minds with useless clutter that leaves no room for God. Worry clouds perspective, causing people to focus on themselves rather than on God. Jesus said that God feeds the birds and clothes the flowers, so He will take care of His children. Trusting God involves trusting Him to care for us. Jesus tells us to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” As believers we still must work to meet our needs; we don't sit back and expect God to do it all. We work, but we don't worry. We know that God will care for us. **Topic: Worry**



which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. <sup>14</sup>That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

<sup>15</sup>This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes. <sup>16</sup>The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; <sup>17</sup>but when he arrived in Rome, he sought me out very zealously and found me. <sup>18</sup>The Lord grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord in that Day—and you know very well how many ways he ministered to me<sup>a</sup> at Ephesus.

things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. <sup>3</sup>You therefore must endure<sup>a</sup> hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup>No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of *this* life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. <sup>5</sup>And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. <sup>6</sup>The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops. <sup>7</sup>Consider what I say, and may<sup>a</sup> the Lord give you understanding in all things.

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#### BE STRONG IN GRACE

**2** You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup>And the

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#### KEY PASSAGE



#### Motherhood

### MORE THAN FULL TIME

(1:5)

When God had told the first couple, Adam and Eve, to “fill the earth” (Gen. 1:28), He had created woman with the capacity to carry and give birth to another living being. Nowhere else in the animal kingdom are mothers so vital to their children for such a long time. No other animals have the same emotional ties that humans carry throughout their lifetimes. Nowhere else are mothers and grandmothers so honored.

Being a mother is a high calling and must be entered into with thought and preparation. Young women should wait until they are married to take on this huge responsibility. Women who have experienced divorce or widowhood need special support as they continue to mother alone. Most important, every mother needs a personal relationship with her heavenly Father to guide her in her most important occupation—being a mom.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about motherhood on pages 1312, 1313. See also the personality profile of Mary the mother of Jesus on page 1315.

#### SOUL NOTE



**Worry Replacers (1:7)** Those who worry are not trusting God. Worry can be a natural first reaction to an uncertain situation, but to persist in worry reveals a lack of trust that God is in charge. Besides, God has not given believers “a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” Power helps us have strength of character and confidence in any situation. Love helps us graciously deal with difficult people. A *sound mind* helps us remain self-controlled and self-disciplined no matter what happens. We can set aside our worry and replace it with these gifts from God.

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