



THE GARDEN

9 WEEK BIBLE STUDY

embrace

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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?

So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

MATTHEW 6:25, 28-29 (NKJV)

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Consider the Lilies

Big Idea

The gospel of Matthew, chapter 6, records one of Jesus' greatest sermons. In the middle of the message, He turns His focus to address anxiety and worry. The Sermon on the Mount was delivered on a hill north of the Sea of Galilee, which was later named the 'Mount of Beatitudes.' Thousands gathered in expectation to hear His profound and revolutionary teachings. Isn't it interesting that Jesus deals with many of the same struggles we deal with today? Like loving our neighbor, how we should pray, not judging others, and not falling prey to the love of money.

Jesus takes particular care to warn us not to worry about what we will eat, drink, or wear. He says, "Look at all the beautiful flowers of the field. They don't work or toil, and yet not even Solomon in all his splendor was robed in beauty like one of these!" (Matthew 6:28-29 TPT). For Jesus to use Solomon as an example is quite profound. The Jewish community knew that Solomon was the wealthiest man in the world. He lacked nothing. We could safely guess that the net worth of his fortune was in the multiple billions of dollars.

Now to put that into perspective, Jesus is saying that the flowers of the field are far greater and more beautiful than all of Solomon's riches.

Jesus was declaring our incredible value and worth. The flowers don't toil to grow and bloom, yet their beauty is unsurpassed in all creation. In the same way, we need not worry or toil, for when we are doing what God created us to do, He promises to provide for our every need. So why do we worry so much? Why are we consumed with anxiety about tomorrow's worries? What is worry, and why are we prone to it?

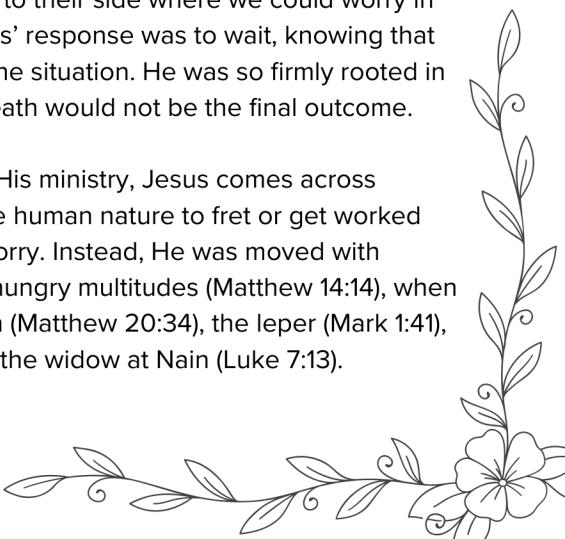
As a noun, worry is defined as "a state of anxiety and uncertainty over actual or potential problems." The verb, to worry, "means to give way to anxiety or unease; allow one's mind to dwell on difficulty or troubles" (Oxford Languages). There's that word "dwell" again.

In our Garden Dwellers lesson, we learned that to “dwell” means to be fully present in a place or with a person. How easy is it to dwell on our worries and fears rather than on God’s goodness and faithfulness? Has it ever occurred to you that when you worry, you’re making your home in your difficulties or troubles?

Corrie Ten Boom famously said, “Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, it empties today of its strength.” So why do we worry? According to an article in Psychology Today (October 7, 2016, Seth J. Gillihan, Ph.D.), we believe that the act of worrying somehow lowers the likelihood of a dreaded outcome and that if we stop worrying, we might invite trouble. We try to preempt disappointment by predicting bad news before it blindsides us. Some of us believe that worry is a strong motivator to action. Psychologically, worry has the opposite effect. It is not only counter-productive but can even become paralyzing. Perhaps our greatest reason for worry is our belief that if we don’t worry, it would mean that we don’t care. This couldn’t be further from the truth. It’s important that we learn to distinguish between worrying and caring. When we care about a situation, we will dedicate all of our energy to help the situation turn out well. Worrying about the situation, by comparison, will sap us of our energy, and result in fruitlessness.

Consider how Jesus responded to concerning news or troubling circumstances. When Jesus received word that his friend Lazarus was ill, we see two things: Jesus loved Lazarus and his family (John 11:5), and Lazarus was going to die (John 11:4). What would your reaction be if you found out someone you loved dearly was on their deathbed? Most of us would be motivated to rush to their side where we could worry in close proximity to them. But Jesus’ response was to wait, knowing that God would be glorified through the situation. He was so firmly rooted in God’s promises, He knew that death would not be the final outcome.

Time and time again throughout His ministry, Jesus comes across distressing situations. Despite the human nature to fret or get worked up, His response was never to worry. Instead, He was moved with compassion. When He sees the hungry multitudes (Matthew 14:14), when He encounters the two blind men (Matthew 20:34), the leper (Mark 1:41), and when He sees the sorrow of the widow at Nain (Luke 7:13).



In each of these circumstances, His compassion motivated Him toward action. He fed the 5,000, restored sight to the blind, healed the leper, and raised the widow's son from the dead!

Jesus' heart for us is that we would not make our dwelling place in the daunting corners of distress. Answer the question He asks in Matthew 6:27: Can you add anything to your life by worrying? No! If we can grasp how much God loves us, and accept that we matter to Him, we can live in the truth that He will always take care of us. We needn't concern ourselves with what we will eat, drink or wear, because our Heavenly Father knows that we need them. What would the world around us look like if, instead of meeting circumstances with fear and anxiety, we approached them with a heart of compassion and faith? The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is alive in you right this moment. Through that power, Jesus promised that we would do greater miracles than even He did during His ministry.

Friends, when anxiety gets a hold of us, and worry takes the wind from our sails, the fear can be paralyzing. We feel like we'll never escape the darkness. The enemy's favorite trick is to isolate us so we feel all alone while he plants seeds of doubt in our minds. Let's do as it says in 2 Corinthians 10:5 and take captive every thought and demolish every fantasy that rises up in defiance of the true knowledge of God. Your healing, your breakthrough, and your promise are just on the other side of your worry. Embrace the truth that your Father cares about you with the deepest affection, and watches over you very carefully. Because of His love, you can cast all your cares, anxieties, worries, and concerns on Him, once and for all (1 Peter 5:7 AMP).

If we make a habit of seeking the Gardner, those seeds of doubt won't have a chance to send down roots and sprout. "Refuse to worry about tomorrow, but deal with each challenge that comes your way, one day at a time. Tomorrow will take care of itself" (Matthew 6:34 TPT). In order to live a life free of worry, let us "set our minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Colossians 3:2). Keep seeking first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all things—what you eat, drink and wear, and any and every concern you have over your well-being—will be added unto you (Matthew 6:33).

Discussion

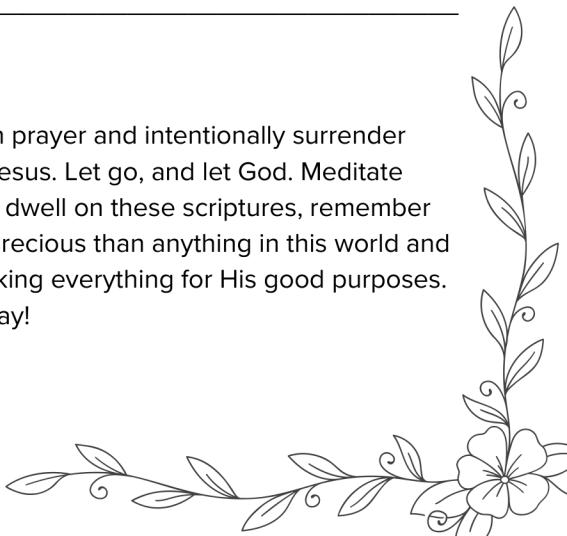
Have you ever worried about something so much that it consumed your thoughts, yet never turned out as badly as you imagined? What could you have done differently?

What you focus on, you will fuel! What do you find yourself focusing on? How can you shift your focus from worrying about dreaded outcomes to rejoicing in God's promises?

Practice turning your worry into worship, your anxiety into admiration, and your fear into faith. Pause for a moment, whether you're in a group or on your own, and put all these things into action by surrendering every worry in prayer.

Takeaway

Take time to lift up every worry in prayer and intentionally surrender those worries into the hands of Jesus. Let go, and let God. Meditate daily on Philippians 4:4-7. As you dwell on these scriptures, remember that you are more valuable and precious than anything in this world and that your Heavenly Father is working everything for His good purposes. Release worry, and trust Him today!



Dear Beautiful One,

I have an incredible plan for you. Put your hand in Mine and see where I can take you. My desire is for you to be free of care, not full of it. The more you spend time with me, the more you realize that you have nothing to fear. Seek me and the fellowship with other believers.

You can trust me completely.

I am your protector and provider.