

The Most Excellent Way, First Baptist Church, Panama City

“Overcoming Worry and Fear”

Part 4 - “Worry and the Thought Life”

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Part 4 - "Worry and the Thought Life"

We could say with confidence that worry has the potential to take our thought life captive. When worry becomes a stronghold it seems that all that a person can think about is what they worry about. If the objective of our adversary is to steal, kill and destroy, we can be sure that one of his strategies to accomplish his objective is worry. Worry has the potential to steal our time, our energy, our peace, our productivity, and a list of other things.

The Bible has much to say concerning our thought life and/or the way we think and the things we think about. It also instructs us regarding what we are to think about that can help us to overcome worry and fear. The struggle when it comes to worry, and fear is the challenge with what to think about other than the things we worry about. When worry turns into fear it can have a crippling effect. The Bible has an incredible way of changing the way that we think. This is described as the "renewing of the mind" that Paul writes about in **Romans 12:1,2**. Since worry had everything to do with what we think and the way that we think, we need to go to the Bible to "rethink" when it comes to worry.

Philippians 4:8 - Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

There are principles, instructions and examples in the Bible concerning the way that we ought to think, but there may not be any better than this verse to show us the "specifics" of right thinking. As we look at these eight things that Paul couples in four "categories" we'll be able to look at worry in the light of God's word and then be able to make the proper adjustments concerning our thinking. Most of our "worry problems" can and will be solved when we put things in their proper perspective.

These four things and what we can learn from them:

1. **Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest...**

This speaks to a regard to truth in our words as well as in our actions. We can also gain a great deal of help when we apply this to worry and fear. What is the truth about what we are so worried about? Are we so consumed with the possible outcome that we are forgetting God's promises? If we are to think of whatever is true and whatever is honest, we would HAVE TO

include God's word if we are ever going to benefit from those two things. Could this mean that there might be times when we worry, and we don't ever spend any time focusing on what God's word says about the various subjects of our worry that our worry only gets worse and not better? I think it would be safe to say that when we worry, we are at most times doing anything but focusing on truth.

2. Whatsoever things are just (correct, righteous), whatsoever things are pure (holy, sacred)

There may not be anything that can usher in an unsettled conscience for the believer anymore than sin and rebellion. Any time we are not thinking about things that are just and pure it's usually because we are thinking about things that are not. It's been wisely said that we cannot do anything about the thoughts that come into our mind, but we can do something with them when they get there. Thinking, like living, takes practice. I learned this when I was unsaved, and I need to learn this when I get saved. We all tend to live what we think and think what we live.

3. Whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report

We could say, whatsoever things are *lovely* (acceptable, pleasing, and agreeable) ...whatsoever things are of *good report* (admirable, well spoken of). This is much more than the power of positive thinking; this is the power of Biblical thinking. When something is of good report it implies it is the opposite of a bad report. We all have our share of bad reports, and we must not ignore them as if they were not part of our reality. However, if we focus on the truth of God's word, we know that good things can be the fruit of bad reports.

Romans 8:28 - And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

4. If there be any virtue, and if there be any praise.

If there is any virtue (good, righteous, honorable, honest) of any kind and worthy of praise, these are the things we focus our attention on. How awesome it is, not only in our thought life, but in our conversations when the topic is anything that causes us to praise God. This kind of thinking turns our attention from what we cannot do to our faith and hope of what God CAN do. We are no longer left to ourselves in a hopeless vacuum of thoughts with no visible light at the end of the tunnel.

Paul tells us of all the things you think about let "these things" capture much of your attention. There are so many things that we can learn in the Christian life that will always be to our advantage. There are so many Bible principles and instructions, illustrations, and examples. Many times, the disconnect is often in our lack of confidence, or lack of willingness to apply the things that we learn to our everyday lives. We allow the enemy to come along and try to convince us that we are not as capable as others are to make good use of what we learn. He tries to convince us that what we might have done in the past will keep us from experiencing a productive future. If we are going to experience change it must begin and continue to with our willingness to learn how to experience it.

All change begins with a desire to experience change. One of God's tools to help us to experience change is what we have been learning about in this part of our study...changing the way that we think. Our thoughts are the conception of our actions; change the thoughts and you will begin and continue to change the actions. According to God's word the only way to do that is WITH God's word. There is an element of life that we are all familiar with as it relates to learning. In all areas of life, we experience this if we choose to put in the time and energy to experience it. I am referring to the element of "practice." Athletes get better at their sport, employees get better at their particular trade, students get better at their particular subjects, business owners become more successful with their business....and Christians get better at the various activities of the Christian life by this thing we call "practice".

Oswald Chambers in his book, "Studies on the Sermon on the Mount" describes it something like this:

Practice in spiritual disciplines means continually doing that which no one sees or knows but myself. Habit is the result of practice; by continually doing the thing it becomes second nature. The difference between some is not a difference of personal power, but that some believers are disciplined, and others are not. The difference is not the degree of mental power, but the degree of mental discipline. If I have taught myself how to think, I have mental power plus the discipline of having out it to use. We must also beware of impulse. Impulsiveness is the characteristic of a child, but it ought not to be the characteristic of a believer, it means he or she has not disciplined themselves.

Every habit is purely mechanical, and whenever we form a habit, it makes a material difference in the brain. The material of the brain alters very slowly, but it does alter, and by repeatedly doing a thing a groove is formed in the material of the brain, and it becomes easier to do it

again, until at last you become unconscious of doing it. When we are regenerated (born again, saved), by the power of God we can reform every habit that is not in accordance with His will and His word. Never form a habit gradually, in other words, do not put it off. We must learn to form habits according to the dictates of the Spirit of God. The power and practice must go together. When we fail it is because we have not practiced, not brought the mechanical part of our nature into line. If I keep at it practicing, what I practice becomes my second nature and/or new habit, then in a crisis I find that not only does God's grace stand by me, His word and His Spirit guide me.....because what I have practiced has become habit. The practicing is mine not Gods, I must do it, and my reaction to the crisis reveals whether I have been practicing. The reason we fail is not the devil, but omission on our part arising from the fact that we have not disciplined ourselves.

The Application:

- Old thinking can always be restrained by new truth.
- The renewing of the mind is intentional, it does not happen any other way.
- Sin is the thief of a clear mind. **(James 1:8)**
- Sin always means pain and pain will always cause worry and fear.
- Discipline yourself to focus on the goodness of God and not the worst of your circumstances.
- Worry is a trust issue, admit it and ask God for the strength to trust Him in and for everything.