

Give Your Worries to God • 1 Peter 5:7

TIME magazine had a cover story about “Understanding Anxiety.” It claimed:

There is certainly a lot of anxiety going around. Anxiety disorder—which is what health experts call any anxiety that persists to the point that it interferes with one’s life—is the most common mental illness in the U.S. In its various forms, ranging from very specific phobias to generalized anxiety disorder, it afflicts 19 million people.

Several weeks ago we surveyed Wooddalers to find out what we worry about. We received 671 written responses. Among those that responded, the top seven categories were:

1. Children (310)
2. Money (285)
3. Health (172)
4. God (159)
5. Relationships (150)
6. Employment (142)
7. Family (108)

Other categories with far fewer worries included: husbands (10), school (18), mental health (26), future (28), death (20), aging (26) and miscellaneous worries (68). Of course, many categories overlap. Husbands, for example, could be included under family, relationships or maybe even mental health. Some worries might be fewer in number but bigger in significance. Death, for example, is obviously a bigger matter than money.

Categories themselves only introduce the worries. Consider some of the specific worries. As far as children are concerned, worries included: raising them to be godly and serve God; will I be around to see them into adulthood; faith; not being able to have children; handicapped; safety; public or private education; parenting skills; moral choices; suffering; adult children’s salvation; teens with foot in both the world and Christ; friends; homework; effects of

divorce; relationship between children; guns and behavior in school; healthy pregnancy and delivery; health and happiness; teaching good values; being a good role model for children; parental wisdom; the world they will live in during the future; losing another child to death; children’s choice of a mate; life choices; as a single mom—providing adequately for needs; having less time with kids because of a divorce; having grandchildren that have not been disciplined by their parents; son who converted to Islam; spoiling them; estrangement from daughter and her children.

Under the category of money, the worries included the state of the economy; finances if marriage fails; what happens if I lose my job; retirement planning and having enough money to live on; not giving enough to the church or to charity; spending and saving wisely; finances since the death of spouse; ability to provide for family; paying of debts; finances because of poor choices; parents’ financial security; home purchase; selling home; paying tuition; living within means; poverty; debts of adult children.

The third category of health included: When will I die; weight; body image; health of parents; insurance; surgery; how to cope with long term care without having a family; physically handicapped spouse; infertility; serious illness; cancer; recurrence of cancer.

The fourth category was God. Worries included how to get closer; how to use my God-given time, energy and talents; being a Christian in an evil world; missing God’s will; salvation of family

and friends; forgiveness; will regret be part of eternal life; living for God; purpose in life; have been a Christian for many years but don’t feel connected; unanswered prayer; living a life that makes a difference; encouragement from God; how to

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pray; meaning of life and life after death; trusting God not self or society; am I “good enough”; being prepared for heaven; lethargy of Christians reaching others for Christ; when will the rapture come and what will I be doing; being a disappointment to God and family—not pleasing God; why doesn’t life go smoothly since I am a life-long Christian; left behind at the end of the world; having a hard heart.

Obviously, we have more than one worry per person. And obviously, there are plenty of things to worry about. This week I saw a bumper sticker that said “Normal people worry me.”

Anxiety and worry are a normal part of all of our lives. To be totally worry-free is not only impossible but probably not healthy. At the low end, anxiety is a genuine and legitimate concern about people and things. It is caring enough to think through what is good, what is bad, what can go wrong and how to make things go right. But at the high end, anxiety is disabling and disruptive. It includes deep obsessive concern over uncontrollable circumstances, disrupts normal life activities and fails to fully trust God and live by faith.

One of the most wonderful principles in the Bible comes from the experience and writing of St. Peter who invites us to give all of our worries to God. 1 Peter 5:7 has to be one of the top ten verses for every Christian to memorize. We teach it to our Sunday School children before they are old enough to read or write. If it is understood and applied to our lives it will transform every fiber of our bodies and every minute of our lives. 1 Peter 5:7 tells us, “*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*”

An important first step in overcoming worry is to accept responsibility. Peter’s call to cast all our anxiety on God is not an invitation to irresponsibility. There is an old expression that tells us to “let go and let God.” There is some truth to it, but it can also be a dangerous heresy. There are some responsibilities in life that God has assigned to us. Other responsibilities in life we must surrender to God. To get them mixed up is to become irresponsible or to play God.

Anyone tempted to abandon all personal responsibility on the basis of 1 Peter 5:7 should first

read the rest of 1 Peter. The author is writing to Christians in very difficult times and telling them how they are to be responsible as they deal with suffering, as they relate to other people in the workplace, at home and at church and how they are to deal with poverty and ill health. He is instructing them how they are to be responsible persons.

There are two extremes we need to consider. Some of us want to control. Controllers seek to control absolutely everything for everybody. They have a better way of running other people’s lives and can become angry and antagonistic when others don’t do things their way. They want to take charge of their friends, their neighbors, their children, their church and even God himself.

Those at the opposite extreme want to do nothing. These people are irresponsible. They avoid healthy habits and expect the doctor to make them well. They won’t work but they expect others to give them money. They are irresponsible in their relationship with God and then blame God because life isn’t perfect, the way they want it to be.

The better way is to be responsible for what God has called upon us to be responsible for and to trust God for what he does not expect of us.

The concept of responsibility can be applied to any of the worries previously listed, but since children lead the list let’s apply the principle there. God has made parents responsible to set a godly example, provide nurture and care and to avoid placing burdensome expectations on their children. Suppose you have done all of these things and you have teenage or adult children who have not turned out the way you dreamed they would. You are prone to worry every day about the company they keep, what they are doing and what will happen to them next. Are these worries rooted in your current responsibilities? Probably not. You can’t be with your grown children the way you were with your babies. You must accept that you have done what you can and it is now time to cast your anxiety about your children on God.

When worrying, let’s ask ourselves if God has given to us the resources we need to solve the problem. If the answer is “no” then it’s time to let go and trust God to do what we cannot do. But there are some considerations with this approach.

There are some people who always think there is something they can do. They can fix every problem. They can always throw money at a challenge. They can always think of someone to call. They keep rolling the issues over and over in their minds trying to figure out a way that they can be responsible. Some people just have an endless capacity to think up new problems. I have a friend who says his wife should work for NASA because she can always think of everything that could go wrong!

If you fit into any of these super-worry categories I have a recommendation for you. Unless you have proof from God that he wants you to worry about something, give it to God and ask him to get back to you when there is something he wants you to do. (This is not advice for irresponsible never-worry types—just for super-worriers!)

Any worry that exceeds what God has required or resourced you to do fits into the casting category. Any worry that causes dysfunction in your life and relationships also fits into the casting category. If in doubt, all worries fit into the casting category. In the words of 1 Peter 5:7, “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”

Peter wrote this in Greek not in English. The Greek word for “cast” meant to “throw on a pile”. It is something that takes a deliberate effort—like dropping a letter in the mailbox, clicking “Send” on an e-mail message or tossing a log into a bonfire. We’re talking about doing something deliberate, decisive and permanent. This is not piecemeal and it is not revocable. Give your anxiety to God once and for all.

Jesus talked about the same casting of anxiety in his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:25-34 when he said:

... do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valu-

able than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat? Or, “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For the pagans run after all these things. and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

It’s almost as if Jesus is saying, “Don’t sweat the small stuff, and it’s all small stuff.”

The practical question is how do we actually cast anxieties on God? Even if we buy into all of this in principle, how do we turn it into practice? There are some practical steps we can follow.

Number One is to define your worry. For some people worry is just a hobby; they don’t really define what they are worrying about. Be specific. Describe your anxiety. Be honest. What is your worst fear? Write it down.

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Number Two is to pray. Tell God your specific worry. Ask God if there is something he wants you to do. Tell him you will do whatever he wants. Ask God for the resources to do what he wants you to do. Repeat

this prayer daily. If God doesn’t guide you to what he wants or give you the resources, assume that this matter needs to be totally cast upon him; it is no longer your problem. Give it to God once and for all. Keep a written record of the date and your prayer.

Third on our list is to take some symbolic action. Do something visible and physical to dem-

onstrate that you are casting your anxiety on God. Build a little altar in your kitchen or the backyard or over the gas grill on the deck. Pray a prayer of commitment and burn the worry list that you wrote out earlier. Have some friends over to see the ceremony. Take a picture of the burning paper and keep it to look at so that whenever you feel like taking that worry back again you can visualize the time when you cast your anxiety on him.

Number Four is to allow some time. Psychologists tell us that fear may be instantaneous but anxiety takes a long time to build up. Likewise, feelings of anxiety may take time to subside. If you cast your anxieties on God and don't feel much different, allow some time. Repeat your prayers of casting and repeat your symbolic action if you need to.

The most important part of this principle is the last five words: "*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*" The last five words switch the center of attention off our worries and us and onto God and his love. The powerful truth is that God loves us. He cares more about the things we are worried about than we do. God is fully informed about our children, our money, our health, our jobs, our families, our relationship to God and everything else. God wants the best for us.

To truly believe that God cares is to live by faith. When we live by faith we don't need to worry. We can go to sleep at night knowing that we have responsibly done what God has asked us to do and that the rest is up to God. God can go with our children where we cannot go. God can give medical skill to the physician in ways that are beyond our knowledge. God can provide food, housing, clothing and money for paying bills in ways we could never figure out. God can settle our hearts. God cares for us more than we care for ourselves.

The question is: Will we accept God's care? Strange as it may seem, some of us would rather worry than let God take care of us. We want to keep control. We want to stay in charge. We may even want to worry. That's walking by sight rather than by faith and it's not a good way to live. So, believe God. Trust God. Accept God's goodness. It is the single most important element in the cure of worry.

What are you worried about? Whatever it is that you are worried about, the powerful gift of God is summarized in these marvelous words from 1 Peter 5:7: "*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*"

Faith Matters® is the Broadcast Ministry of
Leith Anderson and Wooddale Church
6630 Shady Oak Road
Eden Prairie MN 55344
952-944-6300
www.faithmatters.fm
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