

Sermon: 'Not worrying is easier said than done!'

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LESSON: Luke 12:22-34

You see me up here on the platform week by week, year by year;
I am a big man with a big voice,
as a minister and a leader you know that I am very clear cut and decisive,
I preach with confidence because I believe what I preach and I see God at
work in people's lives,
so you may be very surprised to know what my wife Bidy could tell you,
that I am a tremendous worrier!

I don't worry much about work,
just occasionally things get to me a bit, but not as a rule,
why should I worry about work when I have so many other things to worry
About!

I worry about our son Luke,
who is a music journalist,
and earns so little money to live on because he is in a low paid and precarious
profession.

I worry at the moment that our middle daughter Rebecca is trekking with
her husband in Peru and she has had health problems,
so I hope she doesn't get taken ill in the middle of nowhere.

I worry that our youngest daughter Mary has fallen in love with a New
Zealander,

a lovely guy but New Zealand is a long way and tickets to see any future
Grandchildren would be so expensive.

I worry that Bidy rides her bike to work at such a great speed.

I worry as to where we will live when we retire and whether or not we
will be able to afford a house with the nice big garden that Bidy has
always longed for.

Now you may think these are trivial worries compared to your major worries
about health,

and children completely off the rails,
and the work situation you face.

No doubt you are right to think that,
but these are my worries not yours,

and they are very pressing to me because I am a bit of a worrier.

My Mother was far worse than me,

and her Mother was such an anxious and troubled person that she ended
up hospitalised.

Worrying is in my blood.

As you all sit here listening some of you will be empathising with me,
in fact I know that one or two of you are here simply because of the sermon
title,

“Not worrying is easier said than done.”

Some of you, like me, are born worriers.

Others of you however just sail through life and can't see what all the fuss is
about.

Our daughter Mary's like that.

Our other two children are worriers just like me but she faces all manner of
problems with an incurable optimism and the theory that there's no point in
fussing about things you can't change.

Now Mary is very gracious,

but in fact many people who do not worry often get a bit irritated with
those of us who are worriers,

“Why make such a fuss?” they say,

“Life's too short to worry,

and worrying doesn't change anything anyway.”

Well those of us who worry know that,

we know it with our minds but we just cannot get hold of it in our hearts!

So this morning if you're not a worrier don't worry,

just sit back and sleep for a while or study the beautiful dome ceiling until
we get on to the bit about money at the end of the passage.

But for those of us who do worry a bit,

or do worry a lot,

this word from Jesus in Luke 12 and verses 22 to 34 is a hard word which
we need to try and dig something out from.

So this morning I want us to think about three things,
the anxiety which doesn't help,
the anxiety which does help,
and the anxiety which shouldn't be there.

First then,
the anxiety which doesn't help,
and, as I have said at some length in my introduction, a lot of this has to do
with personality.
Some people sail through life with a smile whatever happens,
and some are what we call "born worriers".

Now the great thing about the gospel is that God meets with us as the men and
women who we are,
"Just as I am" we sing in the hymn,
and "just as I am" we come to encounter faith.
This encounter we have with God through placing our faith in Jesus turns
us round to face a different direction,
but does not always move us straight away from where we are.

For example someone might be converted to Christ who is addicted to alcohol or
drugs or pornography or food,
the fact that they have come to faith opens up new hope,
but it does not always sort out the situation in a stroke.
Sometimes it might,
but often it doesn't.
The new faith gives purpose and direction and a new resource of the Holy
Spirit but for many people getting back to sobriety of whatever sort is still a
long haul.

Now when the easy-going person comes to faith it may well be that the work that
the Holy Spirit does in their life is to make them a bit less easy going,
make them a bit more sensitive to folk around them,
because in fact easy going people can be quite infuriating,
in that they never worry when sometimes they should worry!

But in the same way when the worrier comes to faith they do not stop worrying in
an instant,
but what does happen is that as faith becomes more real,
as faith takes a hold on their life they begin to worry less as they trust more,

but this is often a lifetime's work.

So how do we worry less?

How do we begin to deal with this anxiety which doesn't help?

Well one surprising word of advice I would give you is don't spend so much time praying about it.

It used to be that when I prayed I was so worried about my children that I spent most of my prayer time praying about them and then everything else was slipped in at the end.

In the same way I find in talking to people that if there is some situation or person that is worrying them they tell me that they spend hours in prayer over the matter or the person but it still gets no better, the prayer does not stop them worrying.

For me what was most helpful was when I heard my dear friend and colleague Malcolm White preaching about prayer.

His prayer life is very organised,
he spoke about praying with a timer,
and I found that very helpful indeed.

The idea is that you break down your prayer time into units.

In my case these units are first a reflection upon the Bible passage I have just read,

then a review of the day to come,
then my family,
then my friends,
then my Church,
then finally me.

In my case that comes out at six headings,
in your case it may be more or less.

If I am busy I set the timer at a minute and just pray for six minutes total,
if I have more time I set it for two minutes and pray for twelve minutes,
you get the idea,

but the key thing about this is that it builds a balance into your prayer life,
and helps to get that one person or situation which is worrying you into perspective.

Try it as one help to worrying a bit less.

Then next try to sort out in your mind what is really important,
ask yourself what really matters.

Perhaps you are meeting a friend for lunch,
what doesn't really matter is what you wear or where you eat,
what does really matter is that you and your friend meet up and share
together honestly and creatively.

Ask yourself what you think is important in your life and then whether or
not it is worthy of that "important" label.

Then after that ask yourself what God thinks about it all.

Does God actually know about what worries you,
the situation or the person?

I think that God probably does!

Does God want the best for you and that other person or situation?

The message of the Bible is that He does because God loves you,

God sent Jesus to show that love,

the Holy Spirit ministers that love to your heart,

and if you love someone of course you want the best for them,

God loves you and wants the very best for you.

Then also do use a bit of logic,

that's what Jesus does here in verses 22 to 28,

"Look at the birds" Jesus says,

they don't toil away but they are fed.

Look at the wild flowers,

such beauty there but no one planted them."

Jesus is pointing out to us that these are transient things,

here today and gone tomorrow,

if God cares for them then why not for you.

Can you lengthen your life by worrying – of course you cannot,
so why worry?

It's illogical and absurd to waste the time and energy you have for now
on things which may not ever come to be!

Use a bit of logic sometimes and have a laugh at yourself and your
foolishness.

But crucial in all this is priority.

You see if my priority is God,

if I do what it tells me here in verse 31 and *seek his kingdom*,

then in my case where I live is secondary,

even my wife and children are secondary,

and you will discover that if you do seek after God first you will worry less.

But by the way,

don't start worrying as to whether or not you are seeking God properly!

Do your best,

that's all God ever wants,

He knows you through and through and loves you through and through,

and that means God also knows your capabilities,

just do your best.

For some that will mean stopping worrying because you accept that God loves you just as you are, regardless of how much you do for Him.

For others that might mean that you up your game a bit because what you are offering at present is less than your best and you know it.

If you are a worrier but you constantly turn to the promises of the Bible, constantly turn to prayer,

constantly ask for the Holy Spirit to help and to guide you,

then in time you will worry far less,

you will be troubled far less,

by this anxiety which doesn't help.

But do be clear - my second point, that there is some anxiety which does help.

A Methodist minister called Frank Thewlis was one of the great preachers of the last century,

and quite the funniest preacher I have ever heard.

He once preached a sermon called

“Make a friend of fear”,

that was good advice.

I was cycling here to work one Saturday and on my route I pass the Royal Hospital on my right,

the home of the Chelsea pensioners,
and on my left there is a sports pitch.

On the sports pitch small boys of perhaps nine or ten were having a cricket practice,

the gate was further up the road and this is a pitch protected by large spiked railings.

As I cycled along I saw a man,

I presume a dad,

lift his son over these railing in order to save the longer walk in via the gate.

As he did so his son was suspended over the spikes and my heart jumped as I thought what dreadful injuries the child would have had if he had slipped or dropped him.

That father needed fear,

fear himself and fear for his child,

he should have been more anxious about the child than he was.

Some anxiety is good,

it makes sure vulnerable people get a lift home on a dark night,

it avoids cutting through rough estates,

it checks that the brakes on the car work well,

it puts on a lifejacket before going on water in a small boat.

Anxiety isn't always wrong,

there is a God-given built in common sense anxiety which helps us safely through life.

Then there is another kind of anxiety which is positive.

In 2 Corinthians 11 and verse 28 St Paul says that he is anxious for all the Churches,

as does Timothy in Philippians 2 and verse 20.

Theirs is the anxiety of concern for the welfare of others,

and indeed I am always anxious about this congregation,

anxious that we preachers offer you good teaching,

anxious that we do our best to care for you all,

anxious that you as a congregation have a heart for other people.

If we cultivate the right sort of anxiety it will be a blessing.

But then third and last there is the anxiety which shouldn't be there!

Remember the context of this passage.

Last week Tony was preaching on the earlier verses which were all about a rich man who had his future organised, he had built his barns and had filled them with piles of grain to live on for many years, but that night God said to him "*You fool*" and he died.

One of the things we ministers do is to see quite a lot of the life of undertakers, and in the local undertaker's at one of my past Churches whenever they had a member of staff who was new to the trade they would get that person, often straight from school, to phone up the suppliers of shrouds to order ten shrouds with pockets, nearly always they fell for this and would come back saying, "I'm sorry, but they say they don't have any with pockets!"

My Sisters and Brothers, one day you and I will be lying in a shroud and that shroud will not have any pockets at all for we will take nothing with us.

On hearing of the death of a neighbour a woman asked her friend, "What did he leave?"

The reply came back,

"He left the lot!"

Verse 34 here,

"Where your treasure is there will your heart be also."

Too often in the Church we have got this the wrong way round, those of us who are preachers have preached about people giving their heart to Jesus,

we have assumed that if they gave their heart to Jesus they would give their treasure as well,

in fact we have re-written this verse to read

"Where your heart is there will your treasure be also."

Thus we have encouraged prayer and hymn singing and worship but the offerings to the Church have been so low, and the response to human need has been so low, that we have seen where people's real priorities lie.

Jesus knew people like you and me.

Jesus didn't talk here about our giving our hearts and then our treasure,
no,

Jesus says here

"Where you treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Is your treasure in the bank,

in your savings,

in your stocks and shares,

in your house,

in your possessions?

You won't take one of those things with you.

Is your treasure in your learning,

in your education,

your books,

your intellect,

your delight in debate?

That's all quite fascinating, but you won't take it with you.

Is your treasure in who you are,

the country you come from,

your status in the community,

the office you hold in this Church?

It may impress people now but it will be irrelevant then.

There is one place and one place only where your investment will be safe,
and that is in the bank of the Kingdom of God.

When you give to God's work in the Church,

when you help the needy in the community,

when you give your time to witness and evangelise,

when you walk the costly walk of love in everyday life,

when you put following the Jesus way first,

when you allow the Holy Spirit full sway in your life,

when you seek God and His will with all your heart,

then and then alone, have you invested in that which *will never fail,*

where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.

This is so very important,
please don't waste your life striving for things which will not last,
please don't sacrifice your family life to earn more and more,
please don't give status and influence to people who just happen to be rich,
rather *seek His Kingdom*,
for where your treasure is there will your heart be also.

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