

# Worry, Concern, Anxiety

## INTRODUCTION

Most, if not all, languages contains synonyms - different words that mean approximately the same thing. In our study about *worry*, three of the synonyms are *concern*, *anxiety*, and sometimes *care*. Synonyms can develop connotations that are good or bad. For instance, "worry" tends to have a negative connotation, whereas "concern" tends to be positive. This is somewhat unfortunate for our study, because the Greek New Testament word that we are focusing on can be translated either way. This is not a problem when looking at individual verses (the message is accurately communicated); but we fail to realize that the *same* concept or action can be good or bad, *depending on context*. And we can learn a lot by observing the contrast between these contexts. [A person could do this study using the English word "worry" and its synonyms. The verse list might be different (it might include additional N.T. Greek words), but the conclusion would be similar.]

When we realize that many concepts can be either good or bad, depending on the context in which they exist, it opens up a whole new perspective on life. In our study about "worry," we are faced with two alternatives, like a fork in the road. The "sign post" (Scripture) tells us the way to go, and we have to choose whether to follow the instructions, or ignore them. We are free to choose... but our choice brings consequences that we are not free to change.

In some issues, the "opposites" are more like boundaries that keep us out of trouble - boundaries between which we can live in freedom. (Compare to Psalm 119:45 - "I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts.") Sometimes the world tells us that we must do (or affirm) something "always" or "never"; and at times, they may be actually focusing on one of the boundaries (even if misguided). But it's a "one-sided" focus that doesn't protect us from going astray in the opposite direction. And when different people focus on "opposite" boundaries, we end up with a polarized society, where communication breaks down and hostility intensifies. In contrast, we who follow Jesus have the Word of God, which can teach us to avoid *both* extremes.

The "fork in the road" perspective best fits our study about worry/concern. We discover there is a strong emphasis on verses that describe "worry" as something we must avoid, because it is sin. (This strong emphasis probably occurs because this is the type of worry/concern we tend to have.) But there are also a number of verses that point to situations in which we *must* have worry/concern (normally translated as "concern"). This gives us two options - like forks in the road - and we must decide if we are going to pay attention to the "sign post" (Scripture), or go our own way.

A quick survey of the Scripture passages that contain the word "worry/concern" provides us with a basic outline of two parts. Scripture passages that tell us to *not do* it have a focus on *one's self*. (In these verses, the word is normally translated as "worry.") Scripture passages that tell us to *do* it have a focus on *someone else*. (In these verses, the word is normally translated as "concern.") This most basic outline suggests that the issue *isn't* the presence or absence of "worry/concern" itself, but whether or not that worry/concern is an expression of love for self... or for God and neighbor. Who do we care about the *most*?

In the following outline, italics in the Scripture passages point to the concept we are studying.  
(How the New Testament Greek word is translated may vary.)

**PART 1 - WORRY/CONCERN DIRECTED TOWARDS SELF** - one's *own* well-being, accomplishments, etc.

This is the type of worry that is sin; we are not to have it. It is destructive - not just emotionally, but in very tangible ways. It also indicates distrust in God, and is incompatible with salvation.

**I. Worrying about the cares of life.**

**A. General statements.** Jesus made the following statements to people who thought they were saved. He warns them that having this type of worry may indicate otherwise.

**1. Such worry can prevent God's Word from accomplishing its purpose in you.**

This verse is from "the parable of the sower," which describes four types of responses to God's Word. These people may *claim* to be saved, but they are actually preoccupied with the things of the world. God's word remains unfruitful: It does not accomplish its purpose in their lives.

a. Matthew 13:22 The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the *worries* of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.

b. Parallel passages: Mark 4:19; Luke 8:14.

**2. Those who are weighted down by such worries are in danger of *not* being ready when Jesus returns.** This is such a serious matter that Jesus often mentioned it in his teachings. (So did the apostles.)

a. Luke 21:34 "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the *anxieties* of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.

**B. Examples** that show us specific contrasts, and teach us priorities.

**1. Worrying about the *future* daily needs of life.** This is not a prohibition against "planning ahead." Rather, it is a prohibition against being *preoccupied* with the "necessities of life." It's a prohibition against *distorted priorities*. God has told us to focus our attention on *his* kingdom and righteousness, and trust *him* to take care of our daily needs. We are to give our *first* attention to things that have *first* priority.

a. Matthew 6:25-34 "Therefore I tell you, 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 valuable than they? Who of you by *worrying* can add a single hour to his life?

"And why do you *worry* about clothes? 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.

b. Parallel passage: Luke 12:22-31.

There are so many things we can learn from this passage! This worry doesn't accomplish anything good! It is about potential *future* problems - something we have no control over (but God does). This worry is something that the *unsaved* do - it's not an expression of faith, but rather of distrust in God. God cares for birds and plants... and he says we are much more valuable than they! This passage does not deny the existence of trouble, but tells us to not add *tomorrow's* trouble to *today's!*

2. **Worrying because of wrong priorities.** Even good things can be given a wrong priority. In this passage, Martha is preoccupied with hospitality - possibly to the point of trying to impress Jesus - and (in contrast) Mary wants to hear what Jesus has to say. Worrying about all the preparations was causing Martha to lose out on the blessing of hearing what Jesus had to say. This passage shows the contrast between something that may be "good" and something that is "better."

a. Luke 10:38-42 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are *worried* and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

## II. Worrying about one's response when questioned by authority.

1. **One's response during persecution.** The context has to do with persecution as a follower of Jesus. Again, it's a matter of trust. This passage does not condemn being prepared (we're always supposed to be prepared - 1 Peter 3:15); and anyone who

has been following Jesus and learning his Word (the Bible) has already prepared to a great degree. But when authorities persecute us because we are following Jesus, we do not know what they will say (or accuse us of), and we need to trust God - rather than worrying about all the possible responses to all the possible scenarios!

- a. Matthew 10:19-20 But when they arrest you, do not *worry* about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.
- b. Parallel passages: Mark 13:11; Luke 12:11-12.

2. **(A bad example.)** Unsaved people may have worries about being questioned by authority, and it is *not* always for good reasons! Here, soldiers were bribed to *lie* about Jesus' resurrection; and the religious leaders promised to make sure they wouldn't have to worry about getting into trouble with authorities because of it. We can learn from this passage indirectly: it is an example of what *not* to be like! There is a huge difference between getting into trouble because of a lie... and being questioned because of faithfulness to Jesus! (Consider also 1 Peter 4:15-16.)

- a. Matthew 28:14 If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of *trouble*." [= "you'll have no cause to *worry*."] ]

**III. Responding to self-focused worry.** Anything Scripture says about godly values will be helpful. The verses we already looked at show us how to respond in certain types of situations. But here are two passages that give us specific instructions, which are applicable to all of life.

**A. Replacing worry with prayer and thankfulness.** In the following passage, *prayer* involves admitting our dependence on God; *petitions* and *requests* involve talking to God about specific matters, not just a generalized "please take care of things." This is to be done with an attitude of *thankfulness*, because we know we can *trust* God to take care of us. Praying with this attitude will replace worry with *peace* - a type of peace that only God can provide.

- a. Philip. 4:6-7 Do not be *anxious* about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Two words of caution. First, this verse is an expression of *trust* in our "heavenly Father." It is not a "formula" to apply, any time we want to demand something from God. ("I want this thing and I'm going to thank you in advance; so now you *have* to give it to me!") Second, there may be times that God does not answer a request the way we ask it, because we do not see the situation clearly. We may misunderstand what our actual needs are. Or there may be greater needs to be dealt with first. The Holy Spirit may change our *weak* prayers into something *strong*, and worthy of God's attention (Romans

8:26-27). In the end, when we stand in God's presence, we will joyfully admit that he did all things well, even when we didn't understand it.

**B. Let God do the "worrying," not you!** He takes care of us, as we have already seen. So let *him* "worry" about it, not you! (Actually, he already knows his plans for us, so he has no need to actually "worry"!)

a. 1 Peter 5:7 Cast all your *anxiety* on him because he cares for you.

The context (v. 5-6) shows that our willingness to trust God with our cares is linked to *humility*. The opposite – choosing to do our own worrying about our cares – would be associated with being *proud*. And a prideful attitude is incompatible with God's grace!

#### IV. THINKING ABOUT THESE THINGS: THE *BAD* TYPE OF WORRY/CONCERN.

What do you worry about?

These verses show us what *not* to do, and in some cases, what to do. As you look in Scripture, you may discover other principles that guide you in your response.

Sometimes, the object of our worry isn't the issue, but our response to it is. For instance, we *do* have daily needs, and Scripture encourages us to prepare for the future. But even if fully prepared, we do not know the ultimate outcome. We do not know whether tomorrow will bring disaster or success. We still need to trust God (James 4:13-17)!

Remember that this type of worry is *sin* - even if we "redefine" it so it doesn't sound as bad. ("I'm not worrying... I've just got these concerns!") It is as bad as any of those "horrible" sins we don't do (but condemn others who do them). It places a barrier between us and God; and only with God's power can that barrier come down!

Think about your worries and what Scripture says about them. Think about ways to change your response to your worries - different perspectives, actions, plans, etc. One good way to decrease this type of worry is to *replace* it with something else. The Scripture passages we've looked at give us several examples of this: Replace our worries with a kingdom focus, with a change of priorities, with prayer and thankfulness, with trusting God and letting him do the "worrying"!

If you are weak in expressing the *good* types of worry/concern, an increased focus on them may bring about a decreased focus on the *bad* kind. Replace the one with the other. Crowd out the *bad* worries with the *good* ones!

**PART 2 - WORRY/CONCERN DIRECTED TOWARDS OTHERS** - *their* well-being, accomplishments, etc.

This is the type of "worry" that is righteous, a part of following Jesus. It is an expression of love for others, and is normally translated as "concern" (though we will sometimes include both words as a reminder that they represent the same concept).

## I. Worry/concern as an obligation.

**A. As a basic principle.** God gives his people a variety of gifts and abilities, for the purpose of helping each other (not for exploiting others for personal gain, or for considering oneself as superior to others). Some people may have abilities that are more visible than others; but *all* are necessary. In 1 Corinthians 12, Scripture compares this interaction to parts of a body working together. This whole section of 1 Corinthians focuses on values and priorities in the interaction of people with each other (all controlled by the type of love described in chapter 13). For our purpose, we will point out the fact that all parts of Christ's "body" (that is, all of God's people) are to have equal concern for each other. (If this is not happening, it may be due to sin and the fact that many churches have fake "Christians" in them. Also, newborn Christians - like the Corinthians were - may need to *grow* in their understanding of what it means to follow Jesus.)

- a. 1 Cor. 12:24b-25 But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal *concern* for each other.

**B. Some specific examples.** These examples show us that this worry/concern for other Christians is more than just a matter of using our *gifts* for each other. In these examples, the concern is for the basic *well-being* of other Christians. If we pay attention to the context of these verses, as well as to the value priorities found throughout Scripture, we will realize that, first and foremost, this concern focuses on the *spiritual* well-being of others. Though it does not exclude their physical well-being, that is not the first priority.

**1. Paul:** He was not preoccupied his own health and well-being (which he often sacrificed for the good of others - see 2 Corinthians 11:23b-27). But when it came to the spiritual well-being of others, he was quite concerned.

- a. 2 Cor. 11:28-29 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my *concern* for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

**2. Timothy** - He had a "self-less" concern for others. Paul considered Timothy to be a good example of how we should be concerned about others. (Other people were present with Paul, but they had a greater focus on themselves.) As we note this fact, we should probably be asking, "What about us?" Paul's writings (as well as the rest of Scripture) frequently instruct us to focus on promoting the good of others, not of self. These oft-repeated instructions were needed, because many of his letters were written to "newborn" Christians, who did not yet know how to live as a follower of Jesus. But today, there are people in churches who have heard these things for years - even decades - and have chosen to ignore them. We should take seriously the Scripture passages that warn us about having such a "non-Christian" way of life. If you see churchgoing people habitually living contrary to everything they know is

true in Scripture, just remember Jesus's warnings, and *don't* follow those people's example. Those controlled by the Spirit of God will have lives influenced by the Spirit of God. So welcome the Spirit's influence into your life, and be a disciple of Jesus!

- a. Philip. 2:19-21 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine *interest* [= "concern"] in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

Note that the opposite of "being focused on self interests" is "being focused on Jesus's interests" ... which would obviously include those who belong to Jesus (the "body of Christ").

(Interestingly, two chapters later, in Philippians 4:6, Paul talks about the other type of concern/worry and tells us to *not* do it!)

- II. Sometimes you can choose what type of worry/concern you will have.** Sometimes there are different types of *good* worry/concern to choose from - and you get to choose which type is best for you - depending on your gifts and abilities, strengths and weaknesses, etc. (It's like a "fork in the road"; but in this case, *both* options are acceptable.)

The example in 1 Corinthians 7 focuses on the issue of getting married or not getting married. In today's society, we have to point out that neither of these options permits sinful conduct. The sexual sins that are committed by people of the world, as well as by many churchgoers, is not a legitimate option for anybody - much less for those claim to be following Jesus. To affirm sexual sin is to deny Christ (who does not cater to the shifting moral relativism of sinners). Though we will describe the two options as the options for *Christians*, there are actually no additional options given by God for unsaved people.

- A. To marry or not to marry:** Either choice is good, though Paul tells us that one choice is of greater value to the kingdom of God. The first choice involves not getting married and focusing entirely on the things of God. (One of the prerequisites is the ability to control oneself sexually - to maintain moral purity.) The second choice involves getting married and having to divide one's focus two ways. (This would include those who cannot control themselves sexually. In this matter, there is no third option.) In the passage quoted below, Paul begins by expressing a desire that they would be "free from concern/worry." This does not mean having *zero* concerns; rather, his greatest wish is for people to not have to deal with divided interests between *two* concerns. "Being free from concern" means being free from the *added* concern that marriage brings. Yet he knows that many people cannot choose this option... And it is perfectly okay.

- a. 1 Cor. 7:32-35 I would like you to be free from *concern*. An unmarried man is *concerned* about the Lord's affairs--how he can please the Lord. But a married man is *concerned* about the affairs of this world--how he can please his wife--and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is *concerned*

about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is *concerned* about the affairs of this world--how she can please her husband. I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.

Note that, when Paul describes a married person as being concerned about the affairs of this *world*, he is not endorsing "worldliness." Even one's interaction with a spouse and with the world must be done in a way that honors God!

### III. THINKING ABOUT THESE THINGS: THE *GOOD* TYPE OF WORRY/CONCERN.

How does your concern for other people compare to your concern for yourself? The world teaches us that we need to focus first on ourselves - and many in the church have chosen to assimilate the world's teachings. But God says the *opposite*.

A person who has a *self*-focused worry is sinning. Yet it isn't enough to merely *stop* having this focus. If this was all we did, we would *still* be sinning, because of our failure to *start* the *other*-focused type of concern. To be pleasing to God, we need to *replace* the one with the other (not just *stop* the one).

The world has many counterfeit expressions of concern. To your face, people may say encouraging things; but behind your back, they could care less about you. Their words may even be designed to manipulate you into a response that fulfills their *own* interests (like an unscrupulous salesperson).

Genuine concern for others starts in the heart; and it will be there regardless of the other person's response - even if the other person *rejects* your concern! (It's like the genuine type of *love*, which remains, regardless of the other person's response - see 1 Corinthians 13.)

These "other people" attitudes that honor God don't occur by merely deciding to have them. It requires a change of *nature* and a change in *values*. It requires the change of *thinking* that comes from submitting to what the word of God teaches us - the "renewed mind" described in Romans 12:2. When we become genuine followers (disciples) of Jesus, our focus changes from love for self to love for God and neighbor. But it takes *growing* in Christ - by means of God's grace and our increasing knowledge of his Word (2 Peter 3:18) - to develop the type of love and concern for neighbor that Jesus demonstrated by his own example.