



## followers of Jesus seeking to glorify God

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May 11 Devotional (for Sunday May 17)

### Grief and Hope Series Part 2

#### "Practicing the Presence of God in the Present"

As we looked at briefly last week Lament is essential to living in a healthy manner here on planet Earth. Without lament we shift toward excessive guilt or shame, or to living in denial of how broken and hard life really is. Stress, anxiety, fear and worry are common to us all. The situations and relationships which produce these are consistently coming up in specific ways in each of our lives. How we cope, manage and face life's stressors leads us in one of two directions. They move us toward greater loss, worry and fear. Or they can be transformed into peace, hope, faith and love.

This sounds like a fairy tale. Except I have witnessed it in people's lives, and experienced it during my own challenging times.

Practically how do we manage worry?

Max Lucado writes of one man decided he would quit worrying by hiring someone to worry for him. He placed an ad stating he would pay \$200,000/year for someone to carry all his worries. When the successful applicant was hired his first question was, "You don't seem to be overly wealthy, how do you expect to pay me \$200,000/year?" The man's answer was, "That's your worry." ☺

Another faulty idea is Bobby McFarren's song title, "Don't Worry, Be Happy". As we all know from experience it is not this simplistic.

So how do we manage stress in our real lives?

To choose a different way than how we are in the habit of facing stress is challenging. One coaching experience I went through suggested using a tool summarized by the acronym STAR when facing a stressful situation. This can be helpful and apply to the bigger picture of worry or ongoing stress. A brief summary of S.T.A.R. Stop, Time, Appreciate, Resume, is;

**Stop!** Hard to do but absolutely necessary if we want to choose a different path forward. Stop the conversation, situation and thought processes producing stress. Stop the usual reaction in its tracks. Again, much harder than we think it should be.

**Time.** Take time, make time, and carve out time. A time-out is not a time to reload and strategize so you can 'win' or fight 'better'. A healthy time-out calms us and humbles us before God and helps us to gain his perspective.

**Appreciate.** Appreciate God and praise him for who he is. Appreciate your own life and thank God for it. Thank him for the good gifts you have been given. Appreciate the person you are in



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conflict with, they are more than the one you disagree with on some point. They are created in God's image. So are you. Appreciate what you have in common.

Resume. Re-engage the conversation or situation with this renewed perspective of gratitude. Build on what you have in common. Commit to valuing the relationship more than the issue.

This is a helpful start but incomplete by itself. This is helpful in a moment of conflict. Deeper life change and greater freedom from worry and anxiety require specific actions. Let's try to apply this outline to worry.

**Stop.** Stopping is hard in a moment of conflict. It is also hard anytime. But doing the same thing over and over won't lead to different results. We need to **stop.** Stop our usual reaction to worry and choose a different response.

**Time.** Choosing a different response takes **time**. We like to fill our time. Sometimes with very good things, while remaining stressed. Other times we know we are procrastinating (putting off what we know is important by frittering away time with an escape of some sort). A healthy time-out is not simply time away from worries. Time here is not being distracted by something else then returning to our worries again. This is time spent seeking God and choosing his response to our stresses, choosing a different way.

Someone may ask, "Take time in the moment or regularly?" The answer is YES. Time is required to gain a new, or renewed, perspective and to choose a different response. It is harder to think clearly when under stress than at other times. Choosing a different response to worry ahead of time can be very helpful. What response does God recommend to worry? Matthew 6 contains some answers,

<sup>25</sup> "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious 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?

<sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? <sup>27</sup> And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? <sup>28</sup> And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' <sup>32</sup> For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. <sup>33</sup> But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

<sup>34</sup> "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."



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What if we invest time in this passage and apply the truths in it to responding to our worries? Take some time now to consider what God is saying here.

**Appreciate.** The above passage also contains appreciation. Appreciate God and thank him for his incredible care for you. Rest in him. He's got this. Thank God. There is more to thank God for. Thank God in this stressful time which he is using for good. Paul says this and a whole lot more when he exhorts the Philippians this way,

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.<sup>5</sup> Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;<sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.<sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Give thanks! Really? In Everything! Yes. Appreciate that God is working. He works all the more when we pray. Thank God we can always turn to him in prayer! What else do you see here which will help you to choose a different response to worries?

**Resume.** After stopping, taking a healthy time-out, and appreciating, resume. Resume life worry free. Don't take back what you have given to God. Resume life. Jesus came that we might have life, life to the full. Worry robs us of life. "Worry never robs tomorrow of its sorrow, it only saps today of its joy." – Leo F. Buscaglia. Follow Jesus and live the life he has made possible. "Wherever you are be all there." Jim Elliot

The passage in Philippians continues,

<sup>8</sup>Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. <sup>9</sup>What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."

Freed from our worries we can take hold of what is good. Practice taking hold of what is good. Take every thought captive. Choose to dwell on God and his goodness. Pursue living for him, and leave your worries in his capable hands.

"and the God of peace will be with you",

Pastor Gary