

3 Surefire Ways to Cast Out Heart-Crushing Worry

Have you ever been gripped by fear? You know the feeling. Your blood runs cold. A shiver races down your spine. Your mouth goes dry. The hair on your head stands up. It's a terrifying feeling. Then along with fear comes worry.

Of course, there are so many things to be worried about today: the state of our country, the economy, natural disasters, the threat of North Korea and terrorism. Recently one of the top Google searches was about the possibility of a World War III. There are a lot of things to be afraid of today.

But here's what we need to know: Worry has a negative effect on our lives. Modern medical research has proven that worry breaks down our resistance to disease. It actually sickens the nervous system, specifically the digestive organs and the heart. Research has found that 79 to 90 percent of all visits to primary-care physicians are stress-related.

Clearly, worry isn't productive. In fact, the word itself originates from an Old English word that means "to strangle." That's what worry does. It chokes us. It's been said that worry is the advanced interest you pay on troubles that seldom come. So let's try to stop worrying.

You might say, "That is easy for you to say."

But let's consider what the apostle Paul had to say under adverse circumstances. He was under house arrest. He had gone to Rome to preach the gospel, but he had been arrested. He knew nothing about what his future held, yet he gave us some of the most inspiring words found in the pages of Scripture:

"Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! ... Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything.

Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand" (Phil. 4:4, 6–7 NLT).

Paul was not in some ivory tower, spinning up theories. He wasn't lying on some beach in the Mediterranean, eating falafel and drinking an iced tea. He was incarcerated. Yet he was able to say, "Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!"

Sometimes we try to justify worry by saying, "It's OK for me to worry because I'm in a difficult situation." In many ways we all are—some of us more than others. But maybe we all just need to lighten up a little when we can.

We all know people who are depressing to be around. Whatever is going on, they see the dark side. But I think we can find joy. We can find humor. We can find something to rejoice about, even in some very difficult circumstances.

Paul was saying, in effect, "Look guys, if anyone knows what it's like to be afraid, it's me. But I'm telling you, rejoice in the Lord always." Anyone can rejoice when things are going reasonably well. But when you're facing adversity or sickness or hardship or even death, and then you rejoice, you're obeying God.

The Old Testament prophet Habakkuk wrote, "Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!" (Hab. 3:17-18, NLT).

We could update that to say, "Even though the economy is bad and they are downsizing at work, even though insurance rates are up and the car is out of gas, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation!"

We don't rejoice when things get better; we rejoice no matter how things are going. Paul didn't say, "Rejoice when you feel good" or "Rejoice when things are going well." Rather, he said, "Always be full of joy in the Lord." Notice the words in the Lord. The Lord is on his throne. God is in control.

Not only does Paul tell us to rejoice, but he also gives us three ways to overcome worry and fear: right praying, right thinking and right living.

Let's start with the first way, right praying. The next time you're tempted to worry, pray instead. Turn your worries into prayers. When something threatening comes along, when something alarms us, our natural reflex is to panic. The conditioned reflex, on the other hand, is to pray. Remember, Paul said, "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything." God is interested in whatever concerns you.

If you want to overcome fear and worry, you also need right thinking. In the Philippians passage, Paul went on to say, "And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise" (Phil. 4:8, MEV). In other words, think about what you think about.

Isaiah 26:3 tells us, "You will keep in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trust in you." If you want personal peace, it comes down to guarding what you put in your mind.

Finally, there is right living. Paul concluded by saying, "Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me – everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you" (Phil. 4:9, NLT). We cannot separate outward action from inward attitude. We need to live out these things in our lives.

God has not promised us a pain-free world. But he will be with

us, giving us what we need when we need it—not necessarily before, and never after. {eo}

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