

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

64. The Distraction of Worry Says, "Fret About This"

You are listening to episode 64 of the Encouragement for Real Life Podcast, titled, "The Distraction of Worry Says, "Fret About This." Welcome back to the podcast and to this week's episode. I'm thankful you're here. Do you ever struggle with worry? Do you ever fret? I think we each do every now and then, am I right? We don't want to, and we don't intend to, but worry can be a big distraction in our lives. It can snatch our attention from the here and now and put it on situations we have no control over. This is the subject of today's episode. And as we journey through it, we will find some help and hope and a whole lot of encouragement as we learn how to deal with this distraction of worry and what God has to say about it. So, let's get right to it.

Corrie Ten Boom once said,

"Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow. It empties today of its strength."

Isn't that the truth? We want tomorrow to be empty of sorrow, so we worry about it, thinking that will help. When in all reality, worry empties us of the strength God gives us today. Remember that verse from Matthew 6:34? It says not to worry about tomorrow and let tomorrow worry about itself. And I appreciate how The Message translation puts it, "Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes." Amen and amen!

That translation says to give our attention to what God is doing right now (that's living undistracted!), but when we worry, we can't possibly do that. The distraction of worry is a big one, I think, for many. And I can get caught up in worry, as well. No, I don't intend to, and I don't want to, but I can worry with the best of them. Maybe you can relate. And when I do, it distracts me from the moment I'm in and takes my focus off what's important.

For example, my husband and I were on vacation last month in Florida, and I remember this moment well. We had been out bicycling for the afternoon and we stopped at a small pub just down the street from our Airbnb. As we were enjoying the patio and our meal, I received a text from our daughter regarding our infant grandson. "His doctor thinks there's something anatomically wrong. We are taking him to a specialist."

Wait, what?? No, that can't be. He's a healthy little boy. They must be wrong. And as I sat there across from my husband in the warm Florida sunshine, I was no longer hungry. I no longer cared about my beautiful surroundings. My mind raced and my legs went numb. Worry filled me, and my face showed it. My husband, sitting across from me, in his mild-mannered tone, talked me down and reminded me this was not beyond God's control. After all, He created our little grandson. God already knew about it and He could handle it.

Sometimes we know truth, but we just need reminded of it.

And this was the case with me. I knew this truth, but I needed the reminder. And right then I prayed for our little guy. I envisioned lifting little Griffin up to God, asking God to heal him, to care for him, and make him whole. And to take my worry away. Because there wasn't one thing I could do about this situation. Not one. The only thing I could do was pray. And that was the best thing.

Wouldn't you know? Within a matter of minutes, I was able to calm down. Feeling came back to my legs. My food smelled delicious again, and the warmth of the sunshine felt like a great big hug from God.

This distraction of worry completely took my focus off the moment, it completely took my thoughts to the worse possible scenario, and it utterly made me feel ill. Well, that's what worry does.

The distraction of worry causes us physical harm.

It affects us in ways that other distractions do not. It not only snatches us away from the present, but it is also physically bad for us. This distraction causes harm to our brains, our muscles, our breathing, our hearts and blood sugar, and our digestive and immune systems. The distraction of worry can cause a stress response within us known as the "fight or flight syndrome." Our bodies react by increasing blood flow to our extremities and decreasing blood flow to our brains. No wonder we can't think straight when we're worried. No wonder some of us don't think to pray right away when worry overwhelms us. And no wonder our arms or legs feel strange when we worry. (I thought that was just me!) It's no wonder our hearts feel like they are racing, and we lose our appetites when we worry.

Yikes! It's clear to me--and probably to you, too--worry is not good for us.

The definition of worry is this: *to torment oneself with or suffer from disturbing thoughts; to fret*. Doesn't that sound awful? To torment oneself?? To suffer from disturbing thoughts? These words alone make we want to never worry again. Because I assume you're a little like me. You don't want to torment yourself, and you certainly don't want to cause yourself to suffer.

Worry says, "Fret about this." But God says, "Do not worry."

Psalm 37:8b TLB says it well: *Don't fret and worry—it only leads to harm.*

Worry is not God's best for us.

God often reminds us of this when we read His word. He is trying to protect us from the very thing that can cause us so much harm! He wants to protect us from tormenting ourselves or from the suffering caused by disturbing thoughts.

Jesus said to his disciples in Luke 12:22-26 VOICE:

This is why I keep telling you not to worry about anything in life—about what you'll eat, about how you'll clothe your body. Life is more than food, and the body is more than fancy clothes. Think about those crows flying over there: do they plant and harvest crops? Do they own silos or barns? Look at them fly. It looks like God is taking pretty good care of them, doesn't it? Remember that you are more precious to God than birds! Which one of you can add a single hour to your life or 18 inches to your height by worrying really hard? If worry can't change anything, why do you do it so much?

Did you catch that last sentence in verse 26? *If worry can't change anything, why do you do it so much?*

Good question, Jesus.

Why do we do it so much?

The distraction of worry doesn't change our circumstances, it makes them worse. It doesn't help us, it hurts us. It doesn't help us focus on God and His peace, but it distracts us from the only help we have in this world. God, Himself. Worry takes our focus off God and places it on our problems.

It says, "Fret about this because you can't do anything about it." God says, "Do not worry, I have it all under control."

Let's look at another verse, Philippians 4:6-7. We did so not long ago, but it's a good word for us today. The Message translation reads a little differently than with what we might be familiar. Paul encourages us:

Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life.

This verse encourages me greatly, and it points us to the antidote for worry. Prayer. "Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers."

God, I worry about the future, but I'm handing this worry over to You, instead, because I know You are in control.

God, I am fretting about my diagnosis, but I know it won't help me, so I give all my concerns to You. Please give me Your peace.

Lord, I am worrying about my grandson, but Your Word says I have no reason to worry. So, I'm entrusting Him to you, instead.

That's how we shape our worries into prayers.

That's how we trust God with what concerns us.

And that's how we live out our faith, giving Him all our worries and our frets.

The sovereign cure for worry is prayer. --William James

Our daughter took our grandson to the specialist, and thankfully there was nothing wrong anatomically. The worry that consumed me that beautiful day in Florida last month was all for nothing. (Isn't that what most of our worries are? All for nothing? In fact, a recent study conducted at Penn State revealed 8.6% of what we worry about will ever come true! 8%! And get this, the most common percentage of untrue worries per person was 100%!)

Yet, I let worry rob me of a priceless moment with my husband. It snatched me from the present and set my focus on what I couldn't control. And it reminded me of a good lesson. The distraction of worry will always try steal from us the blessings God has given us.

Let's not let that happen.

Let's not allow worry to steal one more moment, one more blessing, one more thought from us. We have greater things to do than to be sidetracked with worry.

So, may we give all of our cares, concerns, worries, frets, whatever we call them, over to God today.

Take 10 minutes and list them out on paper. Pray over each one, forming them into prayers, and asking God to take each one. Asking Him to help you trust Him instead of worrying. Then after 10 minutes are up, crumple up the list and throw it away. Do this exercise as often as you need to.

Do a search for Bible verses about worry and you'll find numerous ones to encourage your heart. Write a couple out and post them where you'll see them often. Surprisingly, you'll soon realize you have those scriptures memorized because you read them so much. This will transform your thinking from worrying to praying. On my Free Resources page, you'll find a printable listing Helpful Verses About Worry. The link to this page is in the show notes.

And sometimes worry has such a hold on us, God may encourage us to seek out the help of a professional Christian counselor or therapist. There is nothing wrong with getting the help we need, and sometimes I think therapy gets a bad rap, especially in Christian circles. From personal experience, God continues to grow me and transform my thinking in every appointment I have with my therapist, and I cannot say enough good things about it or her. I thank God for this tool of healing and growth!

So, what's the thing you're worrying about right now?

What's weighing on your heart? What are you fretting about? Will you give it to God today, and let Him handle it? May we remember, worry is not God's best for us.

We're continuing this conversation over in our Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook. This week we'll discuss worry and how it affects our lives. I invite you over to be encouraged and inspired, and to connect with others who are desiring to live encouraged and less distracted as well. The link to this group is in the show notes.

If you found some encouragement for your real life in this episode today, would you please consider rating and/or reviewing it? This makes a difference in how others find this encouragement too. Be sure to subscribe to the podcast so you never miss an episode.

To wrap up this episode, the distraction of worry can certainly grab us in ways maybe other distractions don't, but we don't have to give in to it. We have tools to help us combat worry, especially prayer. I invite you, if you are carrying any worries today, pray about them. Give them over to God who can handle them. Free yourself from the burden of this distraction of worry. I'm doing this right along with you, friend. Thank you for journeying alongside of me. I'm grateful for you today. God bless you!

Julie Lefebvre