

TOMORROWLAND

The Future Belongs to God

Texts: Matthew 6:25-34; James 4:13-17

A Brief Review

We're talking this month about the subject of WORRY – what it is, where it comes from, and how to deal with it in a life-enhancing way. Before I move us forward, I thought it might be helpful to do a quick review of some key concepts that Tracey and Eric shared with us in their wonderful messages last week.

The FIRST is, all of us worry. We worry over how we look and how we talk. We worry about our kids and our parents, our jobs and our junk, our finances and our followers. We worry over deadlines, and conflicts, and things we can't quite name. In a recent study, Americans rated "worrying" ahead of procrastinating, over-eating, and media-binging on the list of things they sensed they shouldn't be doing but nonetheless often did. I'd have to put it close to the top of my own list. I had at least one sleepless night this past week alone.

The SECOND thing we learned about worry is that it is supposed to shrink the more we grow in Christ. Jesus is clear about his desire to banish worry from our lives: **"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, "Do not worry about what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear."** (Matt 6:25). In making sense of Christ's teaching here, the THIRD important concept to remember that worry is not the same thing as fear or anxiety. Jesus is NOT saying, I expect you never to be afraid or anxious about anything.

Let me remind you that it's O.K. to be AFRAID sometimes. Fear is often a good emotion. FEAR is like the flashing red light at a railway crossing that indicates a genuine present threat. You should be afraid to drive forward. Fear is a God-given emotion meant to awaken us to real danger so that we can fight or flee from it.

It's also fine to be ANXIOUS at times. ANXIETY is like the yellow light on your car dashboard that indicates there might be a real problem. So your spider-sense starts tingling: "You know, I haven't heard the kids for a very long time." Or your belly starts to roil a bit and you think: "Have I got that assignment done?" We're supposed to pay attention to anxious feelings, because they remind us to check our condition.

But as Eric and Tracey explained last week, WORRY is something different than either fear or anxiety. To stay with my car metaphor, WORRY is like someone honking their horn or revving their engine in the midst of a traffic jam. It's a

choice that you make to express your tension or displeasure with a situation, but it doesn't change it. If you insist on being the honker or revver, you'll mainly succeed in pumping up your own blood pressure and irritating people around you. It is YOU that needs adjusting.

As was said last week, sometimes it takes a medical adjustment. Some people's emotional horns or psychological engines get stuck and it actually takes a trained technician to help adjust them. For most of us, however, the honking or revving of worry is something that can be repaired with some simpler means.

In last week's message, Tracey and Eric pointed out that what may be needed is for you to adjust your awareness of God's presence and care for you. Really look around you. What are the odds of a planet like this even coming into being? How likely was it that the particular genetic material that is you would come together? Just think for a moment, says Jesus, of all the ways God provides for little things like birds and flowers, then ponder for a moment the vastly larger array of graces that have surrounded and upheld and filled your life too. **"You are much more valuable"** to God than you may think (Matt 6:26b), says Jesus. You are a beloved child of a heavenly Father. He made you. He's been watching over you. He's willing to shed blood for you. If you died today, he can resurrect you to new life. So why are you honking and revving so hard? What might start to slip off your Worry List, if you truly trusted in God's presence and care?

For the truth, says Jesus, is that **"Your heavenly Father knows [what] you need"** (Matt 26:32). Sometimes our worries have to do with confusion about what we really NEED. We WANT to be thinner, taller, or richer. We worry over whether we or our child will get into a prestigious school. We toss and turn over the opinion other people have of us. We grind over the possibility that we will have to endure some pain or pay a price for our choices. But, if you think about it, these are all "First World Worries." People experienced with real deprivation aren't so concerned about these things. So maybe one way to reduce your Worry List is to adjust your sense of need.

I confess that I often WANT God to serve me a seven-layer-cake-life where all I have to do is blow and all my worried wishes are granted. I am coming to see, however, that I only actually NEED "daily bread" – enough grace to get through this day... enough faith, hope, and love to sustain me through another 24 hours. I'm starting to think that my greatest need is actually -- as Jesus put it – to learn to **seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness** (Matt 6:33). If the Bible is right then the most important need in our life or that of our loved ones is to have experiences – whether hard or happy – that develop in us a character more like God's and that teach us to live more and more by the values of his kingdom. What on your current Worry List might start to evaporate if you saw that as your biggest need?

Driving Toward The Future

Before I let you go today, let me suggest one more strategy for dealing with volume of worry in your life. It requires that you adjust your attitude toward the future. I suspect that one of the other reasons that many of us are haunted by worry is because we spend a lot of our energy walking around "Tomorrowland." How many of you have ever visited Tomorrowland at one of Disney's theme parks?

If you've been there, then you know that it is a place that gives us a preview of what the future will look like. I recall my first trip there when I was nine years old and the glimpse it gave me of what life would be like in the far off future. We'd all be riding around in monorails and flying around with jetpacks and wearing clothes like the Jetsons or the people on Star Trek. This is what I should expect by the Year 2000.

Some of us live with an equally "clear" picture of what the future holds. It may be an IDEALIZED picture like the Disney version and we worry over getting ready for it, or getting there fast enough, or getting other people onboard to go there. We honk and rev our engines, trying to move the traffic in front of us and make tomorrow come. Others of us live with an AWFULIZED picture of the future, sort of like a nightmare Tomorrowland. In this future, the sky is falling, or you're falling, or you show up naked, or you can't run fast enough, or you aren't prepared, or everything that could go wrong does. Ask somebody today: Which kind of Tomorrowland is more dominant for you?

Regardless of whether you tend toward the idealized or the awfulized picture, it's amazing how emotionally powerful and psychologically controlling are these visions of the way things are going to be. But as the folks who invested big bucks in monorails and bomb shelters in the 1960's would tell you, it's hard to predict the future. That's not to say we should be passive when it comes to preparing for it. In one of our scripture lessons for today, the Apostle James made it clear that if there is something constructive we can do to ready ourselves for tomorrow, we ought to attend to it. In the fourth chapter of his famous letter, James wrote: **"If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them"** (Jas 4:17).

But James also suggests, the even greater danger is thinking that we know what tomorrow will bring and that it is mainly our work and worry that moves that future. To which James responds: **"Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow... Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.'** (James 4:13-15) Which is to say that only God truly lives in Tomorrowland and shapes its reality. For you and me, tomorrow never comes. There is only today and the choice we have to trust our

heavenly Father and try to cooperate with his work as best we can, letting go of our worry.

The Lord of Tomorrow

In a recent book, Kyle Idleman confesses his discovery of this truth, and with this I'll move us toward a close: "When I started a new church in Los Angeles... I found that I was overwhelmed with pressure and stress. I was working more than seventy hours a week. My wife would ask me to take a day off, and I would say, 'I can't.' I wasn't sleeping at night, and I started to take sleeping pills. When the church was about a year old, I woke up in the night, and I had this strange sense that God was laughing at me. As I lay in bed, I wondered, Why is God laughing at me? I finally got an answer to that question. Here's how it happened.

"When we moved into our current house, I saved the heaviest piece of furniture for last—the desk from my office. As I was pushing and pulling the desk with all my might, my four-year-old son came over and asked if he could help. So together we started sliding it across the floor. He was pushing and grunting as we inched our way along. After a few minutes, my son stopped pushing, looked up at me, and said, 'Dad, you're in my way.' And then he tried to push the desk by himself. Of course it didn't budge.

It was then that it hit me, says Idleman: "I realized that [my child] thought he was actually doing all the work, instead of me. I couldn't help but laugh. The moment I started laughing at my son's comment, I recalled that middle-of-the-night incident and I realized why God was laughing at me. I thought I was pushing the desk. I know that's ridiculous, but instead of recognizing God's power and strength, I started to think it all depended on me."

Author Amy Simpson writes: "When we worry about the future, we usually imagine a world where God is nearly or completely absent, exaggerated in its sense of darkness, where bad things are almost sure to happen. We discount the active presence of God in this world, stemming the tide of darkness and self-destruction we seem so eager to throw ourselves into and acting for our benefit. We forget that with a loving and all-powerful God enacting his redemptive plan, the odds of something good happening are always at least as great as the odds of tragedy...

"There's usually some truth to what worries us (yes, those bad things really could happen; yes, terrible things are happening all over the world), but worry never tells the whole truth. The whole truth includes what God is doing, his power, the beauty in this world, the surprising kindness of sin-riddled people, our mysterious ability to endure far more than we're prepared for and the fact that I'm not responsible for how everything turns out...

"The Bible makes clear that the future is not our domain. We have no claim on it, right to it, knowledge of it or assurance that it will ever arrive. The future belongs only to God... [But] that same God is so good and beautiful, he has greater gifts in store for us than we can even imagine." With him, in him, because of him, "our unknowable future is bright."

Which is why Jesus says: **"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow"** (Matt 6:34). Cool your engine. Stop your honking. It won't get you down the road any faster. Here's the good news: I'm with you right now. And I'm already there.

Pray with me, would you?

Eternal God, awaken us afresh to your presence and care for us. Recalibrate our sense of what we truly need. Adjust our attitude toward the future, so that we can simply walk in trust and faithfulness with you today. Through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

Benediction

Scriptures Worth Meditating or Memorizing to Help You Move Toward NO WORRIES

Psalm 23

Matthew 6:25-27

Romans 8:28-39

Philippians 4:4-9

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Adapted from Kyle Idleman, [HYPERLINK "http://www.christianbook.com/Christian/Books/product?item_no=331933&p=1022189"](http://www.christianbook.com/Christian/Books/product?item_no=331933&p=1022189) Not a Fan (Zondervan, 2011), pp. 96-97
Amy Simpson, *Anxious: Choosing Faith in a World of Worry* (InterVarsity, 2014)