

Winning *Over* Worry

THE SECRET to LASTING PEACE

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ADAPTED FROM *HEAVEN CAN'T WAIT!*

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Italics added to Scripture quotations reflect the author's own emphasis.

*God has not given us a spirit
of fear, but of power and of
love and of a sound mind.*

—2 Timothy 1:7 NKJV

A thief is running loose in our midst—a dangerous thief robbing us of what is most important in life: joy, energy, peace of mind, and even our health. The name of the thief? Worry.

Right now, our world seems to be consumed with worry. We have been experiencing an unprecedented situation: an invisible enemy has invaded our nation, our communities, and even our homes. Many people have been isolated in their residences for months, watching updates on the news and social media, terrified of the coronavirus and how it might bring harm to themselves or their loved ones. Across our nation, the pandemic has closed schools, shuttered businesses, and caused countless men and women to struggle to pay their bills, not knowing whether they will even

have a job in days ahead. They are overcome with worry.

Worry can cause us to lose all sense of perspective. Someone has described worry as “a thin stream of fear trickling through the mind. If encouraged, it cuts a channel into which all other thoughts are drained.” Have you ever had that experience? Perhaps you were watching television, or maybe sitting in a worship service, when out of nowhere an alien thought came into your mind, something to worry about. You tried to dismiss the thought, but it wouldn’t leave; and this worry grew larger and larger until it drained every other thought and concern you have.

Our English word *worry* comes from a German word that means “to strangle.” And that’s what worry does—it strangles us spiritually, emotionally, and even physically. Worry strangles out the joy in our lives. The late Corrie ten Boom is credited with this wise observation about worry: “Worry doesn’t empty

tomorrow of its sorrow; it empties today of its strength.”

The Devastating Effects Of Worry

Worry can have devastating effects on our emotional well-being, especially when chronic worry leads to an anxiety disorder, which has become the most common mental illness in America.¹ Worry can also trigger a host of physical diseases and health problems. Did you know that during World War II, two million Americans died from cardiovascular disease? Doctors say half of those deaths were directly attributable to hypertension induced by worry. Dr. Charles Mayo, founder of the internationally known Mayo Clinic, said that half of our hospital beds are filled with people who worried themselves there.²

Worry not only drains us emotionally and physically, but it also saps our spiritual strength. In Luke 8, Jesus told a parable about

a sower who went out to sow his seed. Most of the seed did not grow because it fell on the wrong type of soil. The seed, Jesus said, represented the Word of God. The four kinds of soil represented the four different conditions of the human heart. Notice one type of soil in which the seed did not grow: “The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity” (Luke 8:14). Jesus was saying that for some of us, as we try to grow in our spiritual maturity, our spiritual interest is choked out by a love of pleasure and a love of money. And of all the things that hinder a person’s spiritual growth, notice what is at the top of the list. Worry!

Although the world is plagued with worry, God never intended His children to be overtaken by it. What is the antidote to worry? Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let

your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful” (John 14:27). Christ’s gift to us is peace no matter what happens around us. Wouldn’t you like to have the kind of life that no matter what happens, you are at peace and all is well?

The way we experience Christ’s gift of peace in our lives is through faith. The Bible says that faith is not a hope or a wish; it is a confidence that God is going to take care of us. The writer of Hebrews defined faith this way: “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (11:1). Faith is not a positive emotion we try to create when life unravels. Instead, it is the assurance that no matter what is happening around us, God is still in control.

Most of us have to admit that we are not enjoying the gift of peace that Christ left us. Why? Because we choose to worry instead of having faith. Most of the time, we don’t get to choose our circumstances, but we do choose how we respond

to those circumstances. That's what an attitude is. Attitude is our mental and emotional response to the circumstances of life. Worry is an attitude choice, but faith is an attitude choice too.

The moment we are faced with a troubling circumstance, we can respond in one of two ways. We can choose to worry about the situation, or we can choose to believe that God is in control of this circumstance and will take care of us.

Three Major Causes Of Worry

Before we look at how to develop the attitude of faith, let's examine some of the causes of worry. As I look through Scripture, and after forty years of talking with people who worry, I have identified three major sources of anxiety in our lives.

Wrong Value System

Think for a moment about

something you are worried about. What is the thing right now that you are most worried about? I could probably guess that your worry involves something being taken away from you—a person, a position, or a possession. Maybe you are afraid that you will lose your spouse, either through death or desertion. Possibly you are worried about losing your job and, as a result, your prestige. Maybe you are fearful of losing your money and facing financial hardship. Or right now, maybe you are worried about the far-reaching effects of the coronavirus and the loss of your health, or even your life.

Most people have an anxiety that involves the fear of losing something important to us. Thus, a major cause of our worry is building our lives around temporal things, instead of eternal things. Chuck Swindoll quoted the great Scottish writer Alexander Whyte about our tendency to “hang very heavy weights on very thin wires.”³ For example, we hang the heavy weight of our happiness

on the very thin wire of health, only to have it snapped by an accident or illness. Or we hang the heavy weight of our security on the thin wire of our job, only to have the wire snapped by an unexpected change in the economy or an unprecedented pandemic. We will always be anxious when we build our affections around anyone or anything that can be taken away from us.

How do you deal with that anxiety? Most of us think the way to remove worry is to protect ourselves from adversity. For example, if we are fearful about losing money, we accumulate all the money we can to protect ourselves from a downturn in the economy. If we are anxious about losing someone important to us, we smother that person with affection and attention. Or, more recently, if we are anxious about the coronavirus, we stockpile supplies and bathe ourselves in hand sanitizer. But the truth is, we cannot protect ourselves against every possible loss in life.

Jesus reminds us that loss of

relationships or possessions is inevitable. He said, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal” (Matthew 6:19–20). That is why it is much wiser to build our happiness around those things that cannot be taken away from us.

Dwight L. Moody, the great evangelist of yesteryear, once said, “Trust in yourself, and you are doomed to disappointment; trust in your friends, and they will die and leave you; trust in money, and you may have it taken from you; trust in reputation, and some slanderous tongue may blast it; but trust in God, and you are never to be confounded in time or eternity.”

Unconfessed Sin

A second cause of our anxiety can be unconfessed sin in our lives. Whenever we consistently and

willfully disobey God and violate His standards, the byproduct of that disobedience is worry. We sense that judgment is coming.

Sometimes we fear that our sinful behavior is going to be uncovered. Undoubtedly, that was true of David after he committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband, Uriah. For months, David lived in constant dread of the prospect of that sin being made known to the Israelites, so he tried to hide it. He tried to cover it over. In Psalm 32:3–4, he wrote about the anxiety he felt during that period: “When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer.”

Other times, our disobedient lifestyles produce a general sense of uneasiness. We think somehow God is going to punish us. We don't know for sure what form our judgment will take, but we know it is certain.

We feel as if we are living with the proverbial sword of Damocles hanging over our heads, ready to drop at any time. We are fearful that disaster is going to come into our lives at any moment because of our disobedience. Such general fear is what Martin Luther had in mind when he said, “The pagan trembles at the rustling of a leaf.”⁴

Unrighteous people are naturally fearful, because even though they may not proclaim to believe in God, deep down they know that there is a God and that He is unhappy with them. Conversely, righteous living produces peace of mind. The prophet Isaiah wrote, “The work of righteousness will be peace, and the service of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever” (32:17).

Such peace of mind is beautifully illustrated in the Old Testament story of Daniel. Daniel had risen to prominence under the reign of King Darius, and Darius’s court counselors were jealous of Daniel because of the king’s favor. So they came up

with a devious plot that targeted God's young servant. The king's commissioners knew Daniel was faithful in prayer, so they convinced King Darius to sign a decree that anyone who prayed to any other sovereign except King Darius would be executed.

When Daniel heard about the decree, which very likely could have been his own death warrant, the law did not deter Daniel from serving God. Notice how Daniel responded to the news: "When Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously" (Daniel 6:10). David had complete peace of mind even though he knew he would probably be killed. That's what righteous living does—it gives you supernatural peace regardless of your circumstances.

Contrast Daniel's response of

serenity to Darius's response of anxiety: "The king went off to his palace and spent the night fasting, and no entertainment was brought before him; and his sleep fled from him" (6:18). Even though Darius was a pagan and had every right under human authority to sign that decree, deep down he knew it was wrong. He knew there was a God in heaven, the God of Israel, who demanded exclusive worship. And he was unable to sleep because of his misdeed.

Daniel was free from worry because he was obedient to God. On the other hand, Darius knew he was violating God's standards, and such an awareness produced worry.

Satanic Attack

A third source of anxiety is something we don't talk about often. Some of our worry is the direct result of satanic attack in our lives.

In Ephesians 6, the apostle Paul described the spiritual armor that is available to every Christian to use against Satan's attacks. Paul

reminded us that our struggle is not against other people. We may think our struggle is against our mate, our children, our employer, or somebody else. But Paul said, “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood,” but against the unseen “spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (v. 12). Spiritual warfare demands spiritual weapons. In verse 16, Paul described one of our pieces of spiritual armor: “In addition to all, [take] up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”

What did Paul mean by the shield of faith? In Paul’s day, the Roman shield was a piece of wood, two and one-half feet wide and four and one-half feet high, that was covered with metal or leather and soaked in water. The enemy would shoot arrows that had been dipped in pitch and set on fire. Because flaming arrows would ignite anything they hit, the only protection available against serious burns was this shield. When a flaming arrow hit a shield covered

in water-soaked leather, it was immediately extinguished.

Paul said when you are under attack from Satan, hold up that shield of faith with which you can extinguish Satan's flaming arrows. I think Satan has a large arsenal of flaming arrows he shoots into people's lives. One flaming arrow is lust; another is doubt; another is depression. Satan knows exactly what arrow to use at the right time on the right person. And one of his favorite arrows, I believe, is labeled "worry." Satan loves to send the flaming arrow of worry into our lives. Why?

First, look at the result of anxiety. When this flaming arrow strikes us, we are paralyzed by it. Worry is like a stun gun that leaves us incapable of performing our God-given responsibilities. Worry can be so overwhelming that we are incapable of doing anything else.

Does such an emotion come from God? Sometimes. We have seen that building our lives around temporal values or living in disobedience can

produce anxiety. And God sometimes uses such anxiety to bring us into a right relationship with Himself.

But many times, anxiety is the direct result of a satanic attack—especially when such fear hinders our relationship with God instead of encouraging it. Have you ever been so anxious that the last thing you felt like doing was praying, reading God’s Word, talking to God’s people, or confronting your fear in a rational way? Such paralyzing fear does not come from God. Paul wrote, “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:17 NKJV). Whenever worry drives you away from God rather than closer to God, you can know that it is not coming from God; it’s coming from the evil one.

Another reason I believe that most anxiety is a result of a satanic attack is that worry usually is built not on fact but on lies. Jesus said that Satan “is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). Dr. Walter Cavert, in

his study of anxiety, concluded that only 8 percent of people's worries were legitimate. In other words, 92 percent of the things we worry about never actually happen!⁵ Have you experienced that in your own life? I can go back and read my spiritual journal from decades ago; the things I was consumed about, the things I was so fearful of—they never ended up happening. Such unfounded worry is a favorite weapon of the evil one.

Winning Over Worry

How do we erect the shield of faith in our lives to extinguish Satan's flaming arrows of worry? Let me suggest four positive actions, based on God's Word, that you can take to win over worry in your life.

Repent Of Known Sin

If some of your anxiety is because of a wrong value system, then that worry is like a headache; it shows something else is wrong in your life.

Maybe you realize that you have built your life around the temporary, not necessarily sinful things, but things that can be easily taken away from you. You need to change where you are putting your affections and your desires. And that is what the word *repent* means, to turn around.

When your heart is centered not on the Creator but on His creation, such misplaced love is idolatry. When we think of idolatry, we conjure up images of heathens bowing to a wooden image or a golden calf. We would never be guilty of that! But when we love anyone or anything more than God, we are committing idolatry. And we are also setting the stage for a life of worry. Why? Because anything less than God can be taken from us. Deep down, we know that. So, we spend our lives frantically trying to hold on to that which we know can be taken from us in a moment.

What is the cure for such misplaced affection? Paul said, “If you have been raised up with Christ,

keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth” (Colossians 3:1–2). If your source of worry is that you have been building your life around temporal values, then the way to remove that worry is to turn from those attitudes.

In addition to changing your attitudes, you may need to change some of your actions to reduce worry. You may need to let go of things in your life that you know are displeasing to the Lord, such as a wrong relationship, a dishonest practice you are involved in, or maybe an addiction. You know God is displeased with those actions, and you have a sense that if you don’t change your behavior, then God is going to send His discipline into your life.

Such fear is not without basis. God does discipline His children: “For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives” (Hebrews

12:6). If you are involved in sin, it's not a matter of if God is going to send discipline; it's only a matter of when that discipline is going to come. God sends that discipline into your life not because He hates you; He sends discipline into your life because He loves you. Just as a parent who loves His child disciplines His child, so God, our loving heavenly Father, sends discipline into our lives as well. I can tell you from personal experience that God's discipline is not pleasant. There are times in my life that I have not been doing the right thing and God put His heavy hand upon me, and I can tell you for sure I never want to experience that again.

The good news is, we don't have to live in fear of God's discipline. We can remove the fear of impending doom by turning away from our sin. Paul said it succinctly: "If we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged" (1 Corinthians 11:31). Right now, you have the opportunity to say, "I am not headed in the right direction. Today, I'm going to start

walking in a new direction.” That is one way to win over worry in your life.

Remove Unnecessary Fear

Much of the worry we suffer is unnecessary and can be conquered by confronting the source of our fears. For example, many of us feel anxious about things we know we should be doing but are not doing. Maybe you have not reconciled your bank statement in several months. You know you need to do it, but you don't want to find out that you are in worse financial shape than you thought. You keep postponing this task, but unfortunately, you cannot postpone your anxiety. The longer you put it off, the more you worry. Every time you write a check, you wonder if this is going to be the one that bounces. On the backburner of your mind, you have just added one more source of worry.

A doctor has said that the three killers of our age are the telephone, the clock, and the calendar. What do

these three items have in common? They all remind us of what we should be doing. And such reminders produce anxiety. Here are three words that will help you remove much of the anxiety in your life: *do it now!*

If there is a telephone call to be made, *do it now!*

If there is a difficult letter to be written, *do it now!*

If there is an appointment to be made, *do it now!*

The book of Proverbs talks about the diligent person versus the lazy person who is always finding an excuse to postpone to tomorrow what should be done today.

Willard Scott, who for years was the weatherman on the *Today* show, tells of being deathly afraid of bridges. He would avoid them at every opportunity. Tired of the inconvenience of avoiding bridges, he decided to face his fear head-on. He got in his convertible and crossed the Chesapeake Bay Bridge 20 times! And guess what? The bridge did not

collapse. Scott had confronted his fear with truth.⁶

That kind of action is biblical. Another piece of the Christian's armor is the belt of truth: "Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth" (Ephesians 6:14). The loose ends of a soldier's tunic were tucked into his belt, so that he would not trip. In the same way, we are to gird or tuck in our loose thoughts into the belt of truth. That is what Peter had in mind when he wrote, "Therefore, prepare your minds for action" (1 Peter 1:13). Tuck any loose thoughts into the belt of truth so that you might not stumble.

Remember God's Past Faithfulness

As you read the Psalms, you quickly realize that David suffered from anxiety attacks. One of his particularly acute attacks is recorded in Psalm 3. As his son Absalom led

a national revolt against his father, David lapsed into despair: “O LORD, how my adversaries have increased! Many are rising up against me. Many are saying of my soul, ‘There is no deliverance for him in God’” (Psalm 3:1–2).

But then notice how quickly David’s attitude changes: “But You, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the One who lifts my head. I was crying to the LORD with my voice, and He answered me from His holy mountain. I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustains me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me round about” (3:3–6).

What accounts for David’s new courage? I believe that David started to remember God’s past faithfulness to Him. And such reflection reminded David that God was completely capable and willing to sustain him now. David had a habit of remembering God’s faithfulness. When he was confronted by the giant

Goliath, he remarked, “The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine” (1 Samuel 17:37).

When David faced an equally formidable enemy, he was able to add to his list of memories of God’s prior faithfulness. He could have said, “As God delivered me from the paw of the lion and bear, as He delivered me from Goliath, and as He delivered me from Saul, He will certainly deliver me from Absalom.”

In the same way, I believe that God wants us to have a pool of memories to draw from in times of adversity. Such memories of God’s prior faithfulness can relieve anxiety. Specifically, I would suggest that you keep a journal of your prayer requests, making sure to date each request and record the answer to that request. My prayer diary is a great source of comfort as I am able to look back and see God’s past faithfulness to me.

Remain In Contact With God

The two greatest antidotes to anxiety are found in Philippians 4:6–9. One involves our communication with God; the other antidote is allowing God to communicate to us.

First, notice the relationship between prayer and anxiety:

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6–7).

Talking to God about your fears causes His peace to “guard your hearts and your minds.” Paul was alluding here to a Roman guard that marched around a fortress. God’s peace marches around our hearts and minds when we talk to Him.

Second, notice that the cure for anxiety is allowing God to speak to us through His Word: “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever

is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence, and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. . . . And the God of peace shall be with you” (4:8–9).

I believe that when Paul spoke of dwelling on whatever is true, honorable, pure, and lovely, he was referring to the Word of God. Psalm 19:7–10 uses many of those phrases to describe God’s Word. The Bible is a record of both God’s past faithfulness and God’s future promises to His children. And such a record is an eternal source of relief from worry.

Prayer and meditation on God’s Word freed Paul from many anxious moments in that Roman prison. And such peace of mind is available to anyone who will choose faith in God over worry.

Notes

1. Anxiety and Depression Association of America, “Facts & Statistics,” <https://adaa.org/about-adaa/press-room/facts-statistics>.
2. Lloyd M. Perry and Charles M. Sell, *Speaking to Life's Problems* (Chicago: Moody, 1983), 161–62.
3. Charles R. Swindoll, *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 310.
4. R. C. Sproul, *Classic Teachings on the Nature of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 217.
5. Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Joyful* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1974), 129.
6. Sandy Rovner, “Facing Fear Itself,” *Washington Post*, February 17, 1984, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1984/10/17/facing-fear-itself/8d36b7ec-dfc7-4669-a822-f3c6378a14e3/?utm_term=.3c577c2b5fa2.

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Dr. Jeffress has made more than 4,000 guest appearances on various radio and television programs and regularly appears on major mainstream media outlets, such as Fox News Channel's "Fox and Friends," "Hannity," "Lou Dobbs Tonight," "Varney & Co.," and "Judge Jeanine," also ABC's "Good Morning America," and HBO's "Real Time with Bill Maher."

Dr. Jeffress hosts a daily radio program, *Pathway to Victory*, that is heard nationwide on over 1,000 stations in major markets such as Dallas-Fort Worth, New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, Houston, Washington, D.C., San Francisco, Philadelphia, and Seattle.

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Dr. Jeffress is the author of 27 books including, *Not All Roads Lead To Heaven*; *A Place Called Heaven: 10 Surprising Truths About Your Eternal Home*; *Choosing the Extraordinary Life*; *Courageous: 10 Strategies for Thriving in a Hostile World*; and his newest book being released September 2021, **INVINCIBLE: Conquering the Mountains That Separate You From the Blessed Life.**

Dr. Jeffress led the congregation in the completion of a \$135 million re-creation of its downtown campus. The project is the largest in modern church history and serves as a “spiritual oasis” covering six blocks of downtown Dallas.

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Dr. Jeffress and his wife Amy have two daughters and three grandchildren.



Established in 1996, *Pathway to Victory* serves as the broadcast ministry of Dr. Robert Jeffress and the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas.

Pathway to Victory stands for truth and exists to pierce the darkness with the light of God's Word through the most effective media available, including television, radio, print, and digital media.

Through *Pathway to Victory*, Dr. Robert Jeffress spreads the Good News of Jesus Christ to a lost and hurting people, confronts an ungodly culture with God's truth, and equips the saints to apply scripture to their everyday lives.

More than 900 radio stations in the United States broadcast the daily radio program, while Daystar, Trinity Broadcasting Network, and other Christian television networks air *Pathway to Victory* both in the United States and internationally.

Our mission is to provide practical application of God's Word to everyday life through clear, Biblical teaching. Our goal is to lead people to become obedient and reproducing disciples of Jesus Christ, as He commanded in Matthew 28:18-20.

As our ministry continues to grow and expand, we are confident the Lord will use Pathway to Victory to advance the mission statement of First Baptist Dallas—to transform the world with God's Word...one life at a time.

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