



*Jo Helsabeck*

For all of the 48 years that my husband, Hank, and I have been married, we have lived in the rhythm of the academic calendar. But now we are officially retired! We have freedom to explore our world, visit family for longer stretches, and do some of the things on our bucket lists. We are grateful for many good years of employment and for being able to work at jobs we loved. And we are deeply thankful that God still employs us as his ministers and trains us through the ministry of others even in retirement. Hank and I live in Newberg, Oregon, and are part of the fellowship at Newberg Friends Church.

I hope you don't cringe as you see this week's devotional topic: *worry*. Instead, I hope you will find deep encouragement and blessing as we explore the bridges from worry to the peace Christ offers us.

*BIBLE READING: Philippians 4:6-7*

Maybe you remember the Bobby McFerrin song “Don’t Worry, Be Happy.” You may be smiling if you remember it. The message is simple, the tune is catchy, and the mood of the song is carefree. It offers quick relief from the things we worry about. The admonition isn’t bad, suggesting that we can choose not to worry and instead choose to be happy. However, the song fails to offer a bridge—a way—from worry to happiness.

Contrast these words of Paul in Philippians 4:6-7:

Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. If you do this, you will experience God’s peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. (NLT)

In these verses, Paul doesn’t admonish us not to think or to just let our minds float. Instead he gives us the antidote to worry, the bridge over which we can cross into a focus on God who is the only substitute for worry. The bridge is giving worry to God with gratitude.

Perhaps worry is preoccupying your thinking. Tell God about it. Thank him for his ability to carry this burden for you. Receive the peace he gives you. Practice gratitude every time that worry resurfaces today.

*SONG: God Will Take Care of You*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Use Philippians 4:6-7 as your prayer guideline.*

—Jo Helsabeck

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 6:25-34*

This week we are looking at the subject of worry—that common human preoccupation without easy remedies. This form of idolatry takes us quickly away from God’s provision and care, and it throws us into doubt and fear. We are looking into God’s word as our bridge from worry to happiness, from idolatry to deepening intimacy with God.

Let’s look now at the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:25-34. Allow these words to soak into your mind as you read them, knowing that Jesus is talking to you with great love and care for your soul. What is Jesus asking of you? What is he saying about God the Father?

We will only truly be released from the tyranny of worry if we are able to hand it over to a reliable one who has the resources to handle it. Putting worry out of our minds without confidence in a reliable resource means that the source of worry plays havoc in our subconscious minds and returns full force to sabotage us later. Releasing the source of worry to a reliable resource who can handle it means our subconscious mind is free to do the creative and constructive work it is designed to do. We can move on in gratitude to face what comes in the day. Jesus tells us in these verses that God can handle our worries. Looking to God with gratitude yields big dividends.

*SONG: A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Thank God that he can handle all that concerns you.*

—Jo Helsabeck

*BIBLE SCRIPTURE: Philippians 4:6-8*

I grew up in a family of worriers. My parents experienced the Great Depression on farms in the midst of the Dust Bowl, they lost family members and friends during World War II, and they lived without most of modern medicine that keeps us healthy. Anxious depression ran deep through my dad's family. Although I did not grow up in those circumstances, I did learn to worry. "What if..." was a dreaded phrase in my mind from a young age. I was a fearful kid, then a "well-credentialed" worrier by the time I reached adulthood. I learned to deeply desire to be in control. That was my management technique for worry.

As life became more complicated in my adult years, I found I could not control circumstances, other people, or even my own anxious thoughts. Worry was a destructive companion. Trying to control was a peace-robbing technique for keeping worry at bay. Loving Christians in my workplace helped me come to a place of entrusting my life to Christ. I began to experience God's incredible peace as I began to trust him with my life concerns. But that was only the beginning of my journey of crossing the bridge from worry to real peace. Memorizing Philippians 4:6-8 became God's tool to begin my inner transformation. Today let's take time to look again at the promises offered in these verses.

*SONG: Thy Word Is a Lamp unto My Feet*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, help me tuck these promises deep inside of me. May your word transform me.*

—Jo Helsabeck

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 6:31-34*

James Bryan Smith in his helpful book *The Good and Beautiful Life* devotes a chapter to learning to live without worry. He gives us this definition of worry: “Worry is a disproportionate level of concern based on an inappropriate measure of fear.” He emphasizes the difference between caution and worry. We have to be cautious about many things: crossing streets, managing our money wisely, driving on slippery roads, eating healthy foods. We teach our children caution. However, “Worry is what we do after we have planned, prepared and acted properly. When we continue to stew, we have crossed over into the world of worry.” Worry is based on fear. Fear is destructive to us and to those around us. We fear what we can’t control. Worry leads to anxiety, which is worry about the unknown.

For years, worry gave me a false sense of control. Somehow, I thought that worry would keep bad things from happening or at least I wouldn’t be blindsided when they did happen. Yet the words of Jesus made it clear to me that worry was opposed to living in his kingdom. Worry turned my focus from him and his ability to provide. The need for a sense of control robbed me of knowing his peace. Read again these words of Jesus from Matthew 6:31-34. Permit Christ to minister to your worried heart.

*SONG: Spirit of the Living God*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Permit the Holy Spirit to bring you to Christ for his peace and healing as you give him the troubles of your heart.*

—Jo Helsabeck

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 11:28-30*

In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus gives us another metaphor that helps us move from worry to receiving his peace. Consider his words: “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” (NLT). This invitation shows his understanding of the human heart and his great desire to provide for us.

Jesus knows the burdens we carry. Some are of our own making (like worry), and some come from the heaviness of life's events that we must bear. Regardless, Jesus sees our condition and compassionately invites us into his rest.

With this invitation is a command to join him “under his yoke” and to learn of Jesus' gentleness and humbleness. In submitting to the ways of Jesus, we expose ourselves to his very nature and it becomes part of us. This is a yielding of control in favor of taking up the gifts of dependence on him. The experienced ox carries the burden of the yoke so the young ox can learn the ways of the yoke and the work of plowing; Jesus carries our burdens and shows us how to move through our circumstances in his rhythm and strength. This brings deep peace to our souls. We learn how to live in union with him.

*SONG: Oh, Draw Me Lord*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Reread today's Scripture, inserting your name in Jesus' command in verse 28. Allow Christ to show you what coming under his yoke might look like today. Permit his ministry to bring peace to you.*

—Jo Helsabeck

*BIBLE READING: John 14:1, 27*

My husband and I live every day with a difficult situation we cannot change. We have experienced long stretches of trying to make it different, using our resources of time, talent, money, planning—all to no avail. This situation involves a loved one whose life has gone a direction we never dreamed would happen. Yet it has, despite all we have given to prevent it. Over the years, Christ has helped us learn how to get under the yoke with him (Matthew 11:28-30), but this has not been easy. Fear has gripped us so tightly at times that we could hardly breathe. Worry has sunk its ugly claws into us so fiercely that we lost perspective.

Yet, in this experience Christ has simply called us to walk with him in the rhythm of his grace, yielding this loved one to him over and over, day after day. In doing so, step-by-step we have come to see his mercy and have begun to see this loved one as he does. We have found rest, even though the situation does not improve. We are learning to set boundaries that truly help, and we are experiencing peace even though our hearts' desire has not yet been realized.

Will you read John 14:1 and 27 and allow Christ to bring to mind how he is asking you to permit him to give you his peace?

*SONG: You Make Beautiful Things*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Know that Christ's compassion for you is deep and his provision is available. He wants you and me to know his victory over what concerns us.*

—Jo Helsabeck

*BIBLE READING: Philippians 4:6-8*

This final day in our week focused on releasing worry centers on gratitude. Learning to practice gratitude has been transformational to me in recent years. In Philippians 4:6-8, we see that gratitude is a part of giving over worry to God. The phrase “always asking him with a thankful heart” (GNT) is a key part of releasing worry to God. The simple but powerful act of thanking God focuses us on his ability to handle what we give him. It strengthens our resolve and encourages us.

When I read Ann Voskamp’s fine book *One Thousand Gifts*, I was challenged to keep a gratitude list adding up to one thousand gifts in a year. Simple things like color, shapes, smiles, and memories were included, along with gifts more complicated. I found God present in my life in so many ways. My focus on him and my confidence in him grew greatly.

The discipline of keeping the list made crossing the bridge from worry to trusting God much easier. I found joy rising in my heart as I practiced gratitude. Will you join me in keeping a gratitude list? Writing down just three things you are grateful for each day adds up to one thousand in a year. (Should you need inspiration, Ann’s website includes suggestions for each day.)

*SONG: I Will Change Your Name*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Oh Lord, I set my will to live gratefully before you, yielding all that concerns me and receiving the peace you so generously offer. Thank you!*

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