

DON'T WORRY

I take the Bible very seriously as I try to understand how God is at work especially in stressful situations. I rely on the guidance of Christian Scriptures to help me understand my search for meaning, purpose and direction in my life. On the other hand, I sometimes run up against verses or whole chapters in the Bible that just don't make sense.

One of my ongoing struggles with the Bible is in the Gospel of Luke. In chapter 12 from [verses 22 to 34](#). It can be summarized as "Don't worry" or "Don't be afraid." Do you remember when Bobbie McFerrin had a hit song entitled "[Don't Worry Be Happy?](#)" (Released in 1988) I remember liking the music and being very critical of the message. I knew at some level that I wasn't going to be happy if I didn't deal with my worrying.

How is it possible to "not worry" in the modern world? For that matter, how was it possible for the people of 1st century Palestine? Slavery was a reality. Wars were devastating. Taxes were high. Poverty was widespread. Personal freedom was restricted. People could be killed for what we might consider trivial offenses—like not agreeing with the emperor of Rome that he was God!

How is it different now? Our ability to see the severity of the problem is affected by many factors including our wealth, our social standing, our education and our experiences along our faith journeys. There are days when worrying seems to be the only reasonable response to what is happening both around us and far away. We are made painfully aware of local problems such as homelessness, violent crimes and seemingly endless conflicts over politics. We live with the reality of war zones like Syria, countries struggling to respond humanely to waves of immigrants like Greece and now something known as the Zika virus.

What does Jesus say about our worrying? Luke's Gospel reports that Jesus said, "Don't worry." "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Therefore I tell you do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.'" ([Luke 12:22-23](#))

Even when I was young I would have agreed that, "Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes." However, I also imagined the possible outcomes of a nuclear war and later, thanks to Carl Sagan, a nuclear winter. I imagined large numbers of people dying from starvation, lack of clean water and racism. I didn't cope well with the results of my imagination.

How do I cope now? How have I survived without worrying? I haven't survived "without worrying." I have worried, and I have several reasons why I still, at times, worry—at least for a short while. Some of my experiences in life, perhaps like yours, have been nothing short of traumatic. The number of situations that I cannot control has mushroomed as I get older. I live with a more-or-less constant state of what I might prefer to call "concern", that periodically erupts into an anxiety attack or, very occasionally, a panic attack.

You might wonder, “Why is he bringing in what sound like mental health issues? It’s because they are also, and arguably more significantly, spiritual issues. Do we trust God to help us cope with life’s problems while guiding us closer to what the Gospels identify as “The Kingdom of God” or the “Kingdom of Heaven?”

My bottom line is “Yes, I do.” To make that more real for myself, I have to be honest that I struggle not to worry. However, my faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior enables me to turn to God and pray: “God, I believe You are with me. Help me to be aware of your presence when I feel stressed.”

Before I could pray in that way, I had to pray the [Serenity Prayer](#). It is a prayer from the 20th century that reminds us that we cannot cope on our own. We truly need an external source of spiritual power to have any hope of experiencing serenity in the midst of what are very often damaged or even broken lives. Just asking God for serenity, courage and wisdom reminds us that we cannot cope on our own. We need a loving being who cares enough to offer us serenity to deal with situations and people we can’t change, courage to change whatever we can change and the wisdom to know the difference. As Christians we even dare to ask God for the grace (God’s gift of Gods self) to believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior!

The reason that I have hope of not drowning in my sea of anxiety is my faith in a loving God. It helps to believe specifically that God knows and cares about each of us as people as well as our individual needs. We may even need help overcoming some of the lessons we were taught as children about God being angry when we sin. But that is a topic for another column!

Don’t worry.

God knows our needs and will be with us and within us.

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