



WORRY

*Carrying the
weight of
the past,
present and
future.*

By Alison Lublink & Dave Heslip



PART 1: What is Worry?

Read: Proverbs 3:5-6, Matthew 6:25-34

Ponder:

Would you believe someone if they told you they never worried? Me either. Worry is a part of our everyday lives. Sometimes it's a small worry like, *Do I look okay in these clothes?* We also worry about important things like our finances, wondering, *Can I pay my rent or mortgage this month?* And sometimes it's about life and death, like, *Will my child survive this illness?*

We worry as a way of staying vigilant. For some reason, we think that we can control the outcome of situations if we worry about them. It's a natural human instinct. But these worries can sometimes overtake our thoughts and consume us. If we get to this place, we stop being able to have perspective about situations and determining whether a worry is small or big becomes increasingly difficult.

Raphael's mother knew what it meant to have a serious worry. Raphael appeared healthy when he was born, but days later

started to show concerning signs of an intestinal obstruction. Everyone was worried.

Raphael was rushed to the hospital where he was diagnosed with Hirschsprung disease, a rare condition where nerve cells in the rectum or colon are missing, leading to challenges moving food through the digestive tract.

"It was all such a shock to us," Raphael's mother recalls. "We were about to bring our new baby home, and suddenly we're being told about a disease we had never heard of." If that's not worrying, I don't know what is.

Through *BethanyKids* Raphael's prospects changed. After surgery, his health dramatically improved, allowing his parents peace of mind that Raphael will be okay. He will grow up and be able to attend school like other kids his age, jumping, studying and living a healthy life.

Even though worrying doesn't get any of us anywhere, we're unlikely to stop doing it anytime soon. But what we need to remember is that we can trust in God to help us through it. We won't get all the answers immediately, but we know that God will take care of us in His way. He knows all of our needs. It's healthy for us to keep that in perspective even as we inevitably worry.

Discuss:

1. How would you define worry?
2. What worries you the most in your life? Has that shifted over time?
3. What is your most common reaction to a worry in your life?
4. How can you stay mindful of God's presence and protection when you are worried?

Pray: Lord Jesus, you can handle everything going on in my life and in this world; I place all my burdens on you. Please help me to be mindful of your presence and protection when I am worried. Remind me to call on you and recognize that I don't need to worry about anything (even though I know I will!), because you've got it handled.

Do: The next time you start to worry about something - big or small - repeat the phrase "I will trust in You" over and over out loud or in your head. Use this as a mantra to remember that God is with you always.



Part 2: Don't worry, be happy: The Worst Advice

Read: Psalm 94:19, 1 Peter 5:7

Ponder:

"Here's a little song I wrote, you might want to sing it note for note, don't worry, be happy." The lyrics to the well-known Bobby McFerrin song have been made popular over the years as a catchy way to deal with life's woes. Though Bobby wrote and recorded the song, the most prominent line was initially used by Indian mystic Maher Baba. Bobby was attracted to the saying because of its simplistic charm and I mean, who isn't?

It's a great general attitude for life but what happens when things get tough? Often when hardships come, the last thing that you want to be told is "Be Happy." This is usually the case when this catchy bit of advice just flies off the tongue in a failed attempt to cheer someone up.

In Kenya, Emmanuel's mother faced a situation where our favourite piece of catchy advice just doesn't feel right.

Emmanuel was born with spina bifida. This left him vulnerable to physical and mental disabilities as his spinal cord was not fully closed. He awaited treatment at BethanyKids Kijabe hospital as the doctors aimed to lower risks for limb paralysis, spinal cord damage or tethering, infections and the list goes on.

This was a hard diagnosis for Emmanuel and his mother to receive just days after his birth. She knew that Emmanuel would face many challenges in life. With two other children to feed and the cost of care in rural Kenya, Emmanuel's mother knew that their path would not be easy.

It's times like these that our catchy line of advice falls short. Having a child diagnosed with a condition such as spina bifida would be devastating as a parent and being told "don't worry, be happy," would not be well received.

Instead, the team at BethanyKids simply worked hard to let her know she was welcome, safe and loved. She aimed to stay positive as the days passed and the doctors treated Emmanuel. At the time of his surgery, she said "I feel at home at BethanyKids where everyone I meet treats me well and this gives me hope that my son will recover."

Often the act of being happy is a façade to hide what's going on below. It may fool some, but it's not good for us to bottle up negative emotions as they will often find a way to the surface (sometimes in an explosive fashion).

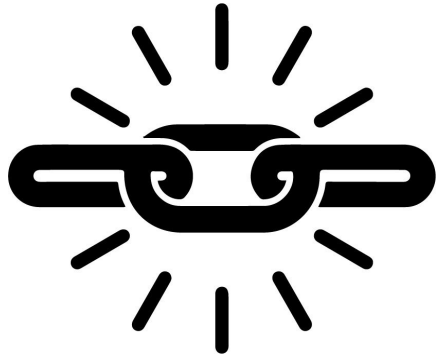
Despite our best efforts, hardships are inevitable in life. This is where we need to slow down and rely on God who we know brings us joy. It's easy for this to not be the case, but when we hand all possible outcomes over to God it makes it easier to relieve pressure on ourselves.

Discuss:

1. Have you ever tried to just “be happy” through a tough time? How did that go for you?
2. Sometimes when people give us “fluffy” advice like this it's hard to stay calm and not get upset. What can you do when someone clearly is not understanding the gravity of a situation or how much something is upsetting you? (in a loving way)
3. Have you heard any genuinely good advice on how to deal with worry? What is it?
4. Brainstorm a better one liner of advice you could use when you're worried or when someone else is worried.

Pray: God help us to deal with our worry in a healthy way. When we are worried, remind us that it's ok to not be happy all the time. Help us to lay our concerns on you and release them. Fill us with your joy (which we recognize is not the same as just being happy).

Do: Feeling worried? Tell someone about it. Find a family member, trusted friend or pastor and tell them about what's bothering you. Ask them to pray with you and help you to hand the concerns you're having over to God.



Part 3: Trapped by Our Thoughts

Read: Psalm 94:19, John 14:27

Ponder:

"I know that's what she's thinking of me!" Sometimes we get so caught up in our worry that we start projecting our thoughts onto someone else. We get so convinced that we know exactly what someone else is thinking about us. We might even start thinking we can predict the future, saying things like, "I know that's what's going to happen! I just know it!" If you've found yourself thinking things like this, you might be trapped in your own thoughts.

We start cycling through the worst possible scenarios, wondering and worrying about the many what-ifs. *What if they don't like me? What if I get fired? What if I can't do it? What if I'm not chosen?* We beat ourselves up and become consumed by these thoughts.

Depending on who we are, we might internalize this worry and quite literally be trapped in our minds in solitude. Others might not even know we're experiencing this. On the other hand, we might be someone who processes extrovertedly, and so while we are trapped in our thoughts we can become overwrought and demonstrative in an all-consuming way.

Piddy's mother experienced this exact feeling in a very outward way when she discovered that her daughter had a likely fatal birth defect. She recalls, "I was hysterical and couldn't think rationally – everything slowed down. I remember crying as one of the medics came over to try to calm me down."

Finding out that your newborn child has a rare – and if untreated, likely fatal – birth defect would destroy any new parent. Compounding that fear was the knowledge that many in their village would associate this birth defect with witchcraft.

Anorectal malfunction can be treated with early diagnosis and effective surgery, but due to a lack of resources at the local hospital, a nationwide doctors' strike and the outrageous cost of private health care, it was not looking plausible.

"We knew that it would cost us a fortune and that there was no way we could raise funds to visit such a hospital. I resigned to prayer in despair, hoping that a miracle would happen. My husband was not content, so he shared our situation with our pastor. The pastor advised us to visit *BethanyKids* at Kijabe Hospital and offered to cover our travel expenses."

Her prayers were answered. Through a partner of *BethanyKids*, Piddy had a successful, life-changing surgery. During the surgery, a spinal defect known as tethered cord, was also found, and successful surgery was performed. Her parents are grateful to God and to *BethanyKids* for giving their daughter the chance to live.

The world around us will never provide us with the peace of mind that we need to get through trying situations like the one Piddy's family experienced. That peace of mind is something only God can provide. So whether we're trapped internally or externally with our worrying thoughts, we can be assured that despite our anxiety, God can provide us with peace of mind and heart.

Discuss:

1. Do you tend to project your worries onto situations, predicting people's thoughts or potential outcomes?
2. Do you find yourself becoming trapped by your worrying thoughts? Does this manifest internally or externally for you?
3. When you worry about someone or something, do you find yourself only focusing on the negative aspects? What if you were to try listing a positive aspect for each negative one?
4. Think back to worries you've had recently. Did any of them come true? Did worrying help? Did any of them *not* come true? Did worrying help?

Pray: God, sometimes I get lost in my own thoughts, trapped into thinking things are worse than they really are. Please clear my mind, and help me to focus on good even when bad might be looming. Allow me to sense your calm, breathing Your peace into my stale, stressful thoughts.

Do: As you start to experience yourself worrying, make yourself wonder about a positive alternative. For example, if you find yourself thinking *I can't do this* - force yourself to think *What if I can do this?* Don't allow yourself to only think of the negative possibilities.



Part 4: Feeling Worry

Read: Isaiah 41:10, Philippians 4:13

Ponder:

Worry is a familiar feeling to most of us. Whether waiting for the results from a test, concern for our loved ones or living through a global pandemic, the list could go on forever. Yes, it's true there is no shortage of things to make us feel worried and most of the time they are not within our control.

Worry is caused by all the "what ifs" our brains can come up with during situations when the outcome is uncertain. When we worry and nothing bad happens, our brain makes a connection between worrying and positive outcomes which encourages future worrying - an endless cycle. Worry can manifest itself in many ways. From that sinking feeling in your gut to restlessness, sleep problems and sometimes physical pain; everyone feels it differently.

Lucy was excited and hopeful to see her unborn son grow up. She could recognize the look of a tiny spine and cranium on the ultrasound screen. She knew that over time the rest of his body would form like her daughter's did before. Once born, she named him Alvin and the proud couple took him home.

It was not long before Lucy and her husband noticed that Alvin had not developed the same way that their daughter had. He seemed to flop over where his sister could sit straight, and he was hardening in places where she was soft. Alvin was then diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy.

After researching and realizing how much care, monitoring and money it would take to raise Alvin, Lucy's husband left. Lucy's life changed dramatically. She now scrubs laundry until her hands are raw in order to earn money and she carries Alvin to a health centre for care. After Alvin was diagnosed with anemia she brought him to *BethanyKids* for treatment where his health began to improve.

As Alvin improves, Lucy wants to enroll him in an education centre where he might get continued support. She maintains a sense of hope for her family, similar to the hope she first felt when she saw Alvin on the ultrasound screen.

Lucy has plenty to worry about in her life. From Alvin's treatment, to his education, to her daughter, to her backbreaking work. In a life of hardship Lucy can't spend all of her time feeling worried about the "what ifs" of what might happen. Instead she relies on God's promises that through him she can do all things.

Although we instinctively are inclined to feel worry about uncertain things in life, it's important to recognize it and try to deal with it. We must remember the promises that have been made to us by God that he holds us close and he will help us through. This is not easy to do and the feelings may not always subside, though it's comforting to know that he is with us and won't leave us regardless of what life throws at us.

Discuss:

1. How do you feel worry? Do you always recognize it? Do you worry without realizing it?
2. When you feel worried, how do you normally react?
3. Do you often recognize when people around you are worried?
4. How can you deal with feeling worried? How can you help others deal with it?

Pray: God, we all spend time feeling worried, even when it's not logical. Help me to recognize the feelings and symptoms of worry. Thank you for being patient with me as I needlessly fret over things that are out of my control. Help me to lean on you in these times. Remind me that you are with me, strengthening me and holding me in your hand. Thank you for the hope you give me and help me to feel that hope instead of worry.

Do: When you next feel worried, try to imagine yourself standing in God's hand and remember how he is working for good. Use this to reposition from a feeling of worry to a feeling of hope. Focus on positive outcomes you hope for rather than the worry-fueled ones.



Part 5: Running on Low Batteries

Read: Psalm 55:22, Matthew 11:28-30

Ponder:

Worry can weigh us down and create an exhaustion that is unmatched. Because worry is often associated with time-sensitive events, we can end up feeling a sense of near constant urgency. This feeling creates a physical exhaustion in our minds and in our bodies.

Have you ever felt like if you don't deal with something right away something bad will happen? Focusing on this type of urgency can be quite devastating to our wellbeing. In those moments, it's important to let yourself be present rather than catastrophizing the future.

This sense of urgency and stress can take worry to a whole new level where we feel like we simply can't handle it anymore and are ready to give up. Theodore's parents knew this feeling well.

Theodore required a shunt to carry excess fluid away from his brain and into his heart when he was very young. The problem is, Theodore had been subjected to nine previous shunts that never seemed to work for long.

"We were almost giving up," says Theodore's mother, Emmy. "But never did BethanyKids... they kept reassuring us that... Theodore would be fine."

The worrying exhaustion Theodore's parents must have felt would have been overwhelming. After nine surgeries, they were surely losing hope. But now after the tenth surgery, he is finally doing well!

"I encourage parents going through the same to remain positive and not for once give up on their children," says Emmy. "I personally never thought my Theodore would ever walk, but now, he is no different from the rest. It excites me to run after him...I thank God for my son."

Despite all the worry surrounding Theodore's health, Emmy's recommendation is to stay positive. It's incredible how in the face of adversity, some positivity can affect so much.

Being positive isn't going to magically erase our worry; but it might help relieve some of the physical burdens we experience. If we can reduce the fatigue it causes, even just a little bit, why not try? God calls us to cast our cares on Him. We might still worry, but God can handle it for us, so let's allow Him.

Discuss:

1. When you experience worry, do you feel it physically in your body? Explain what this is like for you.
2. Do you have ways that you handle the physical stress that worry takes on your body? If you don't tend to feel worried physically, why do you think that is?
3. Sometimes a worry begins with an action. For example, if you are dealing with an illness, researching information on the internet may trigger worries about a possible diagnosis. Once you know what the triggering behaviour is, you can avoid the behaviour whenever possible. What triggering behaviours do you need to avoid? Try making a list.
4. When you feel worried (whether it's physical or not), do you take it to God, truly believing He can help? Why or why not?

Pray: Jesus, I ask for your help in keeping a calm and relaxed spirit in the face of worry. Help me to cast my cares on you instead of trying to hold onto them. Allow me to be gentle and humble of heart, like You. Provide my soul with rest.

Do: The amygdala is the emotional part of the brain. It gets suppressed when you worry. The next time you are consumed by worry, rather than suppressing your emotions, use them. Allow yourself to cry, feel angry - and then take some deep breaths to try and let the worry go. This will help your body process the stress of the worry.



Part 6: Coping with Worry

Read: Joshua 1:9, Philippians 4:6-7

Ponder:

We know that when left on its own, worry can compound, evolving into anxiety or even manifest as physical symptoms. There are times when there is so much going on that it feels impossible to face or deal with. If only we could just switch off that part of our brain that thinks and re-thinks the same concerns, the same worries, the same anxieties.

Do you think you handle worry well? Have you seen people, maybe strangers, maybe loved ones handle their worries in harmful ways? It's important that we learn how to deal with the feelings and experiences of worry, especially since most of the time the outcome is not within our control.

Ralia and her father had plenty of time to worry on their bus ride to *BethanyKids* at The Kijabe hospital from their home in Golale, Kenya. Packed in tight with many strangers for more than 15 hours, they made the journey together. They were able to think about the unknown that was in store for them while their bus covered more than 700 kilometers.

Ralia had been very ill leading up to this 700 kilometer journey. The journey had lasted in some ways for years leading up to this point. Unable to eat, and throwing up any food that she did manage to swallow, left Ralia on a diet of fluids alone. For 3 years she had grown thin and withered, with no diagnosis from local doctors until hearing about *BethanyKids* through their pastor.

Fortunately for Ralia, her community had rallied and gathered enough money to send her and her father on a bus to *BethanyKids*. Ralia did not yet know, sitting on that bus, that thanks to the funding and prayers from the people at home and the effort from the staff at *BethanyKids*, she would go on to have two surgeries. She did not yet know that those surgeries would be a success and that she would get the body parts that she was currently without. She did not yet know that she would soon be able to eat again.

All that Ralia knew was that the scenery they drove past was colourful, her father's arms held her tightly and the sticker on the back of the bus read "God doesn't believe in atheists."

Sometimes when there is so much unknown in our lives we don't even know where to start worrying. We forget that we are surrounded by a beautiful world, knowledge, opportunities and people who love us. We forget that God is faithful and he brings peace and strength to us in our times of need. We forget that he lived a human life with hardships, worry and all.

If we find ourselves in a situation like Ralia, on a journey into the unknown, it can help to give ourselves a set amount of time to worry, perhaps pausing to write down what we're worried about. Then, when this time is over, we can guide our thoughts to think about other, more positive, thoughts.

Of course this doesn't take away the issues or challenges at hand, but it does help to know that we aren't alone and that we can always re-align ourselves with God.

Discuss:

1. What would you do with a 15 hour bus ride to think about your problems? No entertainment, just you and your thoughts. Would you be able to “pull a Ralia” and just watch the scenery go by?
2. If you could completely remove the ability to worry, would you? Why/why not?
3. How do you manage or cope with worry in your own life? How have you seen others deal with it effectively (or not effectively)?
4. When was the last time you needed to use a coping mechanism to deal with feelings of worry?

Pray: Lord, thank you for always being with us in every moment of every day. Sometimes life gets stressful and we don't know how to cope. We recognize that we have a choice to dwell in our worries or focus on what is in front of us in each moment. God we ask that in times of worry you would remind us of your goodness. Remind us through beauty, amusement and people who you have placed in our lives. Help us to hand our worries over to you and bring us strength and peace when we need them. Be with us.

Do: Be in the moment. The next time you feel yourself begin to worry try to ground yourself in the moment. Look for something beautiful and thank God for the way he created or inspired it. Look for something amusing and thank God for the humour in everyday life. Look for something comforting, a place, an object, a person and thank God for it. Turn your focus from the thing you're worried about to something you appreciate and in turn, back to Jesus.

BethanyKids

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