

THE BATTLE AGAINST WORRY AND ANXIETY

By John Gagliardi



Of all the battles Kingdom business professionals face, probably the most unrelenting and debilitating is the battle against worry and anxiety.

Worry and anxiety are just two of the faces of fear – we worry ourselves into a state of anxiety, which if left to fester and grow, leads inexorably on to depression and a range of mental illnesses such as Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Social Anxiety Disorder, Panic Disorder etc.

The world at large is suffering an epidemic of anxiety-related conditions, and for that matter, it's no great surprise when you pick up your daily newspaper and read the latest terrorist horrors, financial disasters, civil wars and serial murders. Time Magazine recently devoted its main feature to anxiety, stating on the cover of the July 18 2002 edition: "Now more than ever we are worrying ourselves sick."

It goes on: "...We live in a particularly anxious age ... millions of people continue to share a kind of generalized mass anxiety. Anxiety disorder – which is what health experts call any anxiety that persists to the point that it interferes with one's life – is the most common mental illness in the U.S."

Yet – Christians should not worry or have anxiety. We are specifically commanded by Jesus Christ Himself not to worry (Matthew 6: 25-34), while Paul tells us in his letter to the Philippians to be “anxious about nothing” (Philippians 4: 6).

By its very nature, business brings with it uncertainty and risk, factors that readily lead on to worry and anxiety. But the good news for us is that God has given us a “toolbox” full of powerful instruments to allow us to overcome fear in all its various insidious forms. That “toolbox” of course is the Bible, and if it stays shut, it is of no use to us.

The Bible is God’s faith agent, and faith is the tool that will always drive out fear. Faith comes from hearing and internalizing the Word of God (Romans 10: 17), which is aptly described elsewhere as “living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword...” (Hebrews 4: 12). The Word of God is the “sword of the Spirit” (Ephesians 6: 17), and if properly used, the most powerful weapon we have for driving out worry and anxiety.

It is literally true that God “spoke” the world into being - how powerful then is God’s Word, our anti-anxiety tool! If we let God’s Word live and “abide” in us, the Bible tells us that we will “overcome the wicked one” (1 John 2: 14), for “greater is He that is in us, than he who is in the world.” (1 John 4: 4)

Fear comes from the devil – it is one of his most potent weapons, using it to bind us up and keep us from being all that we can be for God. The root meaning of both worry and anxiety is to choke, strangle or suffocate – and that is exactly what they do to us if we let the devil in to our minds.

We must do what the Bible instructs us to do – bring “every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10: 5). Our minds are the main battleground for the devil, and we must guard our thoughts very carefully.

If we flood our mind with faith-filled thoughts and Scriptures, we leave no room for the devil to insert thoughts of fear and worry. Someone once wrote: “Worry is faith in the negative, trust in the unpleasant, assurance of disaster and belief in defeat ... worry is wasting today’s time to clutter up tomorrow’s opportunities with yesterday’s troubles.”

Ian McLaren put it this way: “What does anxiety do? It does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, but it does empty today of its strength. It does not make you escape the evil; it makes you unfit to cope with it when it comes. God gives us the power to bear all the sorrow of His making, but He does not guarantee to give us strength to bear the burdens of our own making such as worry induces.”

Worry, an anonymous wit once said, is like a rocking chair – it gives you something to do, but you don’t get anywhere. So when worry and anxiety start to creep up on you,

instead of rolling over and letting the devil have his way, take up some of the powerful tools God gives us in the Bible, and fill your mind with them:

- Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things (Matthew 6:34);
- 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 understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4: 6 and 7);
- Give your burdens to the Lord, and He will take care of you. He will not permit the Godly to slip and fall (Psalm 55: 22)
- I'm leaving you with a gift; peace of mind and heart! And the peace I give isn't fragile like the peace the world gives. So don't be troubled or afraid (John 14: 27);
- So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with My Righteous Spirit (Isaiah 41: 10);
- I will never fail you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13: 5);
- But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint (Isaiah 40: 31);
- Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life (Psalm 23: 6);
- I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me (Philippians 4: 13);
- And my God shall supply all your need, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Philippians 4: 19);
- In God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me? (Psalm 56: 11);
- But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; let them ever shout for joy ... For You, O Lord, will bless the righteous; with favour You will surround him as with a shield (Psalm 5: 11 and 12);
- Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil (Ephesians 6: 10-18);
- But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you (Matthew 6: 33);
- You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You (Isaiah 26: 3);
- In all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him Who loved us (Romans 8: 37);
- Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go (Joshua 1: 9);
- This is the rest, with which You may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing (Isaiah 28: 12);
- I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears (Psalm 34: 4);

- For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways (Psalm 91: 11);
- Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you (1 Peter 5: 6 and 7).

There it is in a nutshell – “He cares for you”. The God of all the universe cares about us, individually, even down to numbering the very hairs on our head (Matthew 10: 30). If we can allow ourselves to really believe that, to trust totally that God will take care of us, where then is our worry and anxiety? It simply cannot exist.

And a sobering thought is that worry is a sin – it is the sin of disobedience, because Jesus commands us several times in the Gospels not to worry. He says: “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life ... Therefore, do not worry, saying ‘what shall we eat’ ... Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow... Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” (Matthew 6: 25, 31, 34; 7: 7).

This is Jesus Himself speaking to us – dare we disobey? He offers us everything we need, all the “tools”, to live a life of confident and overcoming faith. Dare we refuse Him? Dare we choose fear over faith, worry and anxiety over trusting God?

Ultimately, it is a choice – we have the freewill to make our own choice. “I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life...that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days...” (Deuteronomy 30: 19 and 20).

Dr E. Stanley Jones, in “Transformed by Thorns”, sums it up nicely: “I am inwardly fashioned for faith. Fear is not my native land; faith is. I am so made that worry and anxiety are sand in the machinery of life; faith is the oil. I live better by faith and confidence, than by fear, doubt and anxiety. In anxiety and worry, my being is gasping for breath – these are not my native air. But in faith and confidence, I breathe freely – these are my native air.”