

God's Antidote to Worry

Sterling UMC
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Psalm 23:1

As we begin a new year I want to begin with you a new series of messages. This series is called, "The Lord is My Shepherd," and we're going to look at seven of the most difficult issues that plague us. Oddly enough they are all found in Psalm 23. But the good news is that the antidotes are also found in Psalm 23. Psalm 23 perhaps one of the most beloved passages in the entire of the Bible. And is it any wonder? It tells us what God is really like. It's a picture of God. My goal for the next seven weeks is when we get through with the series you'll know what God is like and you'll know how much He really loves you and how much you matter to Him. The more you understand God, the easier it is to trust Him.

The first issue I want to look at is Worry. We all have pet worries: finances, jobs, relationships, marriage, kids, health... When it comes right down to it there are three problems with worry. And I speak to you today with great experience, because I tend to be a worrier. Worry is unhelpful, it's unreasonable and it's unhealthy.

It's unhelpful because it never accomplishes anything, it never solves anything. It is stewing without doing. It's like racing your car engine -- you create a lot of smoke and noise but you don't go anywhere. Worry has never solved a problem. Worry cannot change the past. Worry cannot control the future. It only makes us miserable today. It's unhelpful, it doesn't work.

It is unreasonable. It exaggerates your problems, makes mountains out of molehills. It just makes problems seem bigger and bigger. The more you review something when you're worried about it, the bigger it gets. Worry is kind of like a dense fog sometimes. When it comes in, you can't see clearly. Have you ever tried to drive in a fog? You can't see what's ahead. It's an illusion. Worry is like that. Worry and fog create an illusion. The National Bureau of Standards has discovered if you took a dense fog that would cover seven square blocks of a city, 100 feet deep, and condense the fog it would only equal enough moisture to fill less than one glass of water. That's what worry does - It expands and exaggerates the problem.

It is unhealthy. When you worry you get ulcers, backaches, headaches, insomnia. Our bodies were not made to worry, it's unnatural. Plants and animals don't worry. The only thing that worries in all God's creation is people. The old English word for worry is the word "to strangle" or "to choke". That's what worry does – it strangles the life out of you.

You weren't born worrying. You have to learn to worry. You have to practice to be good at it. The good news is that if worry is learned it can also be unlearned.

WHAT IS THE ANTIDOTE TO WORRY? BELIEVE GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF ME

Psalm 23:1, "The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need." If I believe that God is going to take care of me, I'm not going to worry. How does making God my shepherd show the antidote to worry in my life? If I let the Lord be my Shepherd how is that an antidote to worry? You have to know what shepherds do.

1. A shepherd *provides*. He provides food, shelter, the basic necessities for his sheep.
2. A shepherd *protects*. He defends against enemies, harm.
3. A shepherd *guides*. He leads sheep when they're confused and don't know which way to go.
4. A shepherd *corrects*. Any problem that comes along, he corrects it.

The amazing thing is this: God has promised to do these four things in your life if you'll trust Him, if you'll let Him be your shepherd. He says "I'll provide for you. I will protect you. I will guide you. I will correct the problems in your life for you. If you will let Me be your Shepherd."

Isaiah 40:11(NCV), "God takes care of his people like a shepherd." God says, I'll take care of you, I'll guide, protect, correct. I will help you, if you'll let me be your shepherd.

He even gets more specific in Philippians 4:19 (NIV), "My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." This doesn't say God will meet all of your greed. There's a difference between needs and wants. If God met all of your wants you'd be the biggest spoiled brat in the universe. You'd be spoiled and self-centered.

He's not going to give you everything you want. It would be like the Midas touch. Soon you'd be miserable. But He has said, "I will meet all of your needs." Let me break that down for you.

God says "I will...". He doesn't say, I might, I'll think about it, possibly. He says I will. That means God's character is on the line. He's either going to do it or He's a liar. When God makes a promise His character is on the line. He's either got to do what He says or He's a liar.

God says "I will meet all ..." What does "all" include? Doctor bills? Mortgage payments? Spiritual needs? Financial needs? Health needs? Relational needs? Yes. Everything. If God has promised to provide all of your needs, to protect you, to guide you when you're confused, and to correct the problems in your life, what does that leave left to worry about? Nothing.

Worry is not only unhelpful, unreasonable, unhealthy -- it's unnecessary if Jesus Christ is your Shepherd. Any time you worry you're acting like an atheist. In essence you are saying: God is not going to keep His promises; God's not going to take care of my needs. If it's to be, it's up to me. Worry is simply practical atheism. It says, "I don't believe God will do what He says He will do."

How Do I Make God My Shepherd?

God is not the Shepherd of everybody. He's only the Shepherd of those who let Him be the Shepherd.

Accept Jesus as my Lord

"The Lord is my Shepherd." -- The Lord can't be your Shepherd until the Shepherd is your Lord. You see the two go together. You can't ask Him to be the Shepherd without allowing Him to be your Lord. I have to stop playing God and let God be God.

What does it mean to be Lord? It means to be in control. Lord simply means whoever is in charge. Today we might say boss, manager, CEO, chairman of the board. Lord means under control, the person who is on top, in control, calling the shots.

Jesus Christ is Lord in your life if He's calling the shots in your life. If He's not calling the shots, He's not Lord. And if He's not Lord, He's not Shepherd.

To accept Jesus as Lord means three things. John 10:14, 27 (NIV), "Jesus said, 'I am the good shepherd... my sheep know me ... they listen to my voice, and they follow me.'" These three words is what it means to have Jesus as Lord: You *know* Jesus, you *listen* to Jesus, you *follow* Jesus. You put Him in control.

Who's in control of your life? God gives you the option. He doesn't force Himself on you. You have two options -- either you can be in control of your life or you can let God be in control of your life. But God is not going to force it on you. It's a choice you have to make.

If you're running your own life without God's direction, you ought to be worried. Most of the things in your life you can't control. Then you have every reason to worry.

But if God is running your life and He's your Lord and your Shepherd you know He can control anything so you don't sweat it. I make Jesus the Lord of my life.

Begin Praying About Everything

Pray about all the stuff you usually worry about. Just talk to God. He wants your friendship, your relationship.

You don't have time to pray? Do you have time to worry? If we prayed about all the things we worry about we would have an awfully lot less to worry about. Worry doesn't change anything; prayer does. Worry is stewing without doing. Prayer gets in touch with God who can change it. Whenever I'm worried I have two options -- I can panic or I can pray.

Philippians 4:6 (NIV), "Don't worry about anything; instead pray about everything; tell God your needs... if you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand."

Everything. Don't just pray about religious things. Most people, when they pray, pray prayers they think God wants to hear. Pray about everything. If it's big enough to worry about, it's big enough to pray about. God's ability is greater than your anxiety.

"Cast all of your anxiety on him because he cares for you." I Peter 5:7 (NIV)

Cast means to unload, let it go. The Greek word literally means drop. Unload it. Prayer is an incredible stress reliever. All -- whatever you're stressed out about, upset about, irritated about. Cast it all on Him. The problem is, most of us do the casting like we do in fishing. We cast our worries out and then we reel them back in.

An important antidote for worry to me Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV), "For I know the plans I have for you, plans for good and not for evil, plans to give you hope and a future." I'm learning that when I focus on trusting God's plan in my life, hope pushes the worry out of my mind.

There is a third thing you do if you want to deal with worry.

CONSIDER ONE DAY AT A TIME.

Focus, concentrate and consider one day at a time. Matthew 6:34, "So don't be anxious about tomorrow. God will take care of your tomorrow too. Live one day at a time."

Jesus is saying, "Don't open your umbrella until it starts raining. Today is the tomorrow that you worried about yesterday. When you worry you don't do anything about yesterday, you can't control tomorrow, you just mess up today." The future can seem overwhelming. Therefore, God has put it in little bite-size pieces. He just gives it to us in one little 24 hour increment at a time. Live one day at a time.

Matthew 6:11, "Give us today our daily bread." Overcoming worry is a day to day choice. There is no pill that will make you stop worrying. There is no seminar, tape, or book that will make you stop worrying. There is no one spiritual experience you can have and you will never worry again. Worry, and the antidote to it, is going to be a daily choice, sometimes hourly, sometimes moment by moment choice in which you say, "Am I going to believe the Lord is my Shepherd or am I going to believe I am my own Lord? Who is in control of my life? Who's calling the shots? If I'm in control, I have a lot to worry about. But if God's in control, it's His problem and He can handle it."

What's got you worried? What is it that causes you to fuss and fume, toss and turn, wondering, "Is it ever going to work out?" What is it that when you think about it you get the pit in your stomach? I don't know what you're going through right now, but that doesn't matter. God does. God knows exactly what you're going through.

"Your heavenly Father already knows perfectly well what you need, and he will give them to you if you give him first place in your life and live as he wants you to."

Go home and read Psalm 23. You will find that seventeen times in six verses, the words "I", "my" or "me" are used.

This is an intensely personal psalm. The word "You" -- talking about God -- is used five times, "He" or "His" is used about 7 or 10 times. This psalm is about a relationship to God. That's the antidote to worry. Religion will not get rid of it. Religion will not help you stop worrying. You don't need religion. You need a relationship. You need a Shepherd -- somebody who provides, protects, guides and corrects. God says, "That's what I made you for. I didn't make you for religion. I made you to know Me." He knows all about you, He wants you to know Him. That's why He sent Jesus Christ.

I invite you to take the first step by opening your life to Jesus Christ if you've never done so. Ask Jesus Christ to become your Lord -- your boss, manager -- and Shepherd, as He's promised to do.

Wilbur Chapman was asked to come cheer up a little 10 year old boy who was dying of cancer. He went to the home of the little boy. The little boy was worried about dying and Chapman said, "I want to teach you something. Let me have your hand. The Bible says, 'The Lord is my Shepherd.' Every time you start to get worried about what's going to happen to you, you think, 'The Lord is my Shepherd' and you hold onto your index finger." Two weeks later the little boy died in his sleep. The next morning his mother found him holding his index finger.

I don't know what you're worried about or stressed out about today, but I do know this: God loves you, He cares about your stress, and He can help you. "The Lord is my Shepherd". Emphasize different words -- "The Lord is my Shepherd" -- there is only one real Lord, all the others are fakes and imitations. "The Lord is my Shepherd" -- not might be, He will be, He always has been, He always will be. "The Lord is my Shepherd" -- Can you say that with certainty? Is the Lord your Shepherd? Is the Shepherd your Lord? He can't be one without the other. When you can say that and mean it, you're going to stop worrying. Don't carry that burden one more second. It's unnecessary.