

GOD'S ANTIDOTE TO WORRY

Psalm 23 Stressbusters -Part 1

January 11, 2009

How do you handle stress? We do it in a number of ways, but not all those ways are helpful or healthy. So today we begin a series called Stressbusters. We're going to look at the six greatest sources of stress. They are all found in the 23rd Psalm, as are the antidotes. Psalm 23 is the most beloved psalm of the Bible. It tells us what God is really like. My goal for the next six weeks is to help us all know what God is like, how much God loves us, and how much we matter to Him. The more we understand God, the easier it is to trust Him. And that's important because the first cause of stress is Worry. We all have our pet worries: finances, jobs, relationships, marriage, kids, health. There are three problems with worry. First of all, **Worry Is Unhelpful**. 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. Worry doesn't work.

2. Worry Is Unreasonable. It exaggerates our problems, making mountains out of molehills. It just makes problems seem bigger and bigger. The more we worry and fret over something, the bigger it gets. To worry about something we can't change is useless. To worry about something we can change is foolish. Just do it. Just change it.

3. Worry Is Unhealthy. The body was not made to worry. It's unnatural. When we worry we get ulcers, backaches, headaches, insomnia. Our bodies were not made to worry. Plants and animals don't worry. The only thing that worries in all creation is people. We worry and we weren't made to worry. It makes us unhappy and unhealthy. The old English word for worry means to strangle or choke. That's what worry does. It strangles the life out of us. But it's not natural. We weren't born worrying. We had to learn to worry. We had to practice to get good at worrying. And lots of us are pretty good at it. The good news is that if worry can be learned, it can also be unlearned.

What Is the Antidote to Worry? Believe That 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. But if I let the Lord be my Shepherd, how does that help? How is that an antidote to worry? Well, what do shepherds do? **1. A Shepherd Provides.** He provides food and shelter, the basic necessities for his sheep. **2. A Shepherd Protects.** He defends against enemies and things that might harm the sheep. **3. A Shepherd Guides.** He leads sheep when they're lost and confused. **4. A Shepherd Corrects.** Any problem that comes along, he corrects it. And the amazing thing is that God has promised to do these four things in our life if we trust Him, if we let Him be our shepherd. He says "I'll provide for you. Protect you. Guide you. I'll correct the problems in your life, if and only if, you'll let Me be your Shepherd."

Isaiah 40:11 “*God takes care of his people like a shepherd.*” I will provide and guide, protect and correct, if you’ll let Me be your Shepherd. Paul explains it further in Philippians 4:19 “*My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*” This doesn’t say that God will meet all of our greed. There’s a difference between needs and wants. If God met all of our wants, we’d be the biggest spoiled brats in the universe. We’d be even more self-centered than we are now. So God is not going to give us everything we want, because, like Midas, the king with the gold touch, we’d be miserable. But God has said, “I will meet all of your needs.” God says “I will...”. Not “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. Whenever God makes a promise, His character is on the line. And he says, “Test me on this and you will find out it is true.” He’s going to make it happen. God says “I will meet all ...” What does “all” include? Doctor payments? Mortgage payments? Spiritual needs? Financial needs? Health needs? Relational needs? Yes. Everything. If God has promised to provide all our needs, to protect us, to guide us when we’re confused, and to correct the problems in our life, what more is there to worry about? Nothing.

This week I was to fly out of town to attend a meeting. When the meeting was postponed, I began to worry about how much it would cost to cancel the flight. Now if I had bought the insurance, I wouldn’t have had to worry because I would have known that it was already covered. That’s the way insurance works. If it is covered, I don’t have to worry about it. Well God has insurance coverage on us. Our policy, the Bible, lists over 7,000 promises. So no matter what comes down the pike, we are covered. There’s nothing to worry about. Worry is unhelpful, unreasonable, and unhealthy, and if Jesus is our Shepherd, it is unnecessary. In fact, worry is an atheistic act because in essence we are saying that God is not going to keep His promises. “If it’s to be, it’s up to me.” That is a lack of faith, for deep down we know that God will do what He says He will do.

We need to make God our Shepherd, for God is not the Shepherd of everyone. Only those who let Him be their Shepherd. So how does he become my Shepherd? A couple of things. First, **Accept Jesus as the Lord of your life.** For the Lord can’t be our Shepherd until the Shepherd is our Lord. The two go together. We can’t ask Him to be the Shepherd without allowing Him to be our Lord. I have to stop playing God and let God be God.

But what does it mean to be Lord? It means to be in control. The Lord is the one who is in charge. If I say that I am the lord of my house or of my life, then I’m in charge. Lord simply means whoever is in charge. Today we might say boss, manager, CEO, chairman of the board. Lord means the person who is on top, in control, calling the shots. So Jesus Christ is Lord of 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 your Lord, He’s not your Shepherd, because the Lord, the one in charge, is my Shepherd.

To accept Jesus as Lord means three things. John 10:14, 27 “*Jesus said, ‘I am the good shepherd... my sheep know me ... they listen to my voice, and they follow me.’*” Jesus can

only be our Lord, if we know Him, listen to Him, and follow him. We allow Jesus to take control in our life. Now understand, worry is a control issue. No matter what we worry about, it is all about control. The root behind all of our worry is the fear that we are not in control. Worry is always an attempt to control the uncontrollable. Worry is assuming responsibility God never meant for us to have. Whenever we try to control the uncontrollable (kids, economy, environment, foreign policy, wherever) we're going to worry. Worry is a warning light. Whenever we start to worry that light should go off: Warning!-- you're trying to control too much. That is the root behind all worry. Every time we start to worry, we're trying to control something that we shouldn't be trying to control in the first place.

Who's in control of your life? God gives us the option. He doesn't force Himself on us. Either we can be in control of our life or we can let God be in control of our life. The bumper sticker says, "God is my Co-pilot." No. God doesn't co-pilot, because we'd crash and He'd get blamed. If God is your co-pilot, change seats. God needs to be in charge. But we have to let God take charge of our life. And we should give God control because God is the One who made us. He knows what we need. And God has the power to make things happen for our good. But still He gives us that option. If you are in control of your life you're playing God. **Playing God** is the root of worry. Every time we start playing God, we're going to worry. When we start trying to control things, to make everything work just the way we want it to, trying to take control of things that are beyond our control, then there's this little voice inside us that says "Who are you kidding? You know you're not God. You don't have it all together." It's an issue of control.

Now if you're running your own life without God's direction, you ought to be worried, because most things in life are beyond our control. But if God is running your life, if He is your Lord and your Shepherd, you know that He can control anything and everything. So we don't have to worry about it. If we want to stop worrying, we need to make Jesus the Lord of our life.

And then, **Begin Praying About Everything** Pray about all the stuff that you usually worry about. Just talk to God. God wants to be our friend, and we talk to our friends. So talk to God. Some people tell me that they don't have time to pray. Isn't that interesting. They don't have time to pray but they manage to find time to worry. If we prayed about all the things we worry about, we would have a lot less to worry about. Worry doesn't change anything, but prayer does. Worry is stewing without doing. Prayer changes things. Prayer gets us in touch with One who can change circumstances. Whenever I'm worried I have two options: I can panic or I can pray.

Philippians 4:6 *"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 try to pray prayers that they think God wants to hear. Why? Are we trying to impress God? Don't you know that God knows exactly who we are? 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." (1 Peter 5:7) Cast means to unload, to let it go. The Greek word literally means drop. Drop it. Unload it. Prayer is an incredible stress reliever. Just *"Cast all your anxiety ..."* Whatever you're stressed about, upset about, irritated about, cast it ALL on Him. Dump it on Him. Unload. 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.

Worry is like a dense fog. When fog comes in, we can't see. Have you ever tried to drive in a fog? You can't see what's ahead of you. Worry is like that. Worry and fog create an illusion. The National Bureau of Standards has determined that if you took enough dense fog to cover seven square city blocks, 100 feet deep, and condensed that fog to liquid, it would amount to less than one glass of water. See what worry does? It expands and exaggerates the problem. So make Jesus the Lord of your life, and pray about everything.

And then, **Consider Living One Day at a Time.** Focus, concentrate and consider living 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 to rain. Wait for it. Because today is the tomorrow that we worried about yesterday. And the only thing all that worry managed to do, was to mess up our yesterday by worrying about today. Why do you think God gave us these little chunks of time that we call a day? That's so we are not overwhelmed by the great unknown that is tomorrow. 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 us stop worrying. There's no seminar, tape, or book that will make us stop worrying. There is no one spiritual experience that we can have that will prevent us from worrying in the future. Worry is a daily choice. Sometimes it's a moment by moment choice in which we 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.

So 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, it becomes a knot in the pit of your stomach? I don't know what you're going through right now, but that doesn't matter. God does know. 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."* (Matthew 6:32-33)

Today, go home and read the 23rd Psalm. Matter of fact, read the 23rd Psalm everyday for the next 6 weeks. You will find that it is an intensely personal psalm. And it's about our very personal relationship with God. And it is our antidote to stress. Religion will not get rid of our stress. Religion will not help us stop worrying. But then, we don't need religion. We need a relationship. We need a Shepherd; somebody who provides and 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 us. He wants us to know Him. That's why He came to us in the man called Jesus.

This morning, I invite you to take the first step to know God, and the first step to help deal with your stress by asking Jesus to become your Lord and your Shepherd. 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. I know that because the Lord is my Shepherd. And in your life, may it be so as well. Amen.