

The WAR against WORRY

a thirty-one-day strategy

Simon J. Robinson



The
WAR
against
WORRY

A thirty-one-day strategy

The
WAR
against
WORRY

A thirty-one-day strategy

Simon J. Robinson

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide www.zondervan.com. The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Copyright © 2015, Simon J. Robinson

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, scanned,
or distributed in any printed or electronic form without permission.

First Edition: 2015

LS20170425

ISBN: 978-0-9965168-3-9

Published by www.greatwriting.org

Dedicated to my grandchildren:
Benjamin, Addison, and Ethan

Table of Contents

Foreword	11
1 The Big Picture	14
2 God's Property.....	18
3 The Unshakable Kingdom	20
4 The Good Shepherd	24
5 Look at What God Has Given Us!.....	28
6 God has not finished with me yet!.....	32
7 Kosher Cares.....	36
8 Stop the Rot	40
9 Little Faith.....	44
10 Worry Exposed	48
11 Pre-empting Panic.....	53
12 The Pursuit of Peace	57
13 Medication Matters.....	61
14 Watch out: There's a Lion about!	65
15 Checking out Trust	70

16 Who is in control?	74
17 The Fear Factor	79
18 Unearthing Our Uniqueness	83
19 I Think, Therefore I am	88
20 Tomorrow's World.....	92
21 Early Morning Anxiety	96
22 The Path to Peace	101
23 "Leave it with me"	104
24 Submit to God.....	108
25 Challenge Your Thoughts	112
26 Living with Uncertainty	117
27 Think Outside the Box.....	121
28 The Ultimate Focus	125
29 The Power of God's Purpose	129
30 How to Keep Going When the Going Gets Tough	133
31 Join the Fight!	137
More Tactical Gear	143
About the Author	144

Appreciation

Worry is a universal wound. Almost nothing saps the joy out of our lives the way worry does. Simon Robinson has done good work in showing us the loving salve of our Savior that will begin healing this deepest of wounds.

Terry Esau, Writer and Speaker, Long Lake, Minneapolis, MN

It is easy to say, “Don’t worry,” but hard to achieve. In these reflections, Simon Robinson shares very honestly from his experience, bringing practical insights and drawing on a range of Bible passages. A helpful book for any Christian who struggles with anxiety.

Dr Debbie Hawker, PhD DClinPsy CPsychol AFBPsS, Clinical Psychologist, Nottingham, England

I have known Simon for a number of years and have observed his pastoral and compassionate heart for people. His years in the ministry have taught him how to apply God’s Word to the issue of fear, anxiety and worry. These are emotional states experienced by everyone from time to time, so we can all benefit from this book.

Debra Green, OBE, Founder and National Director, REDEEMING OUR COMMUNITIES, Manchester, England

Acknowledgements

I n December 2014, I had the privilege of bringing daily Bible teaching for a New Year event at Otford Manor in the UK. One of my talks was about dealing with worry, and a few weeks later I found out that there had been a number of emails from people who found the talk very helpful.

When I was talking about this with Jim Holmes, Director of Great Writing, he suggested expanding on the biblical principles I had been teaching and providing a day-by-day approach to tackling worry.

I am very grateful to my wife, Hazel, for her proof-reading skills and her unstinting support. To Jim Holmes, Director of Great Writing who—as always—has been a delight to work with, and to Pastor Doug McMasters for contributing an excellent foreword.

I would also like to thank my friends at Church in the Peak, Chesterfield, for their support and encouragement in writing this book.

Foreword

A lady prone to worry received some excellent advice. Her friend told her that every time she was tempted to worry, to write down her cares on a card and place them in a box. Then, after collecting her cares throughout the week, she could open the box and worry about them on Worry Wednesdays.

The oft-anxious woman took the advice, and dutifully wrote down all her cares and tucked the cards away. To her surprise, she found her week was delightfully worry free. But a better discovery came on the first Worry Wednesday. As she readied herself for a day of anxiety and thumbed through her cards of cares, she realized that nearly all of her concerns had already been resolved. There was very little left unresolved that needed any attention!

There's certainly something to the advice to allow circumstances to unfold before succumbing to worry. But there is a much better way to confront worrying situations!

And that is precisely what you will find from Simon's practical handbook. He offers biblical advice to equip us to meet any present or coming situation that will tempt us to worry.

The format is accessible. There are brief entries for each day of the month, each containing a carefully selected passage from God's Word, a short, yet significant, explanation and related anecdote, a challenge to put the truth into action, and a concluding prayer. This elixir provides just the right preventative medicine or corrective for the anxiety-riddled.

The best counselors are those who have a deep understanding of the human condition and of God's revelation. This book demonstrates that Simon is a keen student of both. It is evident that he understands Scripture deeply and masterfully reveals the meaning of several passages, selecting just the right phrases to convey truth briefly, yet effectively.

But Simon also shows he knows how temptation unchecked by biblical thinking blossoms into worry. He's realized that there is no temptation we face that isn't common to us all. Many of his examples are auto-biographical, yet remain perfectly suitable to everyone. Placing himself under a microscope equipped with a biblical lens, Simon uses his knowledge of the Scriptures to address his—and our—temptations and tragic unwillingness to trust the Lord for everything. This quote stands out as a perfect example:

“When I look at a verse like this one [Romans 8:32], I realize that I have become incredibly short-sighted. I cannot see what God has done for me so I do not trust him to take me through difficulties and

this results in paralyzing worry. I often have to remind myself that God is not reluctant to help me in the problems I face or to provide for my needs.”

Our Lord Jesus calls us to place ourselves under the care of our loving, heavenly Father. The contents will help you to do just that and to discover in the Lord’s hands “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, [that will] will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

Doug McMasters

Senior Pastor

New Hyde Park Baptist Church

New Hyde Park, New York, USA

Day 1

The Big Picture

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

(Ephesians 1:4–6)

Blurred Vision

I stared until my eyes went blurry but the painting hanging on the wall of a prestigious London gallery looked like a mass of paint strokes in different shades of blue. “It’s no good,” I said to my cultured friend, “I can’t see anything in this.” He gently put his hand on my shoulder and ushered me a few feet back. “Now look at it,” he said, with an air of sophistication. I sighed, blinked my tired eyes, and reluctantly took another look. To my surprise, what had first appeared to be a collection of delicate brush strokes in pretty colors now formed themselves into a beautiful picture; I had been standing too near to understand what the artist was doing.

Worry has a way of getting us fixated on a problem and searching for possible solutions so that we cannot think of anything else. The first victory I scored against it was when I stood back and thought about God’s overarching plan. I began to see the big picture and understand what was going on in my life in that context.

Stand Back and See Things Differently

Paul wrote to a group of Christians who lived in a very difficult place. Ephesus was a pagan city and home to the Temple of Diana; every day they would face opposition and struggles. He began his letter by gently putting his hand on their shoulder so they

could stand back and see the big picture, and what a masterpiece it is! His letter is bursting with great facts about God, facts that will help us fire the first shot in our war against worry. Everything God does is fashioned by love which stretches from eternity to eternity. Paul tells us that God “chose us before the creation of the world” and that he “predestined us.” And he has a purpose in mind—to make us “holy and blameless in his sight.” This has been made possible through Jesus’ death and resurrection. When we trust in Christ, God makes us right with him, and the Holy Spirit makes us holy (that is, he sets us apart) so that we become more like Jesus. One day we will meet God face to face and be welcomed into heaven.

Join the Fight!

Enlist in the war against worry by thinking about these wonderful truths from the Bible: God chose us before the world was created, and one day he will welcome us into his presence. In the meantime, the Holy Spirit is at work in us to make us more like Jesus. What will the things we worry about now look like when we get to heaven?

Food for Thought

- Consider how different today’s problems appear in the light of God’s eternal purpose.

Prayer

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

(Ephesians 1:3)

Loving God, I praise you that you loved me before the world was created and that you will love me for eternity. It is so amazing, I can hardly begin to get my mind around it. Thank you that you want to make me holy and blameless in your sight, and have made this possible through Jesus. Sometimes I can get so consumed by the cares of everyday life that I forget these truths. Please help me to stand back and look at the great work you are doing in Christ. When my mind turns to worry, may the Holy Spirit help me to redirect my thoughts to your great purposes and to trust you with the needs of this day.

Day 2

God's Property

*And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.
(Ephesians 1:13)*

There were three short raps on my door; I opened it to be greeted by our local police officer. He asked me if I would like to be part of a new scheme to reduce crime in the local area. It involved putting a code on items such as TVs and laptops so that stolen property could be traced back to the rightful owner. Ownership is an important matter.

Yesterday, we thought about the importance of standing back to look at God's great plan. God has not only made us part of his eternal purpose, but he has also put his seal of ownership on us. This was an everyday picture for the Christians in Ephesus. They would use a stamp and press it onto a surface so that it created a unique mark showing whom the object belonged to. This "seal" is none other than the person of the Holy Spirit who gives us new life and who dwells within us.

Jesus spoke of the Spirit as "The Comforter"—someone who strengthens and helps us. When we get caught in the grip of worry, we start to imagine the different scenarios that may occur and wonder how we will cope with them. It is natural to think about such things and consider what we can do about them but a lot of the time we leave God out of the equation. We belong to God, and the Spirit within us is his mark of ownership. God will never abandon his possession and—through the Spirit—he will enable us to face any situation that may come into our life.

Food for Thought

- Think about a possible scenario you have imagined concerning something that is worrying you. How does it play out?
- Now consider it in the light of the fact that you belong to God and the Spirit is within you to help you. How different does the outcome look now?

Prayer

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever. (John 14:16)

Heavenly Father, I praise you that I am your child because of Jesus' death and resurrection. Thank you for the way in which you have sent the person of the Holy Spirit to give me new life and put your mark of ownership upon me. When I get caught up in my worries, I imagine all sorts of possible outcomes but I rarely think about the way in which you will take care of me because I belong to you. Help me to correct my thinking and to face the challenges of this day in the power of your Holy Spirit.

Day 3

The Unshakable Kingdom

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.

(Hebrews 12:28)

We had explored the Swiss mountains and enjoyed one another's company for the week. Sadly our trip had come to an end and we were asked to get out of our vehicle to show our passports before boarding the Channel Tunnel from France to England. There were two places to form a line: below a sign that said "European Union Citizens" and one that said "All Others." A bleary-eyed group of overnight travelers stood under the first sign but two people could not stand with us because they held citizenship of a different country.

I tend to worry about short-term issues such as whether I can pay the mortgage or how much the latest problem with my car is going to cost. All of these issues are important but as I have got stuck into my counter-attack, I have realized the importance of seeing them in the context of my new citizenship. When I gave my life to Christ, I placed myself under his rule and became part of his kingdom. And what a kingdom it is! Jesus rules over it and will bring it to completion when he returns, and whatever may be going on around me, it "cannot be shaken." So I have total security in Christ. Of course it does not mean that everything will go smoothly; in fact, in context, the verse quoted from Hebrews shows that God is shaking all things, and when he does so our mortgages and jobs will not be exempt. However, our future is certain and God has promised to provide all our

needs—no matter what happens. When the tendrils of worry begin to wrap themselves around my mind, I try to stop myself in my tracks and remind myself that I am part of God’s unshakable kingdom.

Jesus said, “Seek first [God’s] Kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33). In other words, channel the energy used for worry into concern about serving God and extending his kingdom. This came home to me one meal time when my wife asked me why I was so quiet. “I’m worried about how long the car is going to last,” I said. She smiled sweetly, shook her head in disbelief and said, “How about worrying about the decorating instead!”

Food for Thought

- Think about the fact that you are part of God’s unshakable kingdom.
- How does this change the way you perceive worry?

Prayer

Sovereign God, I praise you that while there is chaos around me, you never change. Thank you that you have made me a citizen of your unshakable kingdom. I am the one who changes, especially when I panic and act as if you are not there. Help me to remember where I belong and to live as a child of the King, es-

pecially when circumstances threaten to make me
anxious.

Day 4

The Good Shepherd

*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down
his life for the sheep.
(John 10:11)*

Silly Animals

They bleat endlessly and wander in front of cars with no regard for their own safety. They are a familiar feature of the countryside. If there's one thing I have learned in the twelve years I've lived in the Peak District—a beautiful part of England—it is that sheep are rather silly and reckless animals. It is no wonder that this is the image Jesus uses to describe us; it certainly depicts me when I am in the grip of worry.

Deep Roots

The Shepherd caring for his sheep is an image that has deep roots in the Old Testament. In one of the best-known passages in the Bible, David describes the Lord as his Shepherd and goes on to speak about the way in which God tends and cares for him, making him “lie down in green pastures” and leading him to “still waters.”

With his dying breath, Jacob said that God had been his shepherd throughout his life (Genesis 48:15). The prophet Ezekiel thundered a message from God against the leaders of the day describing them as shepherds who had neglected and abused their “sheep.” He said that God was going to take this role upon himself, gather them together, bind their wounds, and care for them (Ezekiel 34:14-16). Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of this promise: he is the

“good shepherd who lays down [his] life for the sheep.”

A Personal Picture

We have been gathering some heavy artillery for our war against worry by thinking about how we are part of the big picture of God's plan and that we are citizens of his unshakable kingdom. Here we have a personal picture which will bring Jesus right into the midst of the situations we worry about. In Psalm 23, David affirms that the Lord “makes [him] lie down in green pastures.”

I once watched a shepherd lead his sheep in the Judean desert and wondered why he took them through such barren terrain. But my guide told me that there were clumps of grass scattered across this wasteland and the shepherd would know exactly where to take them. It made me realize that Jesus leads us through problems to take us to a place of rest.

Food for Thought

- Think about ways in which the Lord has been in the midst of your problems.
- How can you be more attentive to his guidance, help and provision?

Prayer

He leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. (Psalm 23:3-4)

Lord Jesus, I praise you for the way in which you fulfill all of the promises about God being a shepherd to his people. You are the “Good Shepherd who has laid down his life for the sheep”; you have risen from the dead to lead and care for us. Thank you that, through your death and resurrection, the Father has sent the Holy Spirit who brings you right into the midst of our problems. Not only do you watch over us—you are right here with us. Help me to remember this when worry starts to creep into my mind so that I can rest in the tender care of the Shepherd.

Day 5

Look at What God Has Given
Us!

*He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for
us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously
give us all things?
(Romans 8:32)*

Bartering with Dad

It was drawing to the end of an eventful few weeks of mission. Along with all the ups and downs of such a trip, there had been some unexpected expenses and one of the team members had almost run out of money. He got straight on the phone, spoke to his father, and asked him for a cash transfer. When he returned, the team leader asked him if his father had given him what he asked for. “Not exactly,” he said with a mischievous smile, “but I got what I wanted.” When the leader shot him a bemused look, he explained what he meant: he had asked for more than he wanted, knowing that his father would never give him the full amount requested.

A Generous God

That father may have had very good reasons to be sparing with his son but his attitude was totally different from the way God provides for us. He is overwhelmingly generous; in fact he gives “more than all we could ask or even imagine” (Ephesians 3:20). This is proved by what he has already given us—his Son. I love the way today’s verse from Romans says that God did not spare his own Son. The word *own* is translated from a Greek word that describes someone’s personal possession. Jesus was one with the Father and the Holy Spirit, yet the Father did not withhold him from us. If he was willing to give someone

SO precious to make us his children, he will also give us everything we need to live for him and serve him. Some people give resentfully but God gives “all things ... graciously.”

A Shortsighted Son

When I look at a verse like this one, I realize that I have become incredibly shortsighted. I cannot see what God has done for me so I do not trust him to take me through difficulties and this results in paralyzing worry. I often have to remind myself that God is not reluctant to help me in the problems I face or to provide for my needs. He has already given the greatest gift of all and anything else is small fry in comparison.

Food for Thought

- Spend time throughout the day thinking about how much it cost the Father to send his Son.
- What does this say about his concern for the problems you worry about?

Prayer

Loving God, you have shown me overwhelming kindness and love by not withholding your Son from me. This is such an amazing gift. Forgive me for the way I take this for granted. Everything else I need is small in comparison. Thank you that you are extravagantly

generous. May this truth help to worry-proof my mind.

Day 6

God Has Not Finished with
Me Yet!

*Being confident of this, that he who began a good work
in you will carry it on to completion until the day of
Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 1:6)*

An Expert at Work

Whether it be painting and decorating, woodwork or building work, Steve could put his hand to anything practical, and he always did a fantastic job. His knew what he wanted to do and would not stop until he was completely satisfied with his work. This could be a bit frustrating if you wanted something done by a particular time because he would never be rushed, but you would not be disappointed by the end result.

Worries about Paul

The Christians in Philippi are worried about Paul. They have heard that he is in prison and are so concerned about his welfare that they have sent someone to bring a financial gift to help him and to find out how he is. Paul sends a letter back assuring them that God has a purpose for his imprisonment and urges them to focus on spreading the gospel. As he begins his letter, he realizes that he probably will not see them again but draws confidence from the fact that God will finish the work he began. Literally he is saying, “God will keep on putting the finishing touches on his work.”

God Never Gives Up on Us

God began this work when he chose us before the world was created. He has put his seal of ownership

on us (see Day 2), he is continuing this work, and he will bring it to completion. I have been a pastor for over twenty-six years and during that time I have often found myself worrying about people's spiritual welfare. Of course, it is right to be concerned about people in my care but there have been times when I have moved into worry. This is because I consider that it all hinges on me instead of God. There are two huge flaws in my thinking: pride (I think it is all about *me*) and idolatry (I regard it as my work instead of God's). It is such a relief to come back to the fact that God is the one who starts and finishes a job, and that I am just his servant.

A double-edged sword

This verse equips me to fight worry on two fronts. First, it helps when I worry about people who are not following the Lord as they once did. After encouraging or warning them, I rest in the fact that God will not quit on his work. Secondly, when I get anxious about a mistake or a mess I have made of something, I take heart from the fact that God has not given up on me. He knows what he wants to do with me and will do whatever is necessary to get me to that place!

Food for Thought

- How confident are you that God will finish the work he began in you?

- Do you think this level of confidence is linked to the things you worry about?

Prayer

Creator God, I praise you for the way in which you have begun a work in me. Thank you that it is still a work in progress, to be completed when I see you face to face. Help me to have confidence in the work you are doing and not worry about the times I think I have failed or let you down.

Day 7

Kosher Cares

If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

(1 Timothy 5:8)

Hakuna Matata

We had a friend who did not seem to have a care in the world. She loved to roller-blade and jog, and she was always cheerful. After the Disney Film “The Lion King” was released, she made “Hakuna Matata” her theme song. The title is taken from a Swahili phrase meaning “No problems” or “Don’t worry—Be happy.” Although worry is an activity to defeat, we need to steer clear of a completely carefree attitude, expressed in that song, which does not take everyday responsibilities very seriously.

Bible Balance

God’s Word gives us the balance between not being dominated by the cares of this life and working to provide for our needs. Here are some things we should care about:

Family It is right to keep a caring eye over our loved ones. This involves looking out for health issues that need to be brought to the doctors, taking an interest in our children’s education, and watching out for signs that they are being bullied or pressured to conform to their peer group in ways that are harmful to them. As our parents grow older, we take an interest in their well-being and help them to plan for the future.

Finances It is good to plan our finances and set a realistic budget.

Practical issues It would be foolish to ignore a warning light in the car or a leaky roof in one's home. We need to find out what is wrong and how much it will cost to repair.

Work We live out the Christian life in our jobs so we should care about the quality of our work and deal with problems as best we can. If there are rumors of redundancies, there is nothing wrong with taking action and looking for other work.

The Challenge

The challenge is to get these things into perspective. I have always taken genuine issues like these very seriously. However, instead of taking sensible steps to plan ahead, act on existing and potential problems and then leave them with the Lord, my concern has often intensified into worry.

My first step toward getting the right balance has been to make sure that I place all of these responsibilities under Jesus' lordship. At the end of the day, my job, family, house, car, health—and everything else in my life—belong to him. I want to address the cares of life in a way that honors him, and entrust to him the cares I cannot do anything about. We will be thinking about how to do this in the next few days as we look at Matthew 6.

Food for Thought

- Think about the practical issues presently on your mind.
- Make two lists. The first should be of the things you can do something about; the second should be of what is beyond your control. Take action on the first, and commit the second list to the Lord.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, you have given me responsibilities in this life (mention these to him as you pray this prayer). Help me to put them under the lordship of Jesus. Help me to do what I need to do and to leave the rest with you.

Day 8

Stop the Rot

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?

(Matthew 6:25)

Over and Over

Anxiety, for me, usually begins when I pick up issues of concern, run them through my mind, and then repeat the process again and again. I never intend to worry but as I continually process these concerns, I find myself in the grip of my old enemy again.

A Sense of Perspective

After Jesus tells us not to worry about life and what we will eat and drink, he asks a striking question: “Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?” The word he uses for life is “psyche,” which means our essence. In other words, God is not just concerned about the things we need to keep us alive, but he cares about every part of our lives—about our very essence. If God has given us a life—a body and soul—he will give us everything we need to go on living.

A Lesson from the Birds

Jesus gives us two lessons from the world around us to get his point home. First, there is a lesson from the birds. “They do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.” (Matthew 6:26). I have never seen a sparrow begging in the street with a sign saying, “Wife and two chicks to support.” The rain falls down, the worms pop up,

and the birds gobble them up—that is how God has designed it. And if God has thought so carefully about providing for our feathered friends, it is logical that he will take much more care of us. “Are you not much more valuable than they?” asks Jesus. There’s a lovely old poem based on this verse:

Said the robin to the sparrow,
“I should really like to know,
Why these anxious human beings
Rush about and worry so.”

Said the sparrow to the robin,
“Friend I think that it must be,
That they have no Heavenly Father,
Such as cares for you and me.”

A Lesson from the Lilies

The second lesson is taken from the flowers, which surpassed the splendor of Solomon in his royal robes. “Why do you worry about clothes?” he asks. “See how the lilies of the field grow” (Matthew 6:28). They grew naturally, flowered majestically, and died gracefully, after which they were cut with the grass and used to fuel people’s ovens. So if God took so much care in “clothing” these flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, surely he will provide the clothes on our back.

A Truth to Grasp

It is right to be concerned about feeding and clothing my family but this must be underpinned by a realization that God is the one who provides for my needs, whether that be through the wage that is paid to me, or the children's clothes given to us just when they had gone up a size and we were too short of money to buy any more. However I need to acknowledge the fact that I am going over my concerns again and again, when I should be leaving them with my heavenly Father who cares for me. Looking back over the forty years that I have been a Christian, I can affirm that he has never let me down.

Food for Thought

- How much do you think God cares for you?
- Are your worries consistent with the answer you have just given?

Prayer

Loving Father, I praise you that you care for me as a person, as your child, and so you care about the needs I have. Thank you for the way in which you have provided for me in the past. Please help me to stop worry setting in by enabling me to hold on to this truth.

Day 9

Little Faith

If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

(Matthew 6:30)

Sometimes film producers make alternative endings for their films. I would like to recount a story that has alternative beginnings.

Version 1

After a great few days with our friends in Minneapolis, we were ready to head off to Louisville, Kentucky, for a conference. As the last item was put into the case, I checked our itinerary and noticed that we only had twenty minutes to spare between flight connections in Cincinnati. I calmly told my wife and we committed it to God and went to the airport with a huge sense of peace.

Version 2

The case was packed for the next stage in our journey. It was time to say goodbye to our friends in Minneapolis and to commence our journey Louisville. My heart seemed to double its speed as I looked at the details on the travel documents: we had only twenty minutes between flight connections. I began to panic, packed extra clothes in my hand luggage in anticipation of missing our connection, and set off for the airport with a horrible feeling that we may not get to Louisville in time for the conference.

I would love to tell you that the first version is the most accurate, but I am ashamed to say that the second version is the true one! However, this is how it ends:

A Happy Ending!

I nervously approached the check-in desk. The woman processing our booking acted as if everything was in order and let our bags go through. "Are those turnaround times correct?" I asked. She looked at my booking again, frowned and shouted to a baggage handler, "Take those bags back, Joe." My heart sank and I prepared myself for an extra night in Minneapolis and a late arrival at the conference. But then something surprising happened. The woman then made a phone call which finished with her saying, "That's great, thanks!" My spirits began to rise and for a good reason: the airline we were flying with had just merged with another which had a direct flight to Louisville, and there were just two seats available on the next flight. As I breathed a deep sigh of relief and thanked the Lord for his provision, five words spoken by Jesus gently stung me: "O you of little faith."

When Jesus describes us this way, he is making an observation rather than a condemnation. As C.H. Spurgeon says, "Little faith believes in God for eternal life but it cannot trust him with the needs of the day." Sometimes I think that my little worries are too insignificant for God, but I could not be more wrong. Jesus says, "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows"

(Luke 12:6–7). Big faith is not just about “moving mountains.” It is also about trusting the Lord to care for the details of my life.

Food for Thought

- Write down the things about the week ahead which worry you.
- Then write these words at the bottom: “God cares about *all* of this.”

Prayer

Father God, you are the Creator of the universe, and yet you care about the details of my life. This is truly a mark of your greatness. Help me to have big faith, the kind that can trust my everyday life to you, as well as to move mountains.

Day 10

Worry Exposed

*Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his
life?
(Matthew 6:27)*

Thursday morning would see me jump out of bed with unusual energy and enthusiasm. It was the day my favorite comic called “Whizzer and Chips” would be delivered. I particularly loved a character called Willy Worry who, as his name suggests, seemed to spend all of his waking hours worrying. In one of the stories, someone asked him if he was “building castles in the air,” a phrase meaning was he daydreaming, or making plans that would never become reality. Willy took this statement literally and became very bothered about the possibility of the castles falling out of the sky and landing on top of him.

I could identify with Willy Worry because I seemed to spend so much time thinking about what might happen to me. While my sister lived a carefree existence, I would often be churning potential problems over in my mind. Once I was so concerned about how our family would cope if my dad lost his job that I even asked my grandparents whether they would help to pay the bills; I was six at the time! Unfortunately that seems to be the way I am wired. However, part of my counterattack has been to look at this verse and see worry for the waste of time that it is.

In all of the years I have been on this planet, worry has never helped me. Not only has it been completely unproductive, it has actually done me a lot of harm because it has sapped my energy and demanded my

attention so that I am not focused on the Lord and his kingdom.

There have been times in my life when worry has become a tyrant—a tyrant that is never satisfied. For example, I get worried about how long my car is going to last so I look at my cash reserves to see whether I can buy a new one when it becomes necessary. Then I think, “What if they don’t have the right kind of car for me?”, “What if I have to use this money to pay for repairs on my house?” and “What if the price of secondhand cars goes up?” There are always many more questions for each answer I provide. At the risk of people thinking I am slightly unhinged, I have found the best way to deal with this little voice is to tell it to shut up and remind myself that it is not going to give me any help at all.

Food for Thought

- Your friend is anxious about something she thinks may happen. She is so caught up with this that she cannot think about anything else. It seems to be affecting every area of her life. What would you say to her?
- Remember this advice so that you can implement it the next time you are in the grip of your own anxious thoughts.

Prayer

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

I praise you, Lord Jesus, that you are the Victor. Help me to enter into your victory and face down this tyrant who tries to dominate me. You, Lord, are the only one with the right to rule my life and I submit to you.

Day 11

Pre-empting Panic

My heart is not proud, O Lord, my eyes are not haughtiness; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me.

(Psalm 131:1)

I recently received a letter inviting me to come to my doctors' office for a free health checkup. I have to admit that I have not yet taken up the invitation. I know it is a good idea, but I just feel a bit uncomfortable with the thought of being poked and prodded and told that I may have an illness on the horizon. However, I will overcome these reservations and go because I know that prevention is better than cure. There have been times in my life when I have been gripped with panic, which throws me into "fight or flight" mode. However, Psalm 131 has helped me to develop a way of preventing it before it takes a hold of my life.

I Check Out My Heart

David said, "My heart is not proud, O Lord". This is the king speaking, the man who commanded one of the most powerful armies of the day and had hundreds of people around him waiting to do his bidding. However, when he comes into God's presence he realizes exactly who he is: a mortal man with many failings, a finite speck on God's infinite canvas. In another psalm, David says, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24). A proud heart is a massive obstacle to resting in God's presence and knowing his peace.

I Check Where My Sights Are Set

Having reminded himself of who he really is, David goes on to say, “My eyes are not haughty.” Literally he is saying, “My eyes are not lifted high.” This phrase—lifted up—is often used in the Old Testament to describe someone who is proud and arrogant (see Proverbs 21:4). However, David has jettisoned this attitude, realizing that his perspective on what is happening in his life is very limited.

I Change My Perspective

Checking out my attitude and my heart enables me to change my perspective. I can say, with David, “I do not consider myself with things too great, too marvelous for me.” In other words, “I’m not going to try to fathom out things which are way beyond my comprehension.”

It is hardwired into us to try to comprehend what is going on around us, and our fallen nature imparts a desire to know everything—which is impossible. So I stop trying to work out what is happening and rest in the One who knows all things and who rules the universe.

I Switch Off the Commentary

We live in a 24-hour news culture where everything is put under scrutiny. Events are looked at from every

angle imaginable. My mind is often like this, providing endless commentary on what is happening in my life. I have to make a conscious decision not to listen. Instead I turn my mind to a verse of Scripture.

These simple steps have helped me preempt panic and to experience God's peace

Food for Thought

- What right do we have to know everything we might like to know?
- How do you think this desire creates panic when things go wrong?

Prayer

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27)

God of peace, you rule the heavens; you know the end from the beginning. I realize that I am just a speck on the canvas of eternity but I know that I am your precious child. Please help me to have a humble and submissive heart, knowing that you are working all things according to your purposes. Help me to shut down the commentary that goes on in my head and to listen to you.

Day 12

The Pursuit of Peace

*“I have calmed and quieted myself, I am like a weaned
child with its mother,
Like a weaned child I am content.”
(Psalm 131:2)*

On special occasions, our youth group was invited to Barry and Jean's home for a meal. I used to enjoy those evenings. Barry and Jean made us feel welcome and gave us more food than we could manage but the best part of it was watching their dog, Sally. After we had eaten, we would sink into our chairs and listen to Barry give us great teaching about how to live the Christian life. As he spoke, Sally continually paced up and down the room until Barry looked up from his Bible to say, "Sally, be still."

I dare not add up the hours I have wasted by being churned up by worry. In Psalm 131, David tells us how he has taken a very different route. He talks about the way he has "stilled" his mind. The word he uses has the idea of bringing something back to its equilibrium, rather like a boat that has been rocking and has now moved into calm waters. And quietened means "to silence" or "to wait." Put them together and we see that David has made a conscious effort to stop and come before God, and as he does so he silences the nagging fears, doubts and worries that might drive one to distraction. "I am not listening to those questions racing around in my mind anymore," says David. "I am silent and still before God." He likens his state of mind to that of a child in her mother's arms. This is a beautiful picture of contentment and safety which is one of only two maternal references to

God in the Old Testament (the other is in Isaiah 49:15). Although I have battled with worry all of my life, there have been times when I have known the reality of what Paul describes as a sense of “peace that passes all understanding” (Philippians 4:7) and an overwhelming realization that I am safe in God’s hands. I realize that I do not need to try to work things out or keep bringing the situation to him.

How do we get there?

To get to this place I have had to make a conscious decision not to be ruled by my worry, and then take several simple steps.

- I recognize the turmoil that is going on in my heart and mind. There is little point in being in denial about it; I have to square up in order to get to a place of peace.
- I stop what I am doing and sit quietly before God. Worry and panic have released adrenaline into my system but sitting still puts me in a different frame of mind.
- I take a few deep breaths; this slows my system down and helps me to think more clearly.
- I remind myself that God is my Father and is in complete control. Martyn Lloyd-Jones calls this “talking to yourself in the Lord.” It is something we see David doing in another psalm when he says, “Why, my soul are you downcast? Why so

disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet again praise him, my Savior and my God” (Psalm 42:5).

- I meditate on a verse of Scripture. I have memorized some ready for such an occasion. Here are some verses I would recommend.

Isaiah 26:3 You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.

Psalms 91:1 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

Psalms 46:1 God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

Food for Thought

- Set out the steps you will take to get to a place of peace.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, you show me such tender mercy and care through the Lord Jesus. When I worry, I turn my back on your care and try to take matters into my own hands. Thank you that you graciously call me back to a place of peace and safety. Help me to take the step not to run around in panic, but to rest in your eternal arms.

Day 13

Medication Matters

Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

(1 Corinthians 8:6)

I just had endured eighteen stressful months of guerrilla warfare from a group determined to force me out of my pastorate. After countless hostile meetings and abusive emails, I had reached breaking point and sat in the doctor's office in a crumpled heap. The doctor asked me a series of questions and we talked about what had been going on and how it had affected me. Dr. Smith sat back, looked at me reassuringly, and said, "Simon, you are showing symptoms of clinical depression and you need some medication." I frowned and slowly shook my head; this had always been an anathema to me. "I'd rather not," I said, trying to muster the limited spirit left in me. Dr. Smith, a Christian, smiled and said, "I know that you want to depend on God, which is good, but don't forget that he gave people the ability to make these pills." I trusted this counsel, took the prescription, and remained on the medication for the next year.

Common Grace

Although medication was not the answer to the extreme problems I was experiencing, it is a product of God's common grace and has helped me get through such an excruciatingly difficult period in my life. Theologian Wayne Grudem says, "Common Grace is the grace of God by which he gives people immeasurable blessings that are not part of salvation. They are

common to all and not restricted to Christians. Using the earth's resources and skills in productive work". (*Systematic Theology* 1994 edition, page 657)

What Does Medication Do?

The anxiety and depression I experienced was different from anything I had known before. My face felt constantly hot, my heart was racing, and my sleep patterns were interrupted. I woke up every morning with an overwhelming sense anxiety and hopelessness. I knew that I needed help.

After a period of time in which I took the tablets, I began to feel better. The medication did not stop the problem or make my worries disappear. However, it acted as a safety net which stopped me falling further into despair and gave me space to think more clearly so that I could prayerfully decide what I should do. God has created humanity with skills to produce medication.

There are times, in extreme circumstances—such as my own—when it is sensible to use this to help deal with the symptoms of stress and anxiety so that one may tackle the underlying causes.

Food for Thought

- How do you know when you have moved from everyday worry into intense anxiety and/or depression?

- What steps would you take in these circumstances, and who could help you?

Prayer

Creator God, I praise you that you have made everything good. You have given people the ability to invent and develop medicines. Help me to discern whether I need to use such a mark of your grace as I continue to look to you and as I depend on your help.

Day 14

Watch out: There's a Lion About!

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

*Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil
prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone
to devour.*

(1 Peter 5:7–8)

His velvet-coated feet enabled him to pace the bush quietly. From the safety of our vehicle, we watched him identify his prey and prepare for the kill. But just as the lion was about to pounce, the impala he had set his sight on sped off into the distance and lived to see another day.

After my safari, Peter's description of Satan as a lion on the prowl has taken on a new dimension. Satan stalks us and waits for us to become vulnerable so that he can devour us. It's no wonder Peter tells us to be alert. Have you noticed that Peter puts this in the context of worry? That is not to say that worry is a work of the Devil but it certainly plays into his hands, giving him opportunity to pounce on us to attack our relationship with the Lord.

Peter says we must not to be ignorant of his schemes. And when we are in the grip of anxiety, Satan will tempt us to take refuge and get relief from things that are not pleasing to God. Here are some examples:

Drink can anaesthetize people from the effects of anxiety but this will only last for a time. The longer-term effect is that it makes them feel worse and can cause addiction. The Internet offers an array of images to tantalize people's eyes and provide distraction through pornography but this opens them up to all manner of darkness and sin. Over-indulgence on TV and computer games may numb the mind but it can

take over people's lives. In effect, all of these activities become idols, because they will usurp God's rightful place as Lord over all of life.

Are we helpless in the face of such a powerful enemy who is out to tempt us in these ways? The Bible says that no temptation has seized us except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear. But when we are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that we can stand up under it (see 1 Corinthians 10:13).

Look for a Way Out

Here are some practical steps to find the "way out" that God provides.

Ask questions

Before giving yourself to something offering temporary relief, ask these questions:

"What will this do to me in the long run?" Imagine what would happen if your life became ruled by anything other than God.

What will this do to my relationship with God? It will quickly become clear that it can only have a negative effect.

Where does God figure in my thinking? Psalm 14:1 says, "The fool says in his heart there is no God." I used to quote this verse with atheists in mind but it

is actually a reference to believers who try to push God out of their minds.

Re-orientate

When Satan first appears on the scene, he takes the form of a serpent, speaks to Eve, and questions whether God had really told her and Adam not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He bursts into the New Testament during Jesus' forty days in the wilderness, trying to divert him from his mission and to abuse his power. His tactics are simple: undermine God's Word, and displace him from our thinking. Our counterattack is to do as the psalmist says and "set the Lord always before me" (Psalm 16:1).

Draw strength

Jesus has defeated Satan and has given us the Holy Spirit so that we can overcome temptation.

Worry is not just a problem we struggle with; it takes us into the arena of a spiritual battle and we can be victorious through Christ.

Food for Thought

- What have I been tempted to turn to when I am overwhelmed with worry?
- How can I protect myself from Satan's tactics in the future?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you were victorious over Satan in the wilderness, and conquered him in your death and resurrection. I know that he stalks me, like a lion, so that he can devour my faith. Help me to enter into your victory and to resist temptation when he tries to use anxiety to draw me away from you.

Day 15

Checking out Trust

*“Trust in the Lord at all times, you people,
Pour out your hearts to him,
For God is our strength and refuge”
(Psalm 62:8)*

John had performed all the checks and fuelled up his plane. After making sure I was strapped in correctly, he was ready to rev up the engines and take off. I have taken many flights over the years but I have never sat next to a pilot in a small plane. I have to admit that I was slightly nervous. I reminded myself that the man in the control seat was an extremely experienced pilot. I exercised trust in him by sitting back and letting him fly the plane to our destination.

One of the biggest catalysts for worry in my life is a lack of trust in the Lord. I do not like the idea of letting him take control of my circumstances—I want to be in the driving seat! And this is an issue I have had to work through.

The English word for “trust” originates from an Anglo Saxon word which means “to rely on someone’s integrity.” In the Old Testament, the word is used to describe taking refuge in God. In the New Testament, the word is all about having faith in God.

Trust has not come easy to me; it is something I have had to work at. Here are three steps I take to develop my trust in God and thus stave off worry.

Step 1: Believe

The basic problem lies with my head and my heart. My head tells me that life is spinning out of control and I have to do something about it. I think about what I should do, but every time I identify a solution,

another potential problem arises. Of course, if there is something that needs to be done (such as going to the doctor to get a health issue checked out or arranging my finances better) I will act on it. However, there are many issues that I am powerless to change. So I bring verses of Scripture to mind that speak of God's sovereignty and power. This is more than reciting a few favorite Bible verses; I need to affirm my belief in the truth about God that they reveal.

Step 2: Restrain

In Psalm 40:1, David tells us that he has waited on the Lord. A literal translation would be, "In waiting, I waited for the Lord." And it is worded in this way to show us how David restrained the urge to rush away and take matters into his own hands. He was going to stay in God's presence until he had heard from him. It takes a lot of effort to stop myself taking matters into my own hands rather than to trust God. I have to make a clear decision to wait on God. As I do so, I become conscious of the adrenaline rushing around in me but I make myself sit tight and trust in God. Often, if I get a bit of exercise—like going to the gym or taking a walk—that will help to channel the energy that has been building up in me.

Step 3: Rest

Finally, I rest in the Lord. This is a consciousness of

being totally dependent upon him and trusting him to work out his purposes. It is rooted in my relationship with God. I speak to him about what is going on; I express my sense of dependence upon him; and I ask for the Spirit's help and turn my heart, mind and voice to worship.

Trust does not come naturally to us because our human nature drives us to seek to control what is going on around us. However, as our relationship with Jesus develops, our trust will grow, and that will help us in the war against worry.

Food for Thought

- Think about the reasons why God is worthy of our trust.
- How can we develop a relationship of trust with him?

Prayer

Sovereign God, you created me. Through your Son and by your Spirit, you have given me new life. Thank you for this living relationship I enjoy with you. Help me to resist the urge to take matters into my own hands. My relationship with you began with trusting you in the work you had done in Christ to save me; so help me to deepen my relationship with you by trusting you fully.

Day 16

Who Is in Control?

Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.” (James 4:13–15)

Moving On

After ten years of ministry on the south coast of England, I had responded to a call to be a pastor in the north of England. The “For Sale” sign had been put up outside our house, and we began the arduous process of buying and selling homes. Added to all this, we struggled to get our son into a school because the local one was full and we also discovered that houses in our new location were more expensive than we had first thought.

Change Can Be Hard

I have never found uncertainty easy. I like life being on an even keel, and I enjoy the security of routine and predictability. My tendency towards worrying intensified the stress induced by this life-change. One day I sat in a friend’s house, feeling completely wrung out by the whole experience. Close to tears, I struggled to express the turmoil going on inside me. “I feel as if my life has gone into freefall,” I said. “I don’t have control over it anymore.” One of the biggest lessons I learned during that time is that only God has his finger on the control panel.

The Illusion

Billions of people are living under the illusion that they are in control of their destinies. But it only takes an unexpected event or a brush with death to prove

this is not so and that they are but a breath away from eternity.

Another Way

James has some strong words to say about making plans as if we had control of our lives. He reminds us of the uncertainty of life—"You do not even know what will happen tomorrow". While we can make projections and assumptions, life has a way of taking us by surprise and throwing us onto a different course. A friend of mine is a pastor in Myanmar. He leads a thriving network of churches and has to plan his time very carefully. At the beginning of another busy day in his life, a cyclone wreaked havoc on his city, turning his plans upside down. However, as his churches helped the victims of the disaster, they had countless opportunities to talk about Jesus, and led many people to him in repentance and faith.

So does this mean we should be fatalistic and let life happen around us? Of course not! We need to remember that God is in control and submit to his sovereign will: "Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that'" (James 4:15).

Reminding Myself

When I find myself in an uncertain situation (which I have been in as I write this book), I remind myself

that I have never been in control, I stop myself from imagining potential scenarios, and I thank God that he is sovereign and I submit to his will.

Food for Thought

- Think about an event that has shattered all of your carefully made plans.
- How did God guide you through it?

Prayer

Sovereign God, you created the universe, you put the stars in their places, and you made light and darkness. You have created me and you have a plan for me. Thank you that it is you, not I, who are in control. I gladly submit to your will and I put my trust in you.

Day 17

The Fear Factor

*Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified
because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you;
he will never leave you nor forsake you.*

(Deuteronomy 31:6)

Release the Beast

My friends and family call me a “Trekkie,” as I am a fan of that great TV program, “Star Trek.” In an episode entitled “And the children shall lead them,” the crew of the Starship Enterprise rescue a group of children. Unbeknown to them the children are influenced by a malevolent alien called Gargon who wants control of the ship. He tells the children to “release the beast” that is within the crew and gives them powers to identify the things people fear and make it seem as if their fears have become reality. This reminds me how fear can be a monster that will rule us, if we allow it.

Fear Is Not All Bad

Sometimes fear can be constructive. It is part of our defense mechanism. It warns of danger so that we can do something about it and prepares us to tackle difficulties. If I am crossing a busy road and hear the roar of an approaching car that is clearly going too fast, fear kicks in and I get out of the way quickly. However, I am a fallen human being and this means that fear can become destructive. It often gets out of proportion so that my life becomes dominated by a potential problem.

Fear in Full Throttle

I had just settled into my seat on a plane bound for

Alabama when I heard a lady behind me call the flight attendant. “Excuse me,” she said with a tremor in her voice, “should that light be flashing?” The flight attendant reassured her and explained that it was all quite normal but throughout the flight the lady persistently asked about things that were making her anxious. It was obvious that she had a fear of crashing and could not stop thinking about it.

Facts vs. Fear

In Deuteronomy 31, the people of Israel are about to enter the Promised Land. The previous generation had failed to enter because they let fear mold their perception of the terrain they were called to possess. The people who had scouted it out said that the land was full of giants. Because of this, all but Caleb and a few other faithful people remained in the wilderness. Now their children were about to launch into the Promised Land, and it was vital that they were not overtaken by fear and consigned to more decades in the desert. Moses gave them two facts which—if they took them to heart—would dispel their fear:

The Lord your God goes with you.

He will never leave you or forsake you.

Just before Jesus ascended into heaven, he said he would always be with us (Matthew 28:20) and he promised that the Father would send the Holy Spirit to be the “Comforter”—the one who comes alongside

us (John 14:26). If we hold on to these facts, we can keep fear locked in tight boundaries.

Time to Take Action

Fear does not magically disappear, so we need to take action against it. Here are some of my tactics:

I take time out to write down exactly what I fear. Recording it on paper serves to stop my imagination going into freefall. My circumstances never seem to look quite so bad when I see them in writing.

I ask myself what the worse-case scenario would be, and I write it down.

I speak to God about all that I have written. There is nothing like pouring one's heart out to the Lord to express heartache and fear. Many godly people in the Bible have done this, so if it is good enough for them, it is good enough for me!

We can never completely remove fear from our lives because we need it to steer us away from danger. However, we can act to stop it dominating our thinking and fuelling worry.

Food for Thought

- How do we discern between fear that alerts us to danger, and fear that dominates our thinking and destroys lives?

Prayer

God of peace, your Word tells me that “perfect love casts out all fear” (1 John 4:18) and you have given this to me through Jesus. Help me to hold on to the facts that you are with me wherever I go, and that you will never leave me.

Day 18

Unearthing Our Uniqueness

*For you created my inmost being; you knit me together
in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fear-
fully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful,*

I know that full well.

(Psalm 139:13–14)

Knowing Yourself

I have a friend who has faced many difficulties in his life but he has never been anxious about them. He just shrugs his shoulders and says, “Ah well, I’ll just let it unfold and see what the Lord will do.” I wish I were like him, but I am temperamentally prone to worry. I find uncertainty very difficult to handle, and I feel uneasy about doing something unfamiliar. And I often wake up feeling anxious. This does not mean that I am a weak Christian; it is all a product of my temperament, and once I have faced up to it I have been able to address my weaknesses more effectively.

Christian Extremists

Christians often go to extremes. Some of us may compare ourselves to people who never seem to have a care in the world (like my friend) and feel condemned because we are not like them. The root of this kind of thinking comes from our enemy who is described as “the accuser” (Revelation 12:10) and “Satan” which means “slanderer.” On the other hand, others accept that anxiety is a byproduct of their disposition and spend a huge chunk of their time consumed by the cares of life and do not try to change this.

Another Way

I have found a better way.

I learn from people who are different from me. The person I wrote about has been a great inspiration to me. While I can never be exactly like him, I can learn from the way that he approaches problems and uncertainty. He never seems to expect to know what is going on; instead he stands back and looks for the way that God will work out his purposes.

I try to understand myself better. Sometimes I list the negative and positive traits that make me who I am. I have realized that I like to do everything in my power to control my environment and that I am impatient. However, I find it easy to get to know people and I can communicate with them easily.

I remind myself that I do not need to know every detail about the future. As I write, I am on a ministry trip in Europe. Tomorrow I head home and I can sense my mind demanding to know every detail about the journey: What will the traffic be like? Will I be delayed? How am I going to manage a long two days on the road? But I am going to sit still, check that I have done everything necessary to prepare for my journey, commit the rest of it to the Lord, and look for his hand upon all the details.

I was using a friend's cottage in a remote part of the countryside for a day of prayer a while ago. It is a

lovely secluded spot but proved to be very difficult to find. I could feel the anxiety begin to surge in me but I overrode this and asked the Lord to help me. A young man came up to ask if I needed help, when I told him I was looking for “Rose Cottage” he broke into a smile and said, “That’s Roger’s house; it’s not easy to find, so I’ll take you there.”

I see the times when anxiety begins to creep in as opportunities for “the renewal of [my] mind” (Romans 12:2). I may be more susceptible to worry than other people but God is in the process of changing me and each set of uncertainties is a prelude to the Spirit and Word transforming me.

The Bible tells us that we are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14). We do not need to feel condemned about our weaknesses that cause us to worry. However, we must square up to them and turn them into opportunities for growth.

Food for Thought

- Think about how your temperament makes you more likely to worry.
- How can you use this to grow to greater maturity?

Prayer

Creator God, I am “fearfully and wonderfully made.” You know everything about me. Help me to understand myself so that I can turn the trials—the ones

that make me worry—into opportunities to grow in grace and to trust you more.

Day 19

I Think, Therefore I Am

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-2)

I'll Be Coming down the Mountain!

I had finally cracked it. After a day of slipping, sliding and crashing in the snow, I had learned to ski from the top to the bottom of a short slope. Mark, our instructor, was ready to take us all to the next level. He took us to a slightly steeper slope, stood in the middle of it and watched us ski down, one by one. I began to wonder whether I could manage it and when it got to be my turn, I nervously turned my skis downwards, made a few cautious turns, and then took a tumble. As I got up and brushed off the snow, Mark said, "I can tell you exactly what you were thinking." Sure enough, he was right; my mind had been telling me that I could not possibly get to the bottom without falling, and my body took the cue.

The Bible and the Brain

When the New Testament talks about the mind, it speaks of the way our mind-set has changed. We "should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind," (Ephesians 4:17). Rather, we must be renewed in the spirit of our minds," (Ephesians 4:23), and be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2).

Worry is essentially a mental activity. All of the other things that go with it arise as a consequence of the brain telling the body to be ready to face danger.

So, to win the war against worry, it is essential to get our thought life in proper order.

Total Commitment

Today's verses from Romans tell us to "offer [our] bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God." In Old Testament times, God's people were required to make sacrifices in the process of receiving his forgiveness and as they worshiped him. Jesus' death and resurrection have made the sacrificial system redundant once and for all. However, one sacrifice remains—the whole of our lives; our time, hobbies, jobs, family and, above all, our thoughts. When we put this into practice, we "test and approve" God's will. In other words, we bring our lives and thoughts into line with what he wants.

Toward Transformation

We will need to stop our mind-set from being "conformed to the pattern of this world" or as J.B. Phillips' paraphrase puts it this way: "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould." Our culture demands that we seek total financial security, enjoy life to the maximum—whatever the cost—and live free from difficulties. However, God's Word tells us that "with much tribulation we must enter the Kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

Belief, Adversity, Consequence

A friend has introduced me to the “belief, adversity, consequence” model. The idea is that what we *believe* about our *adversity* will have *consequences*. If we change what we believe, the consequences will be different. This does not mean that there will be a different outcome from what we fear but that we will be much better equipped to deal with the situation and find a way forward.

To put this into practice, I began to list my worries and the beliefs that lay behind them and then challenge them with God’s Word. Here are some verses that have helped me:

But I trust in you Lord; I say, “You are my God.
My times are in your hands.”
Psalm 31:14-15

That is why I began this book by looking at truths about God. You may want to spend some time reviewing them in order to bring your thinking into line with God’s Word.

Food for Thought

- What are the beliefs that lie behind what you are worrying about?
- Challenge them with verses from the Bible.

Prayer

God of renewal, I surrender my whole life to you and ask that you would help me to bring my thoughts into line with your Word. Transform my mind so that it is molded by your truth rather than by the world around me.

Day 20

Tomorrow's World

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

(Matthew 6:34)

Partial Predictions

It predicted online banking and the mobile phone, but the British TV program “Tomorrow’s World” also made some fanciful forecasts. The very first episode pondered the feasibility of intelligent life on Mars. And when Steve Davis won the World Snooker Championship in 1981, the presenters confidently looked forward to the day when he would be able to face a mechanical opponent.

While we may be able to have a general idea about the future, no-one—except God—knows exactly what it holds. Worry occupies our thoughts with what may or may not happen tomorrow but Jesus tells us that today’s challenges are sufficient.

A Helpful Commentary

I have found that these verses from Ecclesiastes provide a great commentary on what Jesus is saying.

“If clouds are full of water, they pour rain upon the earth. Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there will it lie. Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap. As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother’s womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.” (Ecclesiastes 11:3-5)

The writer is telling us to stop sitting around and fretting about what might be, and rather to get on with what God has given us to do here and now: “Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle” (verse 6). That is the principle Jesus gives us—“sufficient is today.” The Puritan Bible commentator, Matthew Henry, said, “Let us not pull upon ourselves all together at once which providence has wisely ordered together to be bound in daily parcels.” God has divided our lives into 24-hour segments, and this is the secret to handling worry.

One Day at a Time

I have found this principle to be one of the most powerful weapons in my war against worry. God has given me this day and I will use it to its full potential. “Tomorrow,” said Jesus, “will worry about itself.” In other words, it can be left to its own devices while, with God’s help, I tackle today’s challenges.

Food for Thought

- What are the joys and challenges I can anticipate today?
- How can I focus them and leave tomorrow to its own devices?

Prayer

Jesus, you are Lord of my life. Thank you for the joys and challenges of this day. Help me to rejoice in the gifts you have given me and to tackle difficulties in your strength and with “the wisdom that comes from above” (James 3:17). May this be a pattern for each day throughout my life.

Day 21

Early Morning Anxiety

O Lord, be gracious to us; we long for you. Be our strength every morning, our salvation in time of distress.

(Isaiah 33:2)

Morning Blues

It is said that the world is divided into “larks” and “night owls.” The former wake up ready to face the challenges of the day and jump out of bed at the first opportunity, while the latter often struggle to emerge from the fog of sleep. I have been an irrepresible morning person for most of my life but at times I have struggled with early-morning anxiety.

Some Strategies

Here are some strategies that I have developed to fight this.

Focus

Before going to bed, I choose my focus for the morning. For example, my waking thought today was writing this chapter, and although there were some feelings of anxiety lurking in my system, I eagerly got out of bed to get on with my task!

Scripture at the ready

I select Bible verses to turn my mind to when I wake up with anxious feelings. Here are some examples:

In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation. (Psalm 5:3)

My eyes stay open through the watches of the night that I may meditate on your promises. Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. (Psalm 143:8)

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. (Psalm 118:24)

The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song. (Psalm 28:7)

Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22–23)

Break the link

Morning anxiety becomes more potent if I attach issues that I have been worrying about to the anxious feelings I am experiencing. I have learned to avoid this by reminding myself that, to a certain extent, the feelings I experience originate from a chemical in my system. (The body produces a hormone called cortisol to enable us to deal with the challenges of the day, but this also creates feelings of anxiety.) This tactic

breaks the link between these feelings and the challenges I am currently facing.

The long-term

These are effective but short-term tactics in the fight. In the long term, it is important to change one's perception so that waking up is seen as a positive experience. The Lord has brought me safely through the night, he has provided sleep, and given another day in which to explore his goodness and mercy.

Food for Thought

- Put together your own strategy to get ready to attack morning anxiety before you sleep.
- How can you change your long-term perception about mornings?

Prayer

Loving God, I praise you that your mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:23). Some mornings I wake up feeling as if I cannot face the day, yet I thank you for your compassion and love. Please help me to rise above these moods and reach out to your eternal love.

Day 22

The Path to Peace

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

(Philippians 4:6–7)

During my war with worry, I have never discovered a weapon that gives me instant victory. Instead it has been a steady, step-by-step approach. Today's verses provide six firm steps which have helped me tread the path to peace.

Step one: Stop!

When a situation arises that has the potential to make me anxious, I stop. In the original language Paul literally says, "Stop worrying" and the word he uses has to do with carrying tomorrow's burdens. I have lost count of the times when my cares about tomorrow have robbed me of the joys of today.

Step two: Turn to God

I change direction and orient myself toward God. The word used for "prayer" is a general one that describes coming to God, praising him for who he is, and speaking with him. This is the very thing that anxiety stops us doing. Martyn Lloyd-Jones describes it in this way:

Come into the presence of God and for the time being forget your problems. Do not start with them. Just realize that you are face to face with God. The idea of being face to face is inherent in the very word "prayer".

Step three: Ask for help!

I ask God for his help. I still do not bring my specific requests to him. “Supplication” or “petition” describes a sense of our helplessness which is a contrast with God’s greatness. It would be used to speak of the way an ordinary person would approach a king to plead for help.

Step four: Give thanks

Paul says that all of this must be done “with thanksgiving.” So I thank him for who he is, what he has done through Christ, and what he has promised in the Bible. I also look back over the way he has shown his care for me in the past and I channel this into thanksgiving.

Step five: Ask

At this stage I am ready to “present [my] requests to God.” I tell him about my problem and I ask him to provide for my needs.

Step six: Receive

When I take these steps, I invariably receive “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding.” It is poignant that Paul describes this as the peace *of* God rather than peace *from* him. This is because it is part of God’s being; he cannot be anxious

because he is sovereign. He is always at peace because he is in complete control. Paul tells us that this peace will “guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” The word that translates “guard”—meaning “garrison”—would have been very pertinent to the Christians in Philippi because their town was a Roman colony. They would have known how secure the local garrison was and thus rejoiced in the way that God’s peace had the same effect on their hearts.

Food for Thought

- Memorize today’s verse.
- Make a note of the six steps so that you are ready to put them into action.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, you are the God of peace. You know all things, and you rule over this universe. You are never troubled or uncertain about the future. Help me to turn away from anxious thoughts and to seek your presence. Help me in my time of need and keep me in your perfect peace.

Day 23

"Leave It with Me"

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

(1 Peter 5:7)

A Trustworthy Tradesman

No job is too much for him. Ted Glenn can fix your leaky roof and repair your blocked sink. His catchphrase is “Leave it with me.” Sadly, Ted is a fictional character from a children’s TV program. I have sometimes wished that I knew someone like him! However I can bring my problems to God and leave them with him.

Throw It Off

Peter tells us to “cast” our anxieties upon God. The Greek word means that you throw an object to someone or something so that it is no longer with you. It’s like throwing a blanket on a horse. And we are to “throw” our worries onto God because he cares for us. Literally, he has a constant care and concern for us.

Make Up Your Mind!

I have to make a conscious decision to throw my concerns onto the Lord. When a big house move was on the horizon, I felt as if I was sinking in a quicksand of worry. I pondered everything that could go wrong with the inspector’s quality report and how that may impact the sale. It was necessary to take on a bigger mortgage so I spent hours raking over figures for our finances again and again. Eventually, I realized that this was not what God wanted for me, so I decided to

give my cares to him and leave them there. I made a decision to commit myself to a different course by bringing my worries to God and leaving them with him. When I am tempted to try to take things back, I remind myself that these issues are in better hands than mine.

Food for Thought

- Think of your worries as an object that is pulling you down.
- Develop a mental picture of throwing it onto the Lord.

Prayer

God, you are compassionate and caring. Thank you that the things that bother me matter to you and can be safely left with you. Help me to make a conscious decision to cast them onto you so that I may live free from worry.

Day 24

Submit to God

*Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he
will flee from you.
(James 4:7)*

My heart sank the moment I saw her march purposefully down to the front of the church to talk to a church leader. Sabrina was a formidable woman at the best of times but something about the look in her eyes and the angry expression on her face sent shivers down my spine. When I asked the leader she had spoken to what the discussion was about, he said that she registered her “concerns.” These he had asked her to put in writing. It was the starting pistol for one of the darkest periods of my life, eventually resulting in my departure from the church I had served as pastor for eleven years.

The turmoil lasted for a year. Each Sunday I could see Sabrina talking to different members of the small group who had been opposing me for some years. She was animated and energized, holding an open Bible in front of her as if it were a weapon. Because of her influence on others, I had to endure agonizing meetings with Sabrina, her husband, and the leadership, during which they attacked me about my preaching and leveled unfounded accusations against me.

Every day I would open my email program with a sense of dread about what abusive message the couple or members of their group would be sending next. I later discovered that three church members were gathering names to arrange a meeting to call for my suspension. When I asked them what their issue was,

they told me that I did not handle conflict very well.

During those turbulent days, I fought the urge to leave my pastoral charge. I was determined not to be beaten; my thinking had always been to remain in service to the church until it was time to retire. However, the situation became impossible and my health was rapidly deteriorating, to the extent that my doctor put me on sick leave. This provided the space I needed to reassess the situation. It was impossible to carry on: opponents were well-organized and entrenched and most of the leadership team were unwilling to face them down. However, my worries about how I could live without an income and what I would do in the future prevented me from being more decisive.

The Point of Submission

After many anxious weeks of prayer and seeking counsel from pastors and doctors, I finally accepted that I had to resign. I remembered something that had always struck me in the story of Esther. Her people were at risk and Mordecai pleaded with her to speak to the king of Persia. In fear of her life, Esther resisted until she realized that it was the only course of action. “I will go to the King even though it is against the law,” she said. “And if I perish, I perish” (Esther 4:16). Like Esther, I had to set my fear aside and come to a point of complete submission to God’s

will. It was at this point I knew his peace and had to learn to trust him for my day-to-day needs. He has never let me down!

Sometimes defeating worry involves surrendering to God's will and accepting that the worst case scenario that we fear may actually be part of his plan. When I came to this position, I began a thrilling adventure of new ministry that I could never have imagined.

Food for Thought

- Ask yourself whether the situation you are presently worrying about revolves around something you do not actually want to face.
- Come to a position of complete submission to the Lord.

Prayer

Gracious God, I know that you are good and your way is perfect. Show me when I am fighting something that is inevitable, and help me to take refuge in your arms and to submit to your will.

Day 25

Challenge Your Thoughts

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

(2 Corinthians 10:5)

Battling with Bleakness

There have been many people who have supported me during my years in pastoral ministry, but Mike stands head and shoulders above them all. Mike had served with me in leadership at the church for some years and was someone I always depended upon for honest advice and loyal support. Although I was at peace during the weeks that followed my decision to leave the church of which I had been the pastor, for much of the time I felt shell-shocked. “I can't believe this has happened,” I stammered, during an emotional phone conversation with Mike. “Whatever will become of me?”

Countering the Lies

In the following weeks I had many similar thoughts. I worried whether I was finished in ministry and about what kind of future I would face. During that time, I was under the care of a Christian psychologist. It was helpful to talk to someone who understood how the mind works and who applied biblical principles to help her patients recover. She showed me a method to challenge these thoughts with the Bible. So when I despaired that my life and ministry were irrevocably damaged, I would bring these verses to mind:

“Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6).

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” (Jeremiah 29:11).

Sometimes—as part of “taking every thought captive”—I write down my negative and fearful thoughts in my journal and put questions below each of them such as:

- Where is the evidence?
- Is this based on emotion or fact?
- If it is emotion, why am I feeling this way?
- Why would God cast me off?
- What would I say to someone in the same position?

This has required effort and discipline. In many ways, it is easier to let anxious, fearful and gloomy thoughts take hold of me but it has paid dividends. I know that “I can do all things through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13). As time has gone, on it has become less difficult and I have noticed a change in my patterns of thinking. Perhaps you are like me, and the fight continues, so I would encourage you,

with God's enabling, to join me in it.

Food for Thought

- List the five most common anxious thoughts that you struggle with.
- What Scriptures can you challenge them with?

Prayer

Lord, you are “compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Exodus 34:6). There are times when my mind becomes full of thoughts that contradict this truth. Give me the strength I need to challenge these thoughts and live the life of faith.

Day 26

Living with Uncertainty

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

(Proverbs 3:5–6)

The Waiting Game

Try as I might, I found it impossible to concentrate. I must have walked the length of my kitchen a hundred times to shed my nervous energy. However, I knew that by four o'clock, when my exam results were to be announced, it would all be over.

I had worked hard throughout the year and revised as much as I could but I struggled with the uncertainty that hung over me, especially as I would not be able to continue the course if I failed. When the results were posted on the wall (these were pre-Internet days!) my mood changed from anxiety to elation because I had passed!

Give Me Certainty!

I have always found uncertainty difficult to live with, and this has been a major catalyst for anxiety. I am sure that others are the same. We like to know our jobs are secure, and there is nothing more unsettling than rumors of redundancies at work. If we get struck by an illness, we invariably ask the doctor if we will recover. We have aspirations for our children, and we plan our finances carefully. All of these things are good but there is no getting away from the fact that life can be very uncertain. In an instant, events can sweep away all that was familiar to us.

A Dream Delayed

A young man had been given the most amazing glimpses of what was going to happen to him. He dreamed that he and his brothers were working in the fields during the harvest when his sheaf stood upright and his brothers' sheaves bowed down to his. And in another dream, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars were bowing down to him (Genesis 37:5-9). Joseph looked forward to a bright future where he would enjoy some kind of elevated position over his family. However, his brothers' jealousy led to his being thrown into a pit and sold into slavery. For many years, life was full of uncertainty: he was falsely accused of molesting his master's wife, and he languished in prison for years. Finally, the future God had revealed became reality. He was appointed as Pharaoh's prime minister and his brothers unknowingly bowed down before him in their desperate search for food during a famine.

Coping with Uncertainty

No-one enjoys uncertainty but I have found that it is possible to live with it by following these principles.

Face the facts—life is uncertain: James says, “You do not know what tomorrow will bring” (James 4:17). Only God knows the end from the beginning; it is not for us to know.

Focus on certainties: There are many certainties, given to us in the Bible, that we can focus on. Here are some examples

- God has loved us from eternity (Ephesians 1:4).
- Jesus has made us right with God (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- God will finish the work he began in us (Philippians 1:6).
- God will provide all of our needs (Philippians 4:19).
- God will bring us safely to heaven (Jude 24-25) .

Have an eternal perspective: God has revealed our final destination, and although we cannot yet see it, we know it is where we belong. The things we are not sure about—health, jobs and money—are all temporal. However, the New Testament calls us to “Fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Food for Thought

- List the things you are uncertain about.
- Compare these things to the certainties we have thought about today.

Prayer

Sovereign God, I praise you that you have begun a work in me which you will bring to completion on that great day when I see you face to face. I humble myself before you in awe of your majesty. I recognize my own limitations and gladly leave uncertainties in your eternal hands. Help me to focus on the certainties revealed in your Word so that I may have an eternal perspective.

Day 27

Think Outside the Box

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

(Ephesians 6:18)

My worries invariably revolve around myself. The more I let this churn around my head, the more self-indulgent I become. I need to break out of this box and I can do so by praying for other people.

In today's verse, Paul writes to Christians living in a very oppressive situation. Ephesus was the center for worship of the pagan goddess Diana, and the huge temple that was dedicated to her would have dominated the skyline. We have already looked at verses from Ephesians in which Paul directed our attention to God's great plan. Now, as he draws the letter to a close, he urges us to pray. We do this "in the Spirit"—enabled by God with his Spirit's leading. "At all times": this is not an activity to be confined to a morning or evening prayer-time but something that goes on throughout the day. And "for all the saints": this describes fellow Christians, people whom God has set apart for himself. In order to do so, we must be "alert." The Greek word means "to be awake and vigilant."

Being on the lookout for people to pray for and bringing them to the Lord has become a powerful weapon in my war against worry. It takes me right out of myself and puts the focus on another person's needs. It gets me interested in someone else's welfare, strengthens my relationship with that person, and puts my own situation into perspective. When I

wake up in the night with anxiety, I turn this nervous energy into prayer until I return to sleep.

Just before I sat down to write this, I was battling negative, anxious thoughts which revolved around my circumstances. My Skype box suddenly came to life asking me to accept a call from a Christian friend in Pakistan. He is a young pastor living in a remote mountain village. We talked about the ministry he is involved in and I found myself astounded by his vision to help the young children suffering terrible treatment from ISIS sympathizers in the village. It made me realize how blessed I am and that I have no cause to complain. Here was a man who lived in a desperate situation yet who was determined to make a difference. This has turned my outlook inside out!

Food for Thought

- List seven needy people you know and pray for one each day. Each time your mind starts to drift toward worry, intercede for the person you have chosen.
- Look out for people you can pray for throughout the day.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you that I am part of your worldwide family. Forgive me for the way that I am often so engrossed with my own problems that I do not see the needs of those around me. Help me to break out of the selfishness worry induces and to care for others. Make me alert, prayerful and supportive.

Day 28

The Ultimate Focus

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

(Hebrews 12:2)

“Where You Look Is Where You’ll Go”

It was my third driving lesson and I was still nervous about driving the car. My instructor was an exuberant Londoner of Italian descent. “Just remember this,” he said, frantically waving his arms around. “Where you look is where you’ll go.” However, at that point I was looking at a tree, which was a cue for him to grab the wheel from me!

Focusing on Jesus

When I have focused on my worries and allowed them to dominate my life, my relationship with God has invariably faltered. However, setting my sights on Jesus enables me to draw together the strategies I have written about in this book and get on with my walk with God.

When the writer to the Hebrews urges us to “fix our eyes on Jesus,” he uses a word which means “to look attentively.” This is like how an athlete focuses on the finishing line of a race or a musician is attentive to his or her conductor. We do this because Jesus is the “author and perfecter of our faith.” In other words, he is the one who has done everything necessary for us to have a living relationship with God. He has paid the price for our sins and he will bring us safely to heaven.

Practicalities

When I was a young Christian, people used to say “just fix your eyes on Jesus.” I really liked the principle but I was never too sure how to do it. If you are in the same position, let me give you some practical ways to put this exhortation into practice.

1. Put your faith in Christ alone. The verse goes on to speak of how Jesus endured a humiliating death on the cross and is now seated at God’s right hand—the place of authority and power.

2. Love Christ. Christianity is not a religion but a living relationship with God. Peter says, “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy” (1 Peter 1:8). The more I know Christ, the greater my love for him. It is a fact, not a feeling (although I can often get emotional about my relationship with Jesus). This love grows as I spend time with him in prayer and reading the Word of God.

3. Remind yourself that Jesus is king over your life. Everything you are and have belongs to Jesus.

4. Live for his kingdom. I have already said that my worries tend to revolve around my life. However, Je-

sus calls us to be concerned for his kingdom and has promised to care for our needs (see Matthew 6:33). Fixing our sights on Jesus is a spiritual discipline which will lift us out of worries and deepen our relationship with him.

Food for Thought

- How much do you need to exercise faith in Christ throughout each day?
- Think about how you can incorporate this into your daily routine.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you are the author and completer of my faith. I praise you for the way in which you laid down your life, enduring that horrific death and taking the wrath of God upon yourself so that I can be saved. You have risen from the dead and now you sit at the Father's right hand. However, I often look at my worries instead of setting my sights on you. Help me to change this so that I can live by faith.

Day 29

The Power of God's Purpose

*And we know that in all things God works for the good
of those who love him, who have been called according
to his purpose.
(Romans 8:28)*

Mr. Mickawber

He bumbled from one disaster to another but Mr. Mickawber was never short of optimism. When the future was looked bleak, his watchword was, “Something will turn up; it usually does.” Mickawber is one of my favorite characters created by Charles Dickens; I love his cheerful disposition. However, he rarely had reasons for his confidence; in fact, the odds were usually stacked against him.

There have been times when I have reduced Romans 8:28 to a platitude similar to Mickawber’s maxim. However, this verse does not vaguely assure us that everything will turn out all right. It is saying that God will work out his purposes in our lives which will be for our ultimate good and his glory. And this is a key principle in the war against worry.

Know This!

Paul begins this magnificent statement with the words, “We know.” He is not communicating a nice idea to cheer us up when things are difficult; rather, he is imparting a crucial truth that should underscore our whole approach to life. “You must keep these facts in your head,” Paul is saying. “They are essential to living out the Christian life.”

Vital Facts

There are two vital facts we must know. First, God is at work in the lives of people who love him. They are “called according to his purpose.” Our relationship with God is rooted in love and our calling is to fulfill his purpose rather than pursue our own ambitions. The second fact is that he is working for our ultimate good—“to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.” God is doing this now as he sets us apart, challenges and builds us up with his Word, and changes us by the power of the Holy Spirit. And he will complete the work when we have resurrection bodies.

A Different Perspective

Throughout this book, we have seen that worry puts the focus on ourselves. However, we can focus on God, secure in the knowledge that he is using everything that goes on around us to make us more like Jesus. When I make this my chief concern, worry fades into the background but when I am wrapped up with myself, it ties me up in knots.

Food for Thought

- Memorize Romans 8:28.
- Throughout this day, remind yourself of the two vital facts it contains.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I want to express my love to you. You have created me, saved me from eternal punishment, and given me “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). Help live my life according to your purposes and trust you to work all things together for your glory and for my ultimate good.

Day 30

How to Keep Going When the Going Gets Tough

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

(James 1:2–4)

From the very outset, I was adamant that I would not do it but somehow I allowed myself to be persuaded to “give it a go.” I was standing at the pinnacle of the steepest ski slope in Europe, and there was no turning back. The run looked tough but I had to keep going.

A lot of my worries have been about whether I can cope with difficulties, such as poor health or loss of income. I have discovered that the most effective way of tackling this has been to change my mind-set. Today’s verses have helped me to do so.

Face Reality

James presents us with two statements to face us up to the reality of trials. Like it or not, every one of us will have to endure hard times. That is why James says, “Count it all joy *whenever* you face trials.” Trials will hit us and hurt us.

James tells us that we will face “various” trials. The same Greek word is used in Matthew 4.25 describing the way that Jesus healed “any and every kind of sicknesses.” It is an inclusive term which covers big and small trials.

Change Our Thinking

James calls us to “consider it pure joy” when difficulties are unleashed into our lives. He says this in a way that describes something that we should do once and

for all—in other words, “Get this mind-set and keep it.” The word translated “consider” was used in the world of accounting. Some translations say “reckon” because it would be used when you were reckoning in a payment due to you. R.T. Kendall says, “Counting it all joy is to dignify God’s providence because it shows that you can see God’s hand in every area of your life.”¹

The Outcome

Trials become a source for joy when we realize their long-term potential. First, they prove the reality of our faith. James describes this process as “the testing of [our] faith”. In the same way that the authenticity of a piece of gold can be proved in the refiner’s fire, the credibility of our relationship with God is demonstrated to everyone around us, and to ourselves, as we continue to trust him and live for him when times are tough. Secondly they enable us to grow in our faith—“you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.” The Greek word for “perseverance” is both active and passive: Actively it describes the persistence that enables us to keep going. And passively it talks about holding on patiently. We do this by trusting in God to work out his purpose and by refusing to give up living for Jesus. Thirdly, we

¹ From a sermon preached at Westminster Chapel

will be “complete, not lacking in anything,” literally “perfected all over.” Trials have a way of exposing our deficiencies and when we face up to them, asking for God’s help, we are transformed by the Holy Spirit.

The philosopher Descartes coined the famous expression, “I think, therefore I am.” Worry is the result of flawed thinking but when we allow our mind-set about difficulties to be changed by God’s Word, we will score an essential victory in the war against worry.

Food for Thought

- Meditate on these verses during the next week, asking God to use them to change your mind-set.
- James 1:2-4

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I praise you that your hand is on every area of my life. I often see trials as hostile intrusions into my peaceful existence. I worry about when they will hit me and what shape they will take. Help me to see them as powerful tools in your loving hands and consider them to be “pure joy” because of the way they will transform me and draw me closer to you.

Day 31

Join the Fight!

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

(Ephesians 6:12)

Enough Is Enough!

The year was 1914, war had been declared, and troops were being mustered to fight for their country. A picture of Lord Kitchener—the British Secretary of State for War—with his forefinger extended could be seen on posters all over Britain. The posters were emblazoned with the slogan, “Your country needs you!” Millions of men responded by attending recruitment centers up and down the country to enlist to join the war effort.

This book has been written as a recruitment drive for a war against worry. In my own case, I have expended a lot of time wrestling with anxious thoughts. My deepest desire is that you join me in this war against worry. Today we will establish the key steps that need to be taken in order to put into practice the biblical principles that have been set out in the last thirty days.

1. Enlist in the War

We have to make a decision not allow ourselves to be dominated by worry any longer.

2. Change Priorities

Paul told Timothy that, “No-one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer” (2 Timothy 2:4). During the last thirty days, we have seen that worry has the effect of

getting us wrapped up with ourselves and our problems instead of focusing on God and extending his kingdom. In the early part of the book, we thought about the amazing things God has done for us which fly in the face of the issues that occupy our anxious thoughts.

- God chose us before he created the world (Ephesians 1:4-6).
- He has put his seal of ownership on us (Ephesians 1:13).
- We are citizens of the kingdom of God—an unshakable kingdom (Hebrews 12:28).
- Jesus is “the good shepherd” who cares and provides for us (John 10:11).
- We need to ensure that God’s Kingdom is our priority.
- God will complete the work he began (Philippians 1:6).
- Since God did not spare his Son, he will graciously give us “all things with him” (Romans 8:32).

3. Identify the Enemy

Worry is not something we have to endure; it is an enemy we need to defeat. Jesus asked a powerful question: “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?” (Matthew 6:27). It is time to see worry for what it is—a destructive force that has no benefit whatsoever.

4. Get into Battle

Here are the core tactics given to us in the Bible:

(a) Commit:

We do not have to carry cares that weigh us down. Peter tells us to “cast” them onto the Lord (1 Peter 1:8), knowing that he cares for us. And he uses a word that speaks of tossing something away.

(b) Resist:

In the very next verse, Peter urges us to be “self-controlled and alert” because Satan is like a roaring lion, on the prowl for prey to devour. We must resist him by “standing firm in the faith” (1 Peter 1:9). Satan will try to use our tendency to worry to destroy us, and we must refuse to allow him to succeed.

(c) Reduce:

Worry usually has a long-term perspective: what will happen tomorrow, and the day after that, etc.? However Jesus says we must reduce the scope of our concern to the challenges of today—“Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matthew 6:34, ESV).

(d) Surrender:

In my experience, the worst-case scenario I imagined did actually become reality. However, when I surrendered to God and said, “Not my will but yours be

done” (Luke 22:42), peace flooded my heart and soul, and I saw God work out his purposes in surprising and exciting ways. Surrender also involves the realization that we are not in control. As the old hymn says, “God holds the key of all unknown.”

5. Stay in the Fight

Our thirty-one-day battle-briefing has come to an end. I hope this book has equipped you to get stuck into the fight. You are not on your own; God has sent the Holy Spirit to be within you and to strengthen you (John 14:15-17). Now it is for you to stay in the fight with dependence upon God, knowing that you are on the victory side.

Food for Thought

- Think about how these key tactics can become part of your everyday life.
- Commit yourself to a personal program in which you will reinforce all the principles you have learned in reading this book.

Prayer

Mighty God, you are victorious in battle and your Son has conquered death and sin. Help me to live in light of your victory. I choose to reject worry and “seek first your kingdom” (Matthew 6:33). I acknowledge

that I need the power of the Holy Spirit to help me fight this war against worry. In faith, I ask for the Spirit's help, and I look forward to seeing you at work in my life.

More Tactical Gear

Bible References for When I Feel Worried

Memorize or look up and refer to the following Bible passages:

- Matthew 6:34
- 1 Peter 5:7
- Hebrews 13:6
- John 14:27
- Psalm 55:22
- Psalm 56:3-4
- Isaiah 26:3
- Philippians 4:6-7
- Matthew 6:25-27

Seven People for My Prayer List

Seven people I will pray for, and who may benefit from reading this book:

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____
- 6 _____
- 7 _____

About the Author

Simon Robinson has been in pastoral ministry since 1988. He is the author of eight books, including *Improving your Quiet Time* and *Growing for God*. He engages in an itinerant ministry teaching the Bible in Europe, Asia and the USA, as well as being a police chaplain and leader of the work of Redeeming our Communities in Chesterfield, England. He and his wife Hazel have two adult sons and three grandchildren.



The WAR against WORRY

a thirty-one- day strategy

“Don’t worry about it!” How many times have we ignored this advice? Most of us know that worry is fruitless and draining but we cannot seem to stop getting entangled with it.

This book declares war against worry, providing a 31-day strategy to stop it in its tracks. Simon Robinson writes as someone who has battled with anxiety for many years and discovered biblical and practical principles to defeat it. Each daily step is earthed in the Bible and simply explained, including prayer and action points.

Simon J. Robinson has been in pastoral ministry since 1988. He is the author of eight books including *Improving your Quiet Time* and *Growing for God*. He is Lead Minister of Watnall Road Baptist Church, Nottingham, England, and engages in an occasional ministry teaching the Bible in Europe, Asia and the USA. He and his wife Hazel have two adult sons and three grandchildren.



Worry is a universal wound. Almost nothing saps the joy out of our lives the way worry does. Simon Robinson has done good work in showing us the loving salve of our Savior that will begin healing this deepest of wounds.

Terry Esau, Writer and Speaker, Long Lake, Minneapolis, MN


GREAT WRITING
PUBLICATIONS

www.greatwriting.org

<https://www.wrbc.co.uk/>

978-0-9965168-3-9



9780996516839

BISAC REL012070

RELIGION / Christian Life / Personal Growth