



The Deeper Way of Thinking--Worry Busters

How Can Your Thinking Improve Your Quality of Life?

Several years ago, I was taking my family on a camping trip to one of the most beautiful national parks in the US. As we were driving down the road leading into the park, a giant, snow capped volcano was looming ahead. I had one of my favorite CDs playing in the car and the kids were happy and enjoying the ride. The forest was on both sides of us, and a much needed vacation was just beginning. Yet gloom pervaded my thoughts, and I told my wife as we sat together in the front of our station wagon that I just wanted to keep driving and never return home. I was completely depressed and if I could have done it, I would have gladly driven all the way into Heaven. I had no physical problems; we were ok financially with no bills. We had a place to live where we were happy, I was employed. Yet, I felt lonely and defeated and wanted to quit everything. How did I come to such a state? How do so many billions of others make their way there themselves? It is of course the trillion dollar question that the mental health industry would love to solve. Medications haven't done the trick and hours of counseling hasn't changed things for countless numbers of our friends, relatives, neighbors and perhaps even yourself. For me, it was worry. Most despair and depression centers around worry...one of the greatest plagues among people today. Is there something we can do to get out of times like I was experiencing and perhaps you have too?

One of the biggest causes of depression, discouragement and despair is the type of thinking you are doing. Of course that may be rather obvious, but it isn't so clear when we are going through it, when we are having a tough time of it. There are three common mistakes we make and each by itself can derail us emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. The first is a universal problem. You dwell on the big problems you may face. I often found myself worrying over what disasters I thought were coming. Many times I lost sleep over my worry, and I struggled to get my work done. You may have a legitimate reason to worry. There could be a terrible circumstance looming and it has you crushed. King Saul, the first king of Israel was so worried about the Philistine army he was about to go to war against the next day that he violated his deepest values to try and find out what the outcome of the battle would be. He went to a witch to try and contact the spirit of Samuel who had been long dead. Listen to why Saul had trouble locating a witch in Israel to help him. When some of the locals told Saul about a woman known for contacting the dead, he went to her but she denied she could help him. **But the woman said to him, "Surely you know what Saul has done. He has cut off the mediums and spiritists from the land. Why have you set a trap for my life to bring about my death?"** (1 Samuel 28: 9 NIV) Do you see what happened? Worry led to Saul violating his own conscience. When we worry, we often do what we never would to try to cope with the fear we face. People have lied, stolen, cheated and committed murder because of their worry. Worry is a destructive force that leads not only to mental health problems, it can wreck our physical health and send us spiraling into sin we might never before considered.

Jesus commands you not to worry. **Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.** (Matthew 6: 34 NIV) That sounds strange as I can't think of anyone who says he or she wants to worry. You worry, most would say, because you can't help it. And yet it seems that Jesus knew that worry is a free choice you make, something you can decide not to do. Earlier in the same sermon, Jesus made a similar rule. **"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? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? (Matthew 6: 25-27 NIV)

Jesus once told a parable that is rarely recognized as a key to overcoming worry. It is commonly called the parable of the shrewd manager. It is the tale of a corrupt manager who wasted his boss's money and when the boss found out what his manager was doing, he confronted him and threatened his employment. Now that manager was in a tight spot. He was about to lose his job and be saddled with a terrible reputation that would make it hard to find work. He could have fallen into the pit of worry, fussing over what terrible things he faced. The manager could have contemplated suicide or started drinking. Instead he did something that was profound. He accepted his fate. The manager faced his worst nightmare squarely. What keeps us up at night and wrecks our soul is the fear of what might be. Instead, follow the example of the corrupt manager. Accept the possibility, maybe even the certainty that the worst is coming. You will die. You will be penniless. You will fail miserably. Your family will fall apart. You will be rejected. Once you accept the worst is inevitable, then you are free to think. You can see how things are and you are not tied in knots. Strange as it may sound, it is quite freeing to accept the worst. Then you don't have to worry about it anymore and you can live again.

The second step to overcoming worry is just exactly what the manager did next. He did the unthinkable. The manager went to each of the people who owed his boss money, because he knew who they were, and he told them to tear up their bills and rewrite them with a lower amount showing than they owed. This was of course dishonest and illegal, but it teaches us an important step to overcoming worry. Take an action step that will make things better for you and others when the worst comes. The manager, knowing he would lose his job hoped that he would, by having each person who owed his boss money, rewrite their debts make friends who would help him when he became unemployed. I have a friend, who when he found out he probably was going to die from terminal cancer, developed his own funeral service, top to bottom, even contacting each person he wanted speaking at it, asking them to participate. He picked out each song he wanted and even wrote his own eulogy. That may sound morbid to you, but it was brilliant. It kept Pastor Ted from worrying about his fate and helped his wife and loved ones not have to fret over how his funeral service should go. Three of David's best soldiers followed this step of overcoming worry. When David and his faithful soldiers were surrounded by fierce Philistine warriors and it seemed certain they were either going to die or be captured, the three overheard David wishing he could taste some of the water from the well in his hometown which at the time was occupied by the Philistines. Knowing perhaps that defeat was almost inevitable, rather than worrying about what they faced, the three soldiers snuck out and going behind enemy lines made it to the well and grabbed some of the water for David. Step two is rather than focusing on your problem, figure out something to do that will be good for yourself or others if the worst does come to you.

Step three is rather simple. Give God the flexibility to do whatever is best for you and those you love. Have you considered just how intelligent Mary the mother of Jesus was when she faced a most horrible situation. A bride and a groom, who were, clearly very close to Mary, ran out of wine at their wedding feast and this would have been humiliating for them both. In a small village, the reputation of them would be wrecked and they would be the butt of jokes, perhaps for generations. Mary immediately went to Jesus telling Him about the situation. Without a clear answer from the Lord, she went to the servants and gave them these impeccable instructions. **His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."** (John 2: 5 NIV) You may not have any strength to hope for a good outcome. It could be that you have run out of options. Then just do this. Throw up your hands and grant God permission to do whatever He wishes. You may feel like there is no way out. It may seem like you are lost and without answers. Then follow step three. Give God permission to do whatever He wants and let things turn out as He wishes. Cast your fate into the hands of Christ and assume He can figure out how to do what's best for you and all you love.