

## **Freedom from Worry and Anxiety**

### **Part 1**

#### **Introduction**

"Do not be anxious about anything" (Phil. 4:6). What do you worry about? Money? Poor health? Growing old? Offending someone? The future? All of us worry, and all of us have times of anxiety, even fear. But few human characteristics are more destructive to us personally. Worry keeps us from living the full life Jesus promised. It fills us with tension and stress, preventing us from enjoying our lives. It can even make us sick.

Imagine a scene from the dawn of history. The time is early evening, and the place, the most beautiful garden on earth. A solitary voice, unlike any other calls out, "Adam, Eve, where are you?" A short distance away, a young couple, dressed in makeshift shirts of fig leaves, crouch among the bushes. Their breathing is labored. Beads of perspiration course down their faces and backs. Worry and fear wrack their bodies.

Finally realizing it is pointless to try to hide from the all-seeing eyes of God, the young man slowly rises. His voice is barely audible as he stares at the ground, unable to look into the eyes of his Maker.

"I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

"Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

"The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

God turns His attention to the woman. "What is this you have done?"

"The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (Gen. 3:9-13).

We all know the familiar story. A whole set of conflicting emotions and actions accompanied Adam and Eve's worry and fear. They lied to God, and they blamed each other. Their punishment: banishment from the Garden of Eden for them. They and their offspring became alienated from God; they were condemned to a life of hard work and pain, accompanied by a propensity for worry and anxiety.

We don't have to look very far in our Bibles before we see the result of worry in the lives of the people chronicled there. We see Moses fleeing from the Egyptians into the desert for a forty-year exile. We see the disciple Peter so fearful that he lies about knowing Jesus. In Psalm 139, we hear David praying, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts" (v. 23).

Yes, like David we all have anxious thoughts. Because of Adam and Eve's sin and the resulting separation from God, worry and anxiety have become a natural part of the human condition. But what do we do then with the Bible's command to not be anxious about anything? This entails living supernatural lives.

How we can do this is the focus of this study.

## **Our Study**

First, let's look at what causes worry. I believe the two primary reasons for worry are having a different set of priorities from God and failing to trust in Him and His promises. Perhaps this sounds over-simplified, but if you will follow along with me, I think you will come to agree.

### **God's Priorities**

Let's be honest. God's priorities and ours are often very different. As long as we disagree with God we are doomed to worry. We feel something is important; God says it isn't. We believe our needs aren't being met; God says we've confused our wants and our needs. What is the Bible's solution?

### **The Scripture: Matthew 6:25-27, 30-33**

*"Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear...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?...O you of little faith?...do not worry...Your Heavenly Father knows that you need them (food and clothing). But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things (food, drink, clothing) will be given to you as well."*

1. What does Jesus tell His listeners? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. How does He see us in comparison to the birds? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. Why is worry futile? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. What assurance does Jesus give His listeners? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. What should be our top priority? \_\_\_\_\_

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What is there about giving God's kingdom and His righteousness top priority in our lives that has the power to banish worry? Let's look at the Kingdom of God first. Just what is it?

A simple definition might be: The manifestation of the rule of God and His people on the earth.

To this, Scripture adds:

**The Scripture: Romans 14:17**

*"The Kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."*

6. How does Paul describe the Kingdom of God? \_\_\_\_\_

Righteousness, peace and joy—not material possessions, not distractions that take us from the Lord, and not carrying around a set of heavy burdens.

This can be broken down into three parts: entering the Kingdom, remaining in the Kingdom, and serving in the Kingdom. Those wishing to become citizens of the Kingdom of God must first pass its entrance requirements.

**The Scripture: John 3:3**

*"Jesus declared, 'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.' "*

7. What is the first requirement? \_\_\_\_\_

Just as we are born into an earthly kingdom, we must also be born spiritually.

**The Scripture: Matthew 7:21**

*"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven (God), but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."*

8. What is a second requirement? \_\_\_\_\_

**The Scripture: Acts 14:22**

*"Then they (Paul and Barnabas) returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,' they said."*

9. What do Paul and Barnabas warn must happen to enable us to enter the Kingdom of God? \_\_\_\_\_

Most of us in the western world do not know what is to suffer for our faith. But in many parts of the world today, people are suffering great hardships to belong to God and His Kingdom. Just as entering the Kingdom is not easy, neither is remaining there.

**The Scripture: Matthew 5:10**

*"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

10. What is necessary to remain in the Kingdom of God? \_\_\_\_\_

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Scripture also gives us the requirements for serving in the Kingdom. In Luke, Jesus gives us an important one.

**The Scripture: Luke 9:62**

*"Jesus [said], 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.'"*

11. What makes a person ineligible for service in the kingdom of God? \_\_\_\_\_

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As human beings we spend an inordinate amount of time looking back (what might have been) and worrying about the future (what is going to happen) but God says those who serve in His kingdom must live in the now--today.

Now let's take a short look at the righteousness Jesus talks about. The simplest definition of righteousness is a right relationship or standing with God. Jesus achieved this for us when He died on the cross. In dying, He exchanged His righteousness for ours. Why was this exchange necessary? What is wrong with our own righteousness?

**The Scripture: Isaiah 64:6**

*"All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags."*

12. How does God see our righteous acts (our righteousness)? \_\_\_\_\_

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Yes, our own righteousness is worthless as far as God is concerned. That is why it's necessary for Him to give us His righteousness. But once we have it, we must still maintain it. How do we do this?

**The Scripture: Matthew 5:6**

*"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."*

13. What must our attitude toward righteousness be? \_\_\_\_\_

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14. What will be our reward? \_\_\_\_\_

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Jesus is not talking about some lukewarm emotion or good intentions. He is talking about hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Only when righteousness is as important to us as food and drink will we be filled.

## The Answers

1. Not to worry about what they eat, drink, or wear
2. We are much more valuable than they are.
3. It doesn't accomplish anything.
4. Our heavenly Father knows our needs.
5. Seeking God's Kingdom and His righteousness
6. As righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit
7. We must be born again.
8. To do the will of the Father
9. We must go through many hardships.
10. Willingness to be persecuted because of righteousness
11. Looking back
12. As filthy rags
13. We must hunger and thirst for it.
14. We will be filled.

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