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Overcoming Worry and Anxiety

(An Introductory Article)

GUY N. WOODS

① The grim phantom of worry has, at one time or another, haunted us all. Its baleful spectre hovers menacingly over countless thousands today, rendering their lives miserable and wretched, and their future ominous and uncertain. For most of us, life would be completely joyous and fully satisfying were it possible for us to eliminate worry from our lives. If we could, by one decisive encounter, slay this arch-foe of mankind, and be assured that he would never plague us again, life would indeed be entrancing and this world a glorious adventure. But either we cannot, or we will not, deal resolutely with it, and we go through life constantly beset with the vexing problem of worry.

Worry is a common characteristic of the race. It is true that we do not all worry about the same things, or perhaps to the same extent, and each doubtless feels that his worries are more serious than any others; but at one time or another—indeed, much of the time—we find ourselves engaged in an uneven contest with this demon of the mind. Financial matters always provide a fruitful source of worry. This is true, whether we be rich or poor. Others worry about their children, their absent loved ones, their friends. One's health, his job, the future, old age, and death, all come in for their share of mental uneasiness. We are disposed to worry about what others think or have said about us, the opportunities we ignored or disregarded yesterday, the decisions we made, or did not make, last year. Because of these matters—and a hundred more—we allow inner tensions to build up in us until we become a bundle of nerves and go to pieces mentally, physically, and spiritually.

It is significant that, etymologically, the word "worry" is from the Middle English *worwen*, or *wirien*, to strangle. It means "to harass with or as if with continual snapping or biting; also, to shake and mangle with the teeth." Have we not again and again experienced this sensation? In the midst of baffling and terrifying situations, have we not felt as if something actually had us by the throat?

→ Worry is the most destructive of all the human emotions. Its evil effects extend to the body, the mind, and the spirit of man. If allowed to run its course, it will disrupt

the entire life and paralyze the whole personality.

1. Worry destroys us physically. It has been styled "the sexton who digs an untimely grave." It robs one of sleep, takes away the appetite, and impairs the digestive system. It produces heart palpitation, high-blood pressure, and stomach ulcers. An eminent physician has said that "the incidence of stomach ulcers goes up and down with the stock market." A prominent British doctor, in an address in Great Britain recently, said that "passing down the street, the trained eye can detect in the faces of the people the early stages of that concern which later on shows itself in the consulting room and the hospital as anxiety neurosis unloading itself on the digestion, the circulation, and other bodily functions."

There is a conception widely prevalent that it is possible to work one's self to death. This is not true. Physical breakdowns do not come because of the amount or the importance of the work one does, but are due to the anxiety and worry which, when added to the load of responsibility already being borne, overload the nervous system to the breaking point. So long as one works with an easy poise and an unhurried attitude, maintaining always a proper balance between labor and rest, his duties will rest lightly on his shoulders, and night will bring satisfaction and a consciousness of work well done for reward. To this add worry, and the spell breaks. Tension creates stress and strain the nervous system was never intended to carry. A disposition to worry that the work will not be finished, or that it will not be properly done, injects an element of panic which utterly destroys one's power to relax.

It has been said that "men do not die of disease, but of internal combustion." A life of comparative uselessness cannot be justified on the ground that work will result in a breakdown of our faculties. Work is healthful, even hard, laborious work. Those who live lives of indolence on the plea that they avoid the tension and stress of modern living merely deceive themselves. It is the tension that kills! It is possible to do a prodigious amount of work if the life can be kept free of inner strain.

In a comparatively recent life of the English preacher, John Wesley, his biographer states that he always "arose at four o'clock in the morning, preached whenever possible at five, and was often on the road again at eight—sometimes following his morning sermon by five others during the day. In the fifty years of his itinerant

life he preached over forty thousand times—an average of about fifteen sermons per week. It is estimated that he crossed the Irish Channel more than fifty times and that he traveled more than two hundred fifty thousand miles on land—visiting in the process remote fishing villages on Cornwall and isolated mining towns in Yorkshire which the regular travel routes never reached. . . . It is doubtful whether the annals of the eighteenth century show another record of such tireless, methodical activity." We may add that, in addition to this enormous amount of preaching and traveling Mr. Wesley did, he also found time to write notes on the entire New Testament, keep a lengthy journal, and publish numerous books of sermons! "His ability to achieve," his biographer points out, was due in the main to a temperament which was remarkably steady and self-possessed." And he adds this significant observation: "He never hurried, he never worried, and he had no wearing anxieties."

→ But if it is not possible for one to work himself to death, it is easily possible for one to worry himself to death. It is not that most of us lack the mental stamina and the physical resources essential to meet the demands of life, we simply suffer these instruments of power to be rendered impotent through tension and worry. We must preserve to ourselves these invaluable and irreplaceable sources of power through relaxation and mental ease. We need to learn, to use Stevenson's words, how "to sit loosely in the saddle of life." Most of us would do well to adopt the philosophy of the old colored man who said: "When I works, I works hard; when I sets, I sets loose; when I worries, I goes to sleep!"

William Lyon Phelps, the world-famous educator, once oddly made the unusual suggestion that every household should have a cat. He said: "The cat in quiescence is medicinal to irritable, tense men and women." It was his view that a cat can teach us the art of repose. "Now, when a cat decides to rest," said Mr. Phelps, "he not only lies down; he pours his body out on the floor like water!" We can indeed learn much in the way of relaxation from this common household pet. Most of us are devoid of the ability to loose taut nerves and rid ourselves of the accumulated tenseness of everyday life.

2. Worry destroys us mentally. It blurs mental processes and distorts reason. One can, and many often do, worry themselves into mental institutions. A superintendent of such a hospital is recently quoted as:

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requirement of men. It, therefore, becomes a purely sectarian procedure.

Campbell and others were patient and forbearing with Thomas, and every effort was made toward the correction of his error. Eventually, though, it was felt necessary to expose the man and his fallacies. There went along with Thomas, however, such a group of persons as was sufficient to constitute the nucleus of the little splinter party of Christadelphianism. And the development of this little sect aptly illustrates a tendency which all who labor for the New Testament way should be diligent to avoid. We who endeavor to labor for the New Testament way must never allow ourselves to form a sect to fight sects. Yet in view of all the circumstances, this is a fault into which one could easily fall. And it is a demonstrated fact that the "rebaptism" extreme did in this instance end in the formation of a sect. We ought to make it plain that we have nothing to plead for except the New Testament way. Let us urge persons, then, to be baptized. Let us, then, urge them as members of the "one body" to give themselves to learning and doing all the things taught of Jesus. (Matt. 28: 19, 20.) This is indeed a "large order," to be sure. Anything less, though, is blameworthy. But success in it is success in faithfulness to the Lord.

And surely it is not amiss to consider the timeliness of this plea for faithfulness to the Lord. The truth is that the denominational order is in disintegration not entirely unlike the process of a barrel falling to staves. Much of the apparent disregard for religion is in actuality a revolt against the denominational order. We are so constituted that the plea for God and his order will surely not fall on entirely unresponsive hearts. Let us, then, give all the strength we possess to pleading for the divine way.

Oswald Wilson

THOMAS H. BURTON

Why introduce this man? Who is Oswald Wilson? It is a great pleasure to me to introduce this man to the readers of the Gospel Advocate. If given a chance, he will be heard from in the work in Upper East Tennessee, where the church is now going forward in a big way.

Brother Wilson was reared in Kentucky. His father is a preacher for the digressive church. He has one brother, who is also a preacher in the same church. Other close relatives were also preachers.

Brother Oswald preached in the so-called "Christian Church" for ten years, but was always very conservative. He is one of the best preachers that that denomination had in Upper East Tennessee. He was doing much work with that church. He has been on the radio in Elizabethton five days a week for several years. About three months ago he renounced all error and cast his lot with the church and truth. He has a wife and four children. He is of good statue and in perfect health. I judge him to be about thirty-five years old. He is one of the hardest workers that I have ever heard of. Since he came to the church he has drawn away from the digressives. I am of the opinion that he will accomplish more within the next five years if he

is able to remain in that field than any other five preachers that could be placed there. He preaches the truth in power and simplicity. He is highly respected and has a clean record. He is not only a gospel preacher, but a splendid singer. He already has ten meetings in that section lined up for next year. Some of these are among the digressives, where he is liable to bring the whole group out of error.

In order to keep this man in that field and on the radio five days per week, his support and the radio expenses must be raised elsewhere than in that section. He was being supported \$300 per month, and certainly we would not ask him to do the work that he will do for less. The expense of the radio is some more than \$200 per month, but I believe that if we will raise \$500, the congregations in that section will make up the balance.

A few contacts have been made and \$75 definitely promised, with a few other good prospects. If any group of elders or any individual would like to meet this brother and have him go into details with them, please contact me immediately at Harts-ville, Tenn., phone 190J, or C. L. Overturf, minister, Lipscomb College congregation.

I am of the opinion that if we let this man leave this field for the lack of support, it will be the greatest setback to the cause in this section since digression swept across those parts about three-quarters of a century ago. Address him: Box 468, Elizabethton, Tenn.

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having said that one of the major causes of mental breakdown is anxiety over the future. An unnaturally increased tempo affects a man's ability to think and reason in calm and orderly fashion. In consequence, his work suffers and sometimes fails. He then becomes either foolhardy and unwise, or else unduly cautious and hesitant, and thus loses his balance of restraint and his ability to concentrate. Gone is the firm control so requisite to success in any endeavor.

3. Worry ruins our disposition. Worried, anxious people are touchy, impatient, and irritable. Those who "fly off the handle" are usually struggling under the burden of a strangling anxiety. Nothing renders a person so miserable and wretched, or creates a greater burden for those about him. A preacher, disposed in this fashion, was preparing one Sunday morning to go to his appointment. It was necessary for him to catch a ferry on the way, and he was sure he would be too late. Finally, with herculean effort, and the whole family assisting, he was off; and when he reached the pier, the boat was several feet out in the water. It was just as he expected; and with a running jump he landed barely on the ferry's edge, and a man, standing near by, caught him in his arms to keep him from falling. "What in the world are you trying to do?" the man asked him. "Why, I was trying to catch this ferry," he answered, breathlessly. His assistant looked at him in blank astonishment. "You simpleton," he finally said, "this ferry is coming in to the bank, not going out!" Many

of us meet our troubles head-on in this fashion.

(Next, "The Sinfulness and Futility of Worry.")

Courage

How few can stand opposition! Peter weakened and fell when the fierce mob cried for the blood of his Master. We all love ease and quietude. Few have a taste for conflict, and when it comes, fewer indeed stand. These thoughts are suggested by reading the words of the Savior when he asked his disciples, "Will ye also go away?" The Savior and his doctrine were not popular in his day, nor are they yet; hence if we would be his true disciples, it requires *courage* to stand up against friends, so called, and against the popular current of the age in which we live. Paul was bold and aggressive, John mild and gentle, yet both were courageous and died for their conscientious convictions of truth. May we have this courage!—J. M. Barnes, *Gospel Advocate*, Vol. XXVIII, p. 36, January 20, 1886.

The Winning Way

If you put a little loving into all the work you do,
And a little bit of gladness, and a little bit of you,
And a little bit of sweetness, and a little bit of song,
Not a day will seem too toilsome; not a day will seem too long;
And your work will be attractive, and the world will stop to look,
And the world will see a sweetness, like the tinkling of a brook.
In the finished job; and then the world will turn to look at you
With a world's appreciation of the thing you've found to do.

—Just a Moment.

Great and Small Men

Great men can differ and not abuse each other but reason together. Most men now, when they differ, try to see how much sarcasm and wit and abuse they can offer instead of argument and reasoning in a Christian way. I fear that there are too many small men in the church and that by this test the preachers are not exempt. Argument and reason are good, but abuse and foolishness are disgusting. Let us help to make some more great men and less little fellows. All have a part in this work. —H. M. Phillips.

People Are Funny

If you sleep late, you are lazy.
If you are up early, you are nuts.
If you just study, you do not play enough.
If you play, your studies will suffer.
If you stay in nights, you do not have enough activities.
If you go out, you do not like your home.
If you go with boys, you get laughed at.
If you do not, you are unpopular.
If you laugh a lot, you are silly.
If you do not, you are a sourpuss.
If you are curious, you are nosey.
If you are not, you do not care.
If you get married, you are crazy.
If you do not, you are a bachelor or an old maid.
People are funny. They do not know what they want.—The Vision.