



Growth Group Discussion Questions

Lesson: #LevelUp! Worry and Anxiety

Primary Scriptures: Philippians 4:6-9

Lesson 5 - Week of May 3, 2020

DISCUSSION

If you are happy when things fall apart, then you are either a repair person or a masochist (a person who enjoys an activity that appears to be painful). And if you are the latter, there are counselors available to assist you with this behavior. For the rest of us, it's stressful when we find ourselves stuck in a gridlock of fears and doubts at the corner of Worry and Anxiety Avenue.

In this lesson, we will review what the Bible says about concern, worry, anxiety and fears. We have all been in a place of worry and stress. And we've all probably had someone say to us, "Don't worry, just trust God." Even if we didn't say it, we may have thought, "Please, be quiet because you don't understand my situation." It's often easy to tell someone not to worry when you're NOT going through it! But the Bible does tell us, time and time again, not to worry and not to fear. In fact, "do not be afraid" appears 120 times and "do not fear" appears 131 times in the Bible. If this concept is not carefully understood during these times of worry, then it can become unhelpful and condemning. These passages, also known as "drive-by-guilty," are scriptures that are normally taken out of context to make one feel guilty. Our goal is to discover what the Bible says about how to grab hold of these fears and learn how to find the peace that surpasses all understanding.

Let's begin by reading a famous drive-by-guilty scripture, Matthew 6:25-34. We will find that the scriptures have a much broader sense about worry and anxiety. At times, we have a tendency, with our religious clichés and the drive-by-guilty passages, to misrepresent the whole context. To better understand this concept, let's say that you gave a person a thirty-page contract, but she only read and focused on three sentences. Would you say that person has a full grasp of the contract? We would probably agree that this person has very limited knowledge of the contract. Sometimes this is how we treat the scriptures. We focus on a few verses and then base our entire understanding on the few and not the whole.

Another scripture, Philippians 4:6, says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Many people quote the first part of the scripture, "do not be anxious about anything" but will often omit the remainder. The latter part of that verse tells us what to do when we do become anxious. Truthfully, when we find ourselves dealing with moments of fear, we don't wake up and say, "Boy, it's a great day to worry!" or "What can I worry about today?" Instead, as life's situations occur, we easily find ourselves overwhelmed. Therefore, it's important that we understand the entire context of what our Father says about how to handle situations when we are faced with worry and anxiety.

For this lesson, we are going to "blast before we build." "Blast before building" is a concept that is often used in the construction industry. It's a decision point that is made to start from scratch with new construction instead of building on an existing infrastructure that may have some unknown foundational issues. Therefore, we are going to blast away some of the preconceived clichés and drive-by-guilty statements about worrying and fear. The **first concept** that we must grasp is **sometimes worrying can be a good thing**. Wait! What? In fact, only a fool ignores genuine danger. If things are really falling apart around you and you are just skipping through and singing life is good,

then you may be acting foolishly. Proverbs 22:3 tells us, “The prudent [wise] see danger and take refuge, but the simple [foolish] keep going and pay the penalty.” Therefore, there is a time and place for appropriate worrying and concern.

The **second concept** that we need to understand is **we cannot control our feelings, but we can control our responses**. Sometimes we or those around us become hyper-spiritual, meaning that we have a tendency to become more spiritual than Jesus. The result of being hyper-spiritual is that we tend to rebuke people for what they feel. God doesn’t rebuke us for how we feel. Instead, He rebukes us for what we do with that feeling. For example, the Bible commands us to love our enemies but it doesn’t say that we have to feel warm and fuzzy toward them like we would a friend.

In 2 Corinthians 7:5-6, we see that the Apostle Paul had fears. The first thing to note is that God did not condemn Paul for his fears. Remember, Paul is credited with planting several churches. From a human perspective, Paul probably believes that he has done God’s will by planting the churches, but he learns of a person who is poisoning the minds of the saints with rumors and lies against him. People are starting to believe the rumors and lies and, as a result, are starting to turn against Paul. Consequently, Paul began to feel depressed until God sent relief via Titus. Sometimes we all need the human element of good news, also known as the “Titus effect.”

Jesus and his disciples also dealt with stress and anxiety. We all know that Jesus was sinless in every way; therefore, if it is a sin to be stressed and anxious, then “Houston we have a problem!” Luke 22:44-45 tells us that Jesus prayed so hard that His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. When Jesus finished praying and returned to the disciples, he was overwhelmed by sadness when He found them asleep. Notice that Jesus was in anguish because he knew what was about to happen but the disciples were unaware. Nevertheless, Jesus prayed three times that the Father would reveal another way for our salvation. Jesus experienced anxiety, fear and concern, but He put His feelings aside to do the will of His Father. He provides the perfect example of how we should deal with our fears.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

When we find ourselves at the intersection of Worry and Anxiety Avenue, the following formula may assist us. The formula is comprised of two primary inputs: spiritual guidance and human reality. Spiritually, we rely on our Father for guidance, but the human reality is that we may also need assistance in the form of other people, medication and counseling, which are all completely acceptable. Reaping the full benefits of God’s blessings requires us to focus equally on both the spiritual side and Titus (human) side of things.

The three principles found in Philippians 4:6-9 may not remove worry and anxiety but can assist us with managing it:

Principle 1: Start with the right kind of prayer. (Verses 6-7)

Tell God exactly what you want. Your prayers should be filled with candor. There’s no need to hide your feelings from Him because He already knows what you are thinking. Pray the desires of your heart. The book of Psalms is filled with prayers of desire. Next, thank God for what He’s already done. A prayer of thanksgiving helps us focus on what God has already done and fuels our faith and trust in our Father. Lastly, remember it’s completely acceptable to pray this prayer frequently. Jesus provides an example of this in the Garden of Gethsemane when He prayed repeatedly that the cup would pass from Him.

Principle 2: Maintain the right type of focus.

Verse 8 says, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, **think about these things**.” The right type of focus is so important because what we focus on will determine what we see. Have you ever researched and then purchased a new car and then you start seeing more and more cars like yours? This is how human nature works; whatever we focus on we tend to see. The problem with this concept during times of worry and anxiety is that we tend to dwell on the negative and not the positive. There’s an old computer acronym, GIGO, Garbage In, **G**arbage **O**ut. This is paramount to how we respond in life. We should focus on the facts, not the what ifs. Many of the things that we get uptight about never happen or if they do happen, they are not that bad. If the bad things do appear in your life, so does your Father’s just in time (JIT) delivery system of grace and mercy and the power to endure whatever comes your way.

Principle 3: Live the right kind of life.

In verse 9, Paul is conveying to us that obedience during turbulent times produces confidence. The opposite also holds true, disobedience breeds fear. Have you ever driven through a red light? One of the first things we do is look in our rearview and side mirrors. Why? It’s probably because we are afraid of getting caught. Sin can remove God’s peace and protection. Therefore, remain obedient with your time, talent and treasure.

As we #LevelUp! during these uncertain times of worry and anxiety, please stay focused on the one who is always certain, our Father.

Questions:

1. From the discussion above we’ve learned that worry is something we all do and something most of us think we shouldn’t do. Here’s a list of some of the most common areas we worry about. Mark the ones you’re prone to worry about. Which are proactive concerns versus unhealthy anxieties?
 - Family concerns (kids, spouse, ex-spouse, siblings, parents, etc.)
 - Job or financial challenges (paying the bills, college expenses, retirement, etc.)
 - Health issues
 - Sudden tragedy (violence, accidents, natural disasters, etc.)
 - Spiritual issues (for yourself and others)
 - Relationship problems (friendships, dating, neighbors, etc.)
 - Self-worth (insecurities, need for approval, peer pressure, etc.)
 - Other: _____
2. We discussed that sometimes worrying can be a good thing. Have you experienced times when worry has been a good thing for you? If so, explain?