

**Sermon: Worried?**  
February 27, 2011  
First Presbyterian Church

**9am & 10:30am Traditional Worship**  
Rev. Dr. Donald W. Hackett  
Lancaster, Pennsylvania

*Text: Matthew 6:25-34 A Life of God-Worship*

**"If you decide for God**, living a life of God-worship, it follows that you don't fuss about what's on the table at mealtimes or whether the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in the care of God. And you count far more to him than birds.

**"Has anyone by fussing in front of the mirror** ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? All this time and money wasted on fashion—do you think it makes that much difference? Instead of looking at the fashions, walk out into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop, but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them.

**"If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers**—most of which are never even seen—don't you think he'll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you? What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God's giving. People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met.

**"Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now**, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.

### *Introduction*

**Worry came knocking at my door this past week.** I had little time and a lot of paperwork to finish. My tax returns and financial forms were soon due at the schools to which my son is applying. I had arrangements to make for an upcoming trip that could not be delayed much longer. Most of my family was out doing errands, at birthday parties, and on the road on a cold, icy, evening. Worry was knocking at my door and was inviting me to fret, be anxious, and to stew over events. Has worry come knocking at your door lately?

**I sent some questions about worry to a few friends last week.** I asked: “What is your definition of worry? When do you tend to worry and why? What helps you not to worry?” One friend replied:

*Do I worry? I think we know the answer to that one. My definition of worry: Allowing thoughts/problems/situations to preoccupy my mind needlessly. When do I tend to worry? I tend to worry when I have nothing else to occupy my mind, idle time. When things are out of my control or are not working out the way I think they should be. What helps me not to worry? A mind that is focused on something. Giving the things that worry me to God to handle (although I must confess here that I give them, then I take them back). My personality has control issues. That describes most of us, doesn't it? We hang onto matters that are better dealt with in God's hands.*

**Some people worry a lot, but do not see a reason to change.** They consider worry like a spiritual gift. They believe worrying is something they were meant to do. Some believe to be a good mom or dad, you should do your share of worrying. Your teenager takes the car out on a Saturday night, then you better be churning, pacing, sweating, and holding your breath until they are safely home again. Isn't that how worrying feels? Your pulse is up. Your heart rate is increased. Your mind is distracted and cannot focus. Your muscles begin to tense up. Worrying is not a pleasant experience! Maybe in some distorted way, we feel we are doing something about the situation.

**One source defines “worry”** as “to torment oneself with or suffer from disturbing thoughts; fret.” It goes on to say that the word “worry” comes from the old Middle English word meaning to strangle ( <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/worry>).

**Essentially, then, when we worry we are strangling ourselves.** Is this what we really want to do to ourselves? Maybe there are times we feel like strangling someone else, but do we want to repeatedly strangle ourselves?! Jesus invites you and me to live a radically different and healthier life.

### *Background*

**Over the last few weeks we have been studying the teachings of Jesus** found at the early part of his ministry. The disciple Matthew recorded for us a block of these teachings in Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7 under the heading Sermon on the Mount:

- In chapter 5 we discover **who** we are in Christ (blessed if we are poor, mourning, meek, hungering for righteousness, and pure in heart for we will encounter God).

- We then find out **what** we are to be (salt - restoring life and giving flavor and light - shedding truth and hope on a world in chaos).
- **Why** we are here comes next. We are here to fulfill the Scriptures, God's rescue plan. Jesus is putting all the lost pieces together in his kingdom and we are here to help.
- The rest of these teachings point us to **how** we live out our God-focused lives. The key in all these instructions is our private, intimate relationship with God.

### *The secret place of change*

**Jesus came reveal this radical mystery! God is no longer out there somewhere** viewing us from a distance. Rather, through his Son, Jesus, the God of the universe is now in our hearts, in that secret place. We cannot hide from God anymore than we can hide from ourselves. The reason God comes into our lives is to change us. You and I are in need of continual heart and brain surgery. Our physical brains and hearts may be working fine today, but it is our spiritual hearts and minds that need metamorphosis. We need a complete change of the way we see, think, and live. Jesus makes us into completely different creatures.

### *How do we stop strangling ourselves?*

**Worry is an indicator that there is more re-wiring to do in our lives.** In this passage of Matthew 6, Jesus is telling us change our pattern of thinking. *“If you decide for God, living a life of God-worship, it follows that you don't fuss about what's on the table at mealtimes or whether the clothes in your closet are in fashion.”* Are food and clothing important to our survival? Of course they are. We all work hard so we can provide for our needs and the needs of our families. Jesus is talking about our focus. If we are focused on impressing others with our looks or fashion, then we are focusing on the wrong thing. If we are worried about what others think about us, we are going to miss what God has for us.

**When you and I choose to follow Jesus,** we are choosing to focus on hearts and minds on God all the time, 24 hours a day, seven days week. As disciples of Jesus we allow God to live and work in us. This good and holy work happens one day at a time. It is work that God does and we respond and join God in his work. Jesus says the key is this: *“What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God's giving.”*

**When we wake up in the morning and look God,** our day will be different. We will see God's hand all around us. We will see God in the gift of a new day, in the gift of family and friends, in the provision of shelter and food, and gifts just keep

coming in. Our openness to God and focus on God will free us from the many worries that will come knocking at our door.

**At the heart of worry is fear.** We worry about things we cannot control. We feel by worrying we maintain some control or input to the event. It is an illusion. Worry and fear do not work for our good. Rather they seek to control and destroy the person who hangs on to them. Jesus does not want us control by fear. God designed us to be controlled by love. We are instructed in 1 John 4:18: *“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”* **We all have things that concern us:** our health, our families, our economy under financial pressures, budget cuts, loss of jobs, and wars and rumors of wars. Jesus comes alongside you and me this morning and says, “Turn your worries into prayers. Talk to me. Let me handle it.” That is why he taught his disciples to pray, *“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”*

### *Daily Practices*

**I recommend two practices to deal with worry.** The first is a simple breath prayer. Take a slow deep breath in. Now gently let it out. Do that again and as you breathe in think to yourself “Lord Jesus” and as you breathe out, think “I give you this concern.” You may even want to say the person’s name or situation as you exhale. “Lord Jesus, I give you \_\_\_\_\_.” Do this about five times. Each time allow the muscles in your shoulders and back to relax a little more.

The second practice is memorizing a meaningful passage of scripture. When we repeat something, it becomes our focus and increasingly our reality. Use a sentence from Matthew 6 like verse 34: *“Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now,”* or the verse from 1 John 4:18 *“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear.”* Repeat them again and again as often as you need to refocus on God.

**I love the fact that spring is around the corner** and high school track is starting up. Some of my favorite races are the relays. I love to see these kids blistering around the track at full steam and hand offs to the waiting team mates. As you can imagine, smooth handoffs are key to a fast and successful relay team. Whole races have been lost with a mistake in the handoff zone. This is a good image for you and me to remember when we are tempted to worry. In the race of life, you and I have important work to do. With God’s help, we run hard and with purpose and direction. There come times, almost daily when we have done all we can do in a situation and we need to consciously hand the baton to God. If we hang on to it, we will not be able to see God work. When we let go at the appropriate time, we allow God to do only what God can do. When it is our time to take the baton and run

again, God will let us know. We never, though, have to run alone. Jesus is right beside us and even working inside us to accomplish his good work.

**Prayer:** Thank you, God , for sending your Holy Spirit to live with us and to live inside of us. Help us today to walk and even run with you; you doing your part and we doing ours to heal and bless the world. In Jesus name, Amen.