

Worry Less.
WORRY FREE.

Practical ways to overcome anxiety

Danny Cheney

INTRODUCTION

For the first 35 years of my life, I was a nail-biter. I had such a problem with it that I would bite my nails until they bled. My fingers often had pain and infection from my habit, but for some reason it never dawned on me that I didn't have to trim my nails with my teeth. I can see the crinkled noses and disgust as you think, don't you know where your fingers have been? But cut me some slack. There was no COVID-19 back in those days. Maybe a few germs but nothing dangerous.

I had an epiphany one day when I realized that people could look at my hands and think that I might be a nervous wreck or that I was the worrying type. While I have never been a nervous wreck or a worry wart, I have been one to dwell on things. Problems that I would play over and over in my mind. Thinking it through, as the saying goes. While I would run things through my mind, I would mindlessly gnaw on my fingernails. I wouldn't even realize I was doing it, until I decided not to. It was a choice I made, to not only overcome the habit of nail biting, but also to conquer my mind. I chose not to allow my problems or worries to consume my mind and decided to do something about it. Because, we do not have to live that way.

This topic is near to my heart because I have walked a million miles through it. I have witnessed victories and defeats, ups and downs, gains, and losses, not only in my life but also in the lives of those I lead. At one time or another, most people struggle with fear, anxiety, and worry.

Now, all preachers have a favorite message that they preach. Or at least, I tell myself that so I feel better when I preach from the same passage multiple different times. The year was 1996. When I preached my first message from Philippians 4:6. I titled it, "Be Anxious For Nothing". I know that is not original, but I didn't waste much time finding engaging titles back then. Today, I would have probably titled it, "Don't Worry About Anything." See how catchy that is.

Little did I know back then that the message of Philippians 4 would impact my life, many times over for the next 24 years. It is a message that I have not only preached, but also sought to live. I strive to live every day to worry less, but my goal is to be worry free. We are all on a journey.

I began writing this book at the beginning of 2020. Yes, an infamous year that we seem trapped in. As if life couldn't get harder, now we have pandemics, political turmoil, and national division on top of our everyday troubles. If you struggled with anxiety, fear, and worry before then, 2020 magnified it. Yet, none of this has taken God by surprise. He is still on the throne. In fact, what we are facing today is much like the world that the New Testament writers lived in. The words of Paul are timeless because he lived these things out 2,000 years ago. So, if he can challenge us to be anxious for nothing, it must be attainable. The power of Paul's challenge lies not in the thought that it seems impossible,

but in the fact that he actually gave us the remedy for anxiety and worry. The Bible is relevant to the times and we can worry less, and we can even become worry free.

Throughout this book you will find practical and simple ways to overcome worry. If you will put these into practice, you will find yourself coping with life in a better way. Life is never free from trouble, but you can find freedom from the worries that consume you.

Worry Less. Worry Free. Focuses on two things: The Problem of Worry and The Remedy for Worry. Do not discount the remedy just because it seems simplistic. The Word of God never complicates things. The remedy, though simple, is not always easy, as you will find.

I have prayed over these pages that they will transform you and give you the insight you need to discover a better life. My prayer is that you will worry less, and that you will eventually become worry free.

A MIND PREOCCUPIED

It was one of those nights, you know the kind, when you are tired, but circumstances keep you awake. I had dozed off and was enjoying a nice restful sleep when I sensed a presence beside my bed. It was my 12-year-old daughter Hannah who informed me that she couldn't sleep. I looked at the clock next to the bed and in large red letters it read, 11:20 pm. In my most compassionate voice, I asked what was wrong and she said that she was anxious about the school day coming up the next morning. I got up out of bed and tried to console her while walking her back to her room. As I tucked her back in bed, I prayed a half-hearted, tired prayer that God would help her sleep, which would help me sleep. Then, I went back to bed.

I had dozed off soundly again only to feel that familiar presence by the bed and with tears of frustration in her eyes she said again, "I can't sleep." I walked her back to her room and began to coach her in overcoming anxiety. I asked why she was so anxious, and she reminded me of a major math test the next day as well as volleyball try-outs. She was nerved up. The pastor dad in me kicked in and I gave her the remedy for worry and what I do that helps me sleep. I recounted the prayers that I pray and the Scriptures I recite in my head and how I intercede for others in the night and I eventually doze back off. I told her it was a well-tested remedy and it always works.

She said she would try to go to sleep. I got her a warm glass of milk and prayed a little harder for her to sleep this time. It worked! She was asleep in ten minutes. I know, because I couldn't sleep for the next hour and a half and every remedy I gave to her, I had to employ for myself.

Anxiety. Worry. These are real issues for our day, but they are not new to our times. They have been written about for generations. Jesus spoke about worry and Paul gave us the sure-fire way to cure anxiety. The fourth chapter of Philippians is a cure-all for the anxious life. Yet, in spite of this encouragement in the Bible, we still struggle with worry. We know we shouldn't be anxious, but we are, nonetheless.

In fact, worries seem endless because we live in a troubled world. We worry about money, family, work, school, and sickness; not to mention, we also worry about everything that is going on in the world. Worries pound our minds over and over and many people cannot seem to shake free of it. This is a real problem that holds captive the minds of God's people, and we must seek to be free from this anxiety that desires to control our minds. The enemy of our souls tries to consume our thoughts with anything he can.

Honestly, the enemy likes to clutter our minds with junk and worries that cause us to be preoccupied with our troubles and the troubles of others. Our minds often resemble the junk drawer that is found in every house. This is the place we put things that we don't want to throw away, so we place them in a drawer that is full of other junk.

I remember a time in the not too distant past that Sonya, my wife, actually cleaned out our junk drawer. It was the first time that it had been cleaned out completely since we moved into our house eight years before. It was a rare occasion and to celebrate, we began to fill it up again with junk, and within a month, it was filled to capacity again.

Not too long after that, we remodeled our kitchen and we had to clean out that drawer again. But this time we didn't get rid of the junk, we put it in a basket and set it in the garage. We transferred our junk somewhere else. Most of us have some junk in our head that we worry about and we need to transfer it to another place.

The beautiful thing about the Bible is that God gives us an invitation to transfer our burdens and worries on Him. Peter instructed the believers to cast all our care on Christ, for He cares for us. (I Peter 5:7) Then in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus talks about the burdens we bear and how He is willing to bear them for us.

He said, *"Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."*

(Matthew 11:28-30 NLT)

Here, Jesus says that we can take the junk in our junk drawer and place it on Him. We don't have to live with a cluttered mind. I believe the greatest instruction on how to overcome the cluttered mind and to live worry-free is found in the fourth chapter of Paul's letter to the Philippians. Paul says emphatically, *"Don't worry about anything... ."* *(Philippians 4:6 NLT)*

Here is a passage in the midst of a chapter that gives us the prescription for worry-free living. Paul didn't give this instruction to a people who had no troubles in life. Theirs was not a life of ease. The believers at Philippi had been walking through persecution, which was not only physical violence but it also created emotional and financial stress. In reading the book of Philippians, you can see how all of this played out and Paul knew they had anxieties and that they needed to be free from them. Why? Because anxiety is not good for a person. The wise sage once wrote, *"Worry weighs a person down; an encouraging word cheers a person up"* *(Proverbs 12:25 NLT)*. The New King James words it a little differently. *"Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression... ."* There is certainly a link between a lengthy bout with anxiety and its marriage to depression. Worry and anxiety will affect every part of your life.

PREOCCUPATION OF THE MIND

According to data released by internet retailer, Amazon, Philippians 4:6-7 is the most highlighted portion of Scripture. Amazon released the finding as a part of a report on their customers' preferences of most liked books and the most liked passages of those books.

Their finding indicates that we live in a culture that is anxious, stressed out, and in need of a remedy.¹ Ironically, that remedy points to God's Word.

⁶ "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. ⁷ Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7 NLT)

In Paul's writing here, he tells us not to worry about anything. Be anxious for NOTHING! The word anxious, in the Greek, means a distraction, a preoccupation with things causing anxiety, stress, and pressure. Again, the enemy uses these things to consume our minds. In fact, Satan enjoys putting junk in your junk drawer.

This verse in Philippians 4 refers to the Gospel of Matthew and Jesus' great Sermon on the Mount. In His landmark sermon, He addresses the subject of worry. Jesus is speaking to a group of followers and reveals to them that not even they, His followers, are free from worry. That is why He admonishes them not to worry.

"So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today." (Matthew 6:34 NLT)

Jesus uses the word worry, which in the Greek means to care for, to look out for, or to seek and to promote one's interest. The other uses for this word worry in Matthew 6 mean to be troubled with cares and anxiety. But in this verse, specifically, it means to look out for tomorrow. This is why Jesus warns us not to worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about its own thing.

The foundation of all worry is rooted in the worry of the unknown. Worrying about things that have yet to happen. Holocaust survivor, Corrie Ten Boom once said, "Worrying is carrying tomorrow's load with today's strength – carrying two days at once. It is moving into tomorrow ahead of time." Haven't we all been guilty of that? It reminds me of the sign hanging over the chaplain's door that reads, "If you have worries, come in and let's talk them over. If you have no worries, come in and tell us how you do it!"

There is a second part to the word worry that Jesus uses in His discourse. It means to promote one's interests. Most of our worries are centered on things that will affect us or we perceive that they will. Kahlil Gibran said, "Our anxiety does not come from thinking about the future, but from wanting to control it." So often, we worry about things that we can't control and that is why we worry about them because worry is our means to feel like we are doing something about our troubles.

This is why Paul attaches the admonition to be anxious for nothing, but everything with prayer. Prayer is the way we release our control and place things in God's control. One of the enemy's tools is to keep our eyes focused on our problems and worries so that we will keep our eyes off the only One who can help us. Yet, if we change our focus, and keep our eyes on the One who holds the world in His hands, anxiety will decrease in our

life. Not only does God hold the world in His hand, He holds your world. He holds you in His hand. Therefore, you can rest in His control.