

# What, Me Worry?

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Most arguments in marriage, it is said, are over money. This may or may not be true, but, speaking from experience, it is close to the top!

As a nation, we have been blessed with so much, yet we never seem to have enough money. Maybe we enjoy a good income but disagree on how to spend it. Many of us overextend ourselves—get out on a "financial limb." And we worry. Do we have enough to pay the house note, the car note, the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker? If you are like me, you worry.

We ask God for faith and strength, and, for the most part, we do not get overly concerned with material needs and wants. But a doubt occasionally creeps in: "Should we buy this? Can we afford it?" At times like these, we need to focus on what is truly important, and that, of course, is God's Kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

## A Different Age?

Our rational, converted minds can read Matthew 6 where Christ says not to worry about our lives, what we will eat, drink or wear. He advises us not to be anxious about anything—just seek God's Kingdom (verses 25-34). We know this is true and believe it. But has your carnal self ever reared its ugly head and said, "Yeah, but times are different now. Life is tougher, more stressful. No one understands"?

Each generation seems to think that life's events are unique to it, that it is smarter than its parents' generation—and way smarter than their grandparents'. But Solomon says, "There is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9), and he is right. Our fears and worries are the same that preceding generations have had. For instance, just because we have computers and telephones does not mean we are more intelligent than Noah. (In fact, a convincing argument could be made that our technological advances have actually decreased our ability to think.)

When Christ says, "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow" (Matthew 6:34), have you ever thought to yourself, "Easy for You to say! After all, He lived in a small, backwater country with only minor cares compared to ours. What could His contemporaries have had to worry about? The cows got into the onions?"

During Jesus' lifetime, His nation was under Roman rule. Even though the Romans were fairly benevolent at the time, they were still rulers. Roman troops, garrisoned around the country, were an everyday reminder. The threat of punishment from an angry master always hung over the heads of the people should they make a false step. Roman rule also brought with it Roman ways, roads, buildings and the like, for which the Jews had to pay.

The Jews were a severely taxed people. They had to pay poll taxes, water taxes, road taxes, property taxes, village taxes, city taxes, death taxes, and duties on goods coming in and going out of the

country. On top of this, they had religious fees above their tithes and offerings. They had to pay for the expenses of the Temple sacrifices, payments to the priests (who were kept in luxury) and Temple tribute for all male Jews over twelve.

In meeting all these expenses, the people remained poor. During these times, food was not plentiful and prices were high. Some of the poorest could not find work due to the wealthy using slaves. This is reflected in the Bible as fully one-quarter of Christ's parables deal with money. People were anxious not only about their daily bread but tomorrow's bread and next week's bread. Sounds very much like today!

But they had much more to worry about than their daily bread. Remember that they were subject to Rome. When Jesus was about twelve, the Romans decreed another census to be taken for yet further taxation. The Galileans rebelled and were cruelly crushed by the Roman legions. Their capital, Sepphoris, only seven miles from Nazareth, was completely leveled. Thousands of Jews—even boys and girls—were shipped off to Rome as slaves. Two thousand young men were crucified. And the Romans got their new taxes!

### **Keeping Our Priorities Straight**

Life in those days was harder than we have thought. The everyday pressures on a Jew were every bit as intense, maybe more so, than those on us. We are not without food. Our friends or family have not been sent into slavery or been crucified. Yet Jesus Christ saw all of this. When He spoke, it was from experience. He had lived through it.

Christ warned against laying up treasure on earth (Matthew 6:19). The sin was not in "laying up," because God requires us to plan and save. But some go to extremes, spending inordinate amounts of time acquiring perishable material goods. Time spent chasing "things" is wasted at the expense of eternal life. Christ knew this. He told us to focus with clear eyes and an unclouded mind on our goal (verse 22). We should not worry about food and clothing (verse 25) because worrying about them will not add even a day to our lives (verse 27).

So He urges us to pursue our goal, the Kingdom of God (verse 33). It is what we were created for! Christ knew we, like every generation, would be distracted, so He blessed us with these simple instructions to help us refocus ourselves from time to time.

To paraphrase Matthew 6:34 "Every day brings its own worries, and to anticipate them is only to double them." Yes, the easiest way to avoid worrying is to keep your eyes intently focused on the goal.