

Deconstructing Worry
Genesis 18:1-10a
Psalm 15
Colossians 1:15-28
Luke 10:38-42

Worry is a distraction to being a disciple and making disciples. Why, it gets us off point, particularly when it is tough to trust God. Remember, Jesus is with us always until the end of this age.

One of my favorite classes I taught when I was Assistant Professor of Religious and Philosophical Studies at Sterling College in Sterling, Kansas, was my Introduction to Philosophy course which was a required general education class for all students to graduate. The study of philosophy assists us in looking at the importance of worldview. Our worldview consists of the values, perspectives, and commitments we hold to make sense of the world we live in.

Darrel Johnson, a retired Presbyterian Minister of Word and Sacrament and the pastor at Glendale Presbyterian Church when I was the pastor at La Crescenta Presbyterian Church, in his book *The Glory of Preaching* lifts up a compilation of worldview questions from James Sire and N.T. Wright that I want to list for you as the launching illustration for how destructive worry can be in life, let alone in our journey of being a follower of Jesus,

1. What is prime reality? What is the “really real”?
2. Who or what are we? What does it mean to be a human being?
3. Is there such a thing as “morality,” right and wrong? If so, what is its basis; how does one know the good and the bad?
4. What is the meaning of history? Or, is there any meaning?
5. What is wrong with us? Something is off—what is it?
6. Is there a solution; can things be fixed? By whom? How? How quickly?

7. Is there a God? If so, can this God be known? And is this God involved in the world, especially relative to human suffering?
8. What happens to a human being at death?
9. What time is it? “There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven” (Eccles 3:1). Where are we in the flow of history?¹

Trust me when I say, that addressing these questions in times of worry will get you right back on track. Your answers will lead you to an encounter with God. Jesus will take your hand and say, “follow me.”

I worry the most when I must trust what God requires of me works. That is to do justice, love kindness and to walk humbly with God. The texts in Genesis 18:1-10a, Psalm 15, Colossians 1:15-28 and Luke 10:38-42 address the complexity of encountering God in “the stranger,” “the other.” Yes, God is all knowing, all powerful, and all loving. God is not distant. God is personal. God is involved in our lives.

Genesis 18:9-10 reads, “They [the visitors] said to him, [Abraham,] ‘Where is your wife Sarah?’ And he said, ‘There, in the tent.’ Then one said, ‘I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.’” Abraham was called by God to leave his home and begin the journey to the Promised Land. There were many obstacles along the way, which forced Abraham to trust the promise that God gave him. That promise was that God would make Abraham’s name great, his people numerous, and they would be a blessing to all. Worry would cease and confidence return in believing God’s promise. The visitors confirmed that Abraham would have descendants and promised he and Sarah that they would have a son at their advanced years.

¹Darrell W. Johnson, *The Glory of Preaching* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 2009), 67-68.

Psalm 15:1-3, 5 reads, “O LORD, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill? Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart; who do not slander with their tongue, and do no evil to their friends, nor take up a reproach against their neighbors... Those who do these things shall never be moved.” Worry moves us away from doing “these things.” Yes, worry happens, but the sooner we can stop and trust God, we begin to live more fully “these things,” which are walking blamelessly, doing what is right, speaking the truth from the heart, not slandering with our tongues, doing no evil to our friends, nor taking up a reproach against our neighbors

Colossians 1:27-28 reads, “... God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.” What is this mystery? God bestows the riches of Christ, which is Christ himself, upon those who believe. The mystery gives us hope. The sooner we can give our worries to Jesus, who lives in us by the power of the Holy Spirit, we mature in Christ, which means we grow more fully into being the best Jesus someone sees. Worry impedes trusting Jesus to do his work in and through us.

Luke 10:41-42 reads, “But the Lord answered her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.’” Martha was upset that she did all the work and Mary spent time with Jesus. Worry distracted Martha from listening to the conversation between Mary and Jesus as she worked. Martha had a bias for binary

thinking, that is making decisions in an either/or way, between exclusive alternatives. Often, binary thinking is not helpful. Mary and Martha needed each other. Hospitality, listening, and doing go together.²

Worry is detrimental to one's health and participation in God's wonderful invitation to invest goods news in others, particularly "the other, the stranger." For God's unconditional love brings the presence of God near to us in all circumstances. Being encountered by the mystery of God's unconditional love makes the greatest difference in deconstructing worry. God's unconditional love motivates us to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

Worry impedes God serving you and you in turn serving others. Utilize some or all the worldview questions to move you off worrying. Trust God. Be hospitable. Be surprised and encouraged by the gospel. Bear God's light in our broken, fractured, and divided world. Know that the kingdom of God is always nearby. Amen.

This sermon was preached (for the In-Person, Online, and Village TV 6 congregations) on Sunday, 17 July 2022 by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh at Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California

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²In the paragraphs of biblical interpretation above, I am grateful for the thinking and writing of Matthew Richard Schlimm, Carol J. Dempsey, OP, Benjamin M. Stewart, Linda McKinnish Bridges, John M. Buchanan, Stanley P. Saunders, and Hieraal E. Osorto in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery and Cynthia L. Rigby, editors, *Connections, Year C, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 161-164, 164-166, 167-169, 170-172, 172-174, 175-177, and 177-179.