

Things That Make People Anxious

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The Lord Jesus once spoke of the “cares of this life.” He knew all about them and how very real they are. One great object of His coming into the world was to teach men how to get free from those cares. He taught them by precept and example to trust God.

What are some of the “cares of this life”? There is, first of all, the care connected with its *maintenance*. How to make both ends meet, we may depend upon it, presses very heavily upon not a few. The husband does not know, perhaps, how long he may keep his situation. His health is failing, his income barely sufficient, and with a growing family expenses necessarily increase. Or, worse still, he is actually out of work.

Take another case. There is a widow with a number of young children dependent upon her. Work is uncertain, at the best hard, and the entire responsibility of the family devolves upon her. Is it possible under such circumstances to be free from care? We answer with unhesitating certainty, Yes. God has given us an object lesson as to this which is before our eyes every day. Christ drew our attention to it. The birds have neither storehouse nor barn, yet they sing as blithely as if all the world were theirs. How are they fed? “God feedeth them” is the divine explanation.

The prayer the Lord taught His disciples is in harmony with this: “Give us this day our daily bread.” If the kind of life indicated here is accepted, it is possible to be free from care even in the poorest circumstances.

Are we not led back once more to the lesson of Luke 10, “Take care of him”? If you are a child of God, however low down the ladder, however trodden upon and tried, however heavy the burden you are called to bear — you have to take the lesson of the Good Samaritan home to yourself and realize that God has given orders for you to be taken care of.

What does that guarantee but the very friendship of God? And if we can go to Him for all we want — no matter how great the want — we need have no care. We have said that the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to teach men to trust God. Was anyone ever so poor as He, or so tried? And remember, He had been rich. Possibly the greatest care comes not to those who have been poor and remain poor, but to those who have known better days. The lesson Christ came to teach has therefore a special application to them, for He had been rich and became poor (2Cor 8:9). If we wish to know how poor He became and how much He was tried, we have only to read Psalm 22. He was “a *reproach* of men,” “*despised* of the people,” laughed to scorn. Great and small, high and low were against Him. His most intimate followers forsook Him. But there was one thing that wrung His heart more than all this: He was forsaken of God when made sin for us. And yet running all through the psalm there is a tone of unshaken trust. How wonderful, amid such abandonment, to hear not a murmur escaping those lips! Never for a moment did faith waver, though He was brought into the dust of death. And it is that One who says to us, in the midst of all our cares, that not one sparrow is forgotten before God, in order to remind us that we never can be, and then He adds words which had remained unspoken since the beginning of the world by either philosopher or poet: “Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.” “Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have

storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?" (Luke 12:7,22-24).

We are bound, of course, to use all proper means. But it will generally be found that it is not what we can do that brings the care, but *what we cannot do*. And it is just here we have to trust in God, simply resting in the words, "Your Father knoweth." "If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest?" Do all you can do, but never be troubled about what you cannot do.

And then let us remember that a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses. It is astonishing, when we are put to the test, how little of real happiness depends upon things or circumstances. Christ had no money and sometimes not where to lay His head, and yet He could speak of His peace and His joy. Someone who had resided in South Africa said the happy people were the Kaffirs with only a simple hut and a blanket, and whose entire possessions would sell for 2s. 6d., and not the men who were making fortunes over diamonds and gold mines.

Ill health is often another fruitful source of care. Your very success in life may depend upon good health, and that seems denied. Or you may have others depending upon you, and you are feeling less and less equal to the strain. Perhaps few things are more trying than to feel unequal, physically and mentally, to the demands of your calling, and yet to be obliged to face them day after day. Under such circumstances everything is apt to become draped in black. All we look at is in varying shades of Indian ink. Heaven's blue is forgotten, and cold, gray mist envelops everything. The thistledown, lighter than a feather, seems to our distorted imagination a ton weight. All this may be purely physical, and there is the physical side of getting free from care as well as the spiritual, for man is body as well as soul and spirit. To pay due attention to each is one of the great problems of life. But the very remembrance that your feeling of depression has no real cause in circumstances, but only in some transitory condition of your body, will enable you to arise and shake yourself free from it. There is one text, too, which has often been like a sheet-anchor under pressure of this kind: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the [trial] also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1Cor 10:13).¹

Another cause of care is the habit of anticipating trouble and meeting difficulties halfway. How much arises from this mischievous foreboding! It would serve a useful purpose if we kept a record for a month of things that might have happened, but which never did happen. It would turn out something like this:

1. Received letter from landlord that the house you rent is to be sold. A gentleman calls to look over it and says he thinks he will become a purchaser and, if so, would come and live in it himself. You immediately become anxious as to where you will find another house to suit you as well, and mentally you go through all the discomfort of a move.

Result, after some weeks of anxiety: House did not find a purchaser at the auction, and you are left undisturbed.

2. Your boy comes home from school with a badly bruised nose; some other boy has

pushed him down. For some hours you are in great anxiety as to whether the bone is broken and his face will be disfigured for life.

Result: The bone is not broken. J — is just as good-looking as ever.

3. Your letter to a friend has not been answered. As no reply comes, your anxiety increases.

Result: The answer did come, but through an extraordinary occurrence never reached you. When found, it proved that all anxiety respecting it was pure waste of time.

4. An act is done, or a word spoken, which seems to indicate unkindness on the part of one from whom you expected better things. You spend hours in considering what it can mean and how it is to be met, and, perhaps, in smarting under a sense of gross injustice. Circumstances transpire afterwards which show that the word was never meant for you, nor had the act the significance you gave it.

Each one of us could add indefinitely to the list, and we should never exhaust the number of matters about which we trouble ourselves, and all to no purpose. Are they not occurring almost every hour? Might not many of us bear the same testimony as the man who put up on his office wall the words, "The greatest troubles of my life have been those which never came."

Once we overheard a conversation that passed between two Christians, which we shall not easily forget. One was aged and had been prosperous, but in the decline of life misfortune overtook him through the dishonesty of another. We can see him now as he stood in the doorway, his shining face set off by an abundance of white hair. As they parted, his friend said to him, quoting from Psalm 34, "Well, remember, 'This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.'" "Ah," he said (and they were the last words we ever heard him utter), "He has done a greater thing for me than that: He has delivered me from all my *fears*" (see the same psalm, verse 4).

Yes, it is surely a greater thing to be *delivered from* all our *fears* than *saved out of* all our *troubles*. It is those fears that cast such a dark cloud over many a life. And yet how often they are groundless fears! But if trouble actually does come and the trial is upon us, then let us remember the words of the psalm already quoted: "This poor man *cried*, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." He *cried* just as if he had fallen into some pit or was being washed out to sea. And this is just how we must cry to God in our trouble.

In this connection there are three verses we might do well to keep in mind.

"What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee."

"I will trust and not be afraid."

"Trust in Him at all times."

In regard to anticipating troubles, we once visited an old Christian suffering from a wasting

disease, who expected, in the ordinary course of things, to last some three or four months longer and gradually to grow weaker and weaker until life ebbed away. This was a great trial to him, for he was a widower, living in the house of his daughter, a widow, and he seemed hardly able to bear the thought of the burden that his prolonged illness and consequent helplessness would be to her. Seeing his trouble, we knelt down and asked God that His child might be spared the many days of weariness that seemed to be between him and his longed-for release. The answer came more promptly than either of us could have expected. Instead of three months of weary waiting, there remained not three hours. We saw him at twelve. At two o'clock the same day his spirit was absent from the body and present with the Lord. "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Mt 6:34). Here is our warrant for living, as someone has said, within the compass of twenty-four hours. And this is one secret of how to be free from care.

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Footnotes

[1] "Temptation" (A.V.) is in the sense of "trial."