

Life Improvements --- Mountaintop Makeover --- Seek & Find

Isaiah 49:13-16 & Matthew 6:24-34

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Matthew 6:33

Isaiah 49:13-16

¹³Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the LORD has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones. ¹⁴ But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me.” ¹⁵ Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. ¹⁶ See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.ⁱ

Matthew 6:25-34

²⁵“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ²⁸“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³²For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”ⁱⁱ

(This sermon is a first-person sermon. I will be entering the sanctuary from the back whistling, “Don’t Worry, Be Happy.” I will be wearing big glasses and an old trench coat.)

“Don’t worry, be happy! In every life we have some trouble --- when you worry you make it double.” Boy, Oh, Boy. Ain’t that the truth?

Our pastor back home is trying to teach us that we can have a new life in Christ. He is always talking about some old sermon on the mount. He is always saying something about a “Mountaintop Makeover” and “Life Improvements.” Then he starts shouting, “Move those sins! Move those troubles! Move those worries!”

To be honest with you, I think our pastor has lost it --- he is a few bricks short of a load --- you know --- he’s not the sharpest pencil in box --- if you know what I mean! He just might be a few sandwiches short of a picnic! He really believes that the Bible is true! He really believes that God is not only alive, but God wants to work in our lives to change us into His likeness. Can you believe that!?

Oh, I am sorry. I never really introduced myself. My name is Walter. Yes sir, Walter is my name. Growing up, my friends made a lot of fun of me. They called me “Walter the Worrier!” They named me

that because I worried about everything! I worried about getting to school on time—I was always the first kid on the playground. I worried about getting my homework done—so I ran straight home and got it done. I worried about what to wear—so I color co-ordinated my hangers before it was in style. I worried about dinner time—would my mom make a nutritious meal? I worried if my dad would come home from work on time. I worried if my sister would get all her homework done, too. I worried if my classmates liked me. I worried about going to church—would the teachers like me? I worried about everything! I guess they were right in calling me “Walter the Worrier!”

Do you worry? What do you worry about?

I had to start wearing these glasses when I was really young. They make everything really, really, big! My, oh my, what a big place this is! My mom would say, “Walter, when you worry all you’re doing is making your worries bigger than they really are.” Hey, today is Mother’s Day! Happy Mother’s Day to all you moms! My mom was pretty special, I miss her on days like today! My mom would always try to calm my worries and help me bring them back to earth, especially after I had blown them all out of proportion.

Growing up, I watched my sister pull her eyelashes out because she was worrying about what those other girls were thinking about her. Those middle-school years were hard on her. Her so-called girlfriends would call up and tell her that everyone was wearing red the next day for school. So my sister would dress up in red and go to school only to find all her friends in yellow, or blue or some other color than red.

My mom would set her down after school and listen to her cry and pray with her. My mom would always get out her old, worn-looking Bible and read some passages to try to cheer us up. That day my sister was crying about the clothes, my mom opened her Bible to that passage our pastor was going on and on about last week. She would say, *“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’”*

My mom was really, really faithful. She really believed the Bible was true, too, like our pastor!

I remember when I would start to worry. My mom could always tell when I was worrying. I would begin to fidget, and move a lot. I would walk around and raise my voice thinking I was somehow in control of things.

Do you do that when you are worried? My sister would crawl up in bed and cover her head. Maybe you do that when you are worried?

I can remember when one day, worry tried to overwhelm our house. It was as if a big, old, black, rain cloud had settle over the house and was never going to move. I was really worried about everything and anything, I was raising my voice, acting out and getting into a fight with my mom. My sister was upstairs hiding under her covers because she was so worried about what the other girls were thinking of her. That day was a particularly bad day. Worry was being worn like an old blanket. My mom gathered us up under her arms, like a mother hen would gather her baby chicks, and she took us outside and sat us on the porch.

We sat there on the porch swing, waiting and waiting in silence. Then our mom said, “Remember what I told you about Jesus? Do you remember what Jesus said about the birds?”

At that very moment the most beautiful cardinal came and sat on the tree right in front of the porch. We all sat there as silent as we could be and watched that cardinal. After a few minutes, it seemed like an eternity, that bird flew off to the pond out front of the house.

Our mom reminded us about what Jesus said about the birds --- how they don’t plant their food, or store up seeds in a barn, yet our God is so great, He provides for them. The she looked us both in the eyes and said, “Listen --- if the God of creation loves the birds and cares for them by giving them food, shelter and all they need, won’t that same God who created you give you all that you need.?”

She said that she had been spending a lot of time praying to God about how she could help her children not worry so much. She said that God had spoken to her through the Holy Spirit and given her a little plan to help her children “STOP” worrying. She said that it was simple; it was four words made up from the word “STOP”.

My mom knew the Bible and she had memorized so many scripture passages. I think that is how she was able to overcome her worry. I know that the two of us kids did enough to cause her worry. She had a captive audience after we saw the cardinal. She said:

“Kids, when you find yourself worrying...just STOP!

S --- SHARE

T --- THINK

O --- OPEN

P --- PRAY

S --- SHARE

“S” is for share. Share your worry with God and share your worry with someone else. She would quote Scripture. Matthew 11:28-30, ***“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*** Remember to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all your worries will be taken care of because God cares for you! She would walk around the porch acting like she was taking all her burdens and she’d put them at the foot of the cross. “Kids, just think of what it is like to come to Jesus when you are weary and carrying heavy burdens--and let Him give you rest. Share your worry, share your burden with Jesus and He will help you carry it.” We were also reminded to share our burdens with someone who we could trust. We were told over and over again, “an isolated Christian is a paralyzed Christian. The enemy, Satan, loves to isolate and paralyze you so that your worries will overwhelm you.” The “S” of “STOP” is “share.” Share your worry with God, share your worry with a person you can trust.

“T” --- THINK & THANK

“T” is for stopping the worry with thinking about all the times God has provided for you. Our mom would say, remember how God has provided for Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Jacob, Rehab and Ruth, David and Elijah, Esther and Hannah. Boy, oh, boy she knew her Bible stories. Jesus has provided sight for the blind, the lame to walk, the lepers healed, the deaf to hear and the mute to speak and even raised the dead. She would say it with much animation! All those wonderful miracles are recorded in the Bible. But think

about the everyday miracles that God has given you: safety at school, food to eat, a house to live in, parents and grandparents, teachers and good friends to share life with. Think on the little blessings and thank God for them. When you are thinking on all your many blessings, your mind won't be thinking on the worries and then it is so much easier to thank God! She would use a passage from Philippians chapter three that says --- ***“Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.”*** (Philippians 4:8-9)

“O” --- OPEN

“O” is for open your heart. Open your heart to God's presence in your life. Your worry will be diminished if you remind yourself that your life is in God's hands. God will not ignore those who depend on Him. We were reminded by our mom to think about God's presence in our everyday life. She would say, if you open your eyes and look, you can see God's presence in the flowers and the trees and the gorgeous blue sky. You can see God's presence in the kindness of nurses, teachers, co-workers, and in the love of your family and friends. Then she'd say, ***“Open my eyes, so that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.”*** (Psalm 119:18)

“P” --- PRAY

When we were really worried she would say --- pray --- pray --- pray! When you come to God in prayer, God will hear you. ***“Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.”*** She would say that that word for “seek” means: dig, search, hunt, endeavor after. “Walter, the promise of God is that we will find Him. It is not a game of hide and seek --- it a game of seek and find.” ***“Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*** (Philippians 4:6-7). What would it be like to have my heart and mind guarded by the peace of God? My mom would turn the praise music on and praise our heavenly Father! Her favorite was, “This is the Day!” Mom would look at us and say, “it's hard to worry when you're praising!” Our mom would sing around the house every day, even when the days were hard, and difficult!

(I will be taking off my Indonesian sport coat and big glasses. I will have a colorful shirt and sunglasses.) Well, Walter the Worrier grew up and became Walt the Wonder Boy! All because of my super smart Mama. I can hear her voice today, “STOP, Walter, STOP: SHARE --- THINK --- OPEN --- PRAY! When you start to worry: STOP! Share your worry with Jesus, lay it at His feet. Think about all the good things in your life and THANK GOD for them! Open your eyes—look around...open your heart...open your BIBLE!! Pray...Don't worry—Be Happy!”

So What?

I know that some of you here have been worrying a lot lately. I sat out back and heard some of you worrying about how long this service will take. Will we get done in time to beat the Baptists to Rudy's? Some of you have worries for your family, your finances, and your future. Others have worries about health and retirement and others have worries about the nation and creation with all the natural disasters we are having. And there are others that are worrying about end of life, children, parents, school, work ---

you name it, we are a worrying group! So, Pastor Dave sent me here today to tell you to STOP! He knew my mama, too. He saw me change from Walt the Worrier to Walt the Wonder Boy!

Let's pray: Lord, right now we STOP. S—we share with you our worries. We are heavy laden and burdened. We share our load with you. T—we think about all You have given us—our lives, our homes, our cars, our families...THANK YOU. O—we open our hearts to You. We open our eyes to You. We open our minds to You. Help us to OPEN our Bibles, too. P—we pray. Lord, we come to church to praise you—and our worries seem lighter. Teach us to pray and teach us to praise You. Amen.

(Ken Shaw singing, "Don't Worry, Be Happy")

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May 9, 2010
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ⁱ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Is 49:13-16). Nashville, Tn: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

ⁱⁱ *The Holy Bible: New International Translation: 1973* (MT 6:25-34), Wheaton, Il: Tyndale Publishing