

Too Confident For Worry

Numbers 18:21-29; Luke 12:22-34; 1st John 2:28-3:3



Worry, anxiety, uncertainty, and fear are all issues we face on a routine basis. Whether we recognize it or not, at heart they are all about the validity of our faith in God's provision. While we claim to trust God about eternity, do we trust God with the uncertainties that cloud our day-to-day struggles? We know that Jesus teaches that we should not worry. Can we be sure that God is big enough and cares enough to overcome our daily worries and concerns?

Back in high school and college, I was concerned about ever finding a mate. I knew that God had called me to missions, and there weren't many girls around who were willing to think in those terms. Sure, there were girls that I liked, and there were those who liked me, but I knew better than to accept a relationship with someone I knew was unwilling to accept God's call to missionary service. I knew that God would bring her into my life at the right time, but trusting God's idea of the right time was not easy.

The Hebrews' big concern was survival. A semi-nomadic people, they were learning agriculture to provide food for hungry mouths. Their concerns were very basic. They needed food, shelter, and the know-how to grow crops to sustain them in their new land. They needed herds and flocks that would reproduce to feed growing families. They were not concerned with issues of entertainment, vacations, retirement accounts, home furnishings, and fading carpets. Their great concerns were agricultural and pastoral yields, as well as protection from marauding bands of invading peoples. They depended on the local rains for more than surplus. Survival was at stake.

Such was the backdrop for Moses' commandments on tithes and offerings. This was a poor, young, struggling nation. While they struggled to feed their families and provide a margin of comfort for winter and future planting, *Yahweh* required them to care for those serving in the tabernacle. The tithe of all the produce was to be presented to those serving them before God. The Levites were then to tithe of their own receipts to the priests under whom they served.

This whole system was an exercise in trust. At every step, the people must trust God to supply their needs. The Levites and priests had to trust the people to be faithful in tithing, as well as that God would somehow supply where the people fell short or the crops failed. Tithing was a demonstration of faith. It was where they expressed the quality of their confidence in *Yahweh's* provision.

God required that they trust that *Yahweh* would provide for their needs. Their responsibility was to be faithful, acting upon their faith. Trust needed to work itself out in action. It was not enough for them to remember the manna in the wilderness, the water from the rock, nor even the victories over enemies at the Sea of Reeds. Trust was an active principle needing constant exercise. Living before *Yahweh* in trust required constant renewal. Tithing was but one means of affirming dependence upon God season after season. Amid concerns over their future, would they give God a significant portion of their livelihood, trusting God to continue meeting their needs?

During seminary days, Karen and I often did not know how we would meet our monthly bills. I worked about 40 hours a week, we were both in school full-time, and Karen had an internship that provided no income. Several times we lacked fifty dollars for one or another payment. The day we

needed it, a check would arrive in the mail from some unexpected source, getting us through the month. We knew God would provide, even though we could not always see how, when, or where.

Jesus told his disciples not to worry. He brought up the theme on more than a few occasions. They weren't necessarily the most adept at learning the lesson. Worry was a never-ending issue for the disciples to accept and incorporate into their lives. Worry was often about financial needs. It was often about survival against the political upheaval of the day. Worry surrounded concerns with one's standing in society. At heart, however, Jesus said it was about trusting God—faith at its most basic level.

Jesus addressed the issue of dissonance between the faith proclaimed by his followers and the prevalence of worry in their lives. If we trust God to care for our needs, why do we spend so much time worrying over things we cannot control? If we trust God with eternity, why don't we trust God with the temporal issues of living on this side of eternity? Does faith allow me to take risks in serving God?

In 2002 we were presented with the "request" to sign our affirmation of the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message. We could not sign the statement in good conscience for various reasons. I struggled over this issue of faith, trust, and God's provision. We knew that we would not be allowed to remain on the mission field if we did not sign. Regardless of the wording of Jerry Rankin's letter, we knew that this was an ultimatum by another name.

We received all sorts of advice, especially to use our signatures to buy us time to seek a new position on our own schedule. It seemed a simple solution, but it did not proceed from faith. Though it would have seemed an easy way out, it did not address the fact that we owed allegiance to Christ Jesus and God would see us through. I could trust God to meet my needs. Trusting God to meet my family's needs was a much more difficult. The day after my termination letter, we received word that the Mainstream Baptist Network would provide a stipend to carry us through to a new position of service.

John was aware of worry among the believers he addressed as well. There were some who did not seem very confident of their acceptance before God. John wrote words of reassurance, for faith is essentially about assurance. Some were concerned about their future relationship to God in eternity. Some were confused about their relationship to God in the here and now. John wrote to reassure them of God's love and willingness to accept us in forgiveness. It is because of God's love that faith can exist at all, for love lays the foundation for trust.

It is due to confidence in God's love and forgiveness that we are able to enter God's presence. It is out of this love that we have assurance that God will care for us now and into eternity. John reminds us that it was in love that God calls us as children. If God has called us as children, it is because God desires us to be in eternal fellowship with him and each other. John says this is reason enough for faith to grow and change our lives.

Being God's children is not about our future existence in eternity. John says that this is our present reality. In love God has already called us as children of the Almighty. We are to live now as the children of God that we are. Faith is our confidence in God's love to draw near to God in fellowship, all the while allowing God to transform our lives in the process. Are we ready to make faith a living reality in our lives? Are we willing to allow the confidence in God we proclaim show loud and clear in our actions? Real faith must be tested. If our faith is real, is there any point in worry?

—*Christopher B. Harbin*