

HURRIED

DEALING WITH BUSYNESS AND ANXIETY

WORRIED

BY GREG LAURIE

BURIED

A high-angle, blurred photograph of a crowd of people walking on a tiled floor, overlaid with the word 'BURIED' in large white letters. The image has a yellowish tint and a grainy texture, suggesting a sense of movement and urgency. The people are seen from above, their figures blurred as they move in various directions across the floor.

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Published 2017

www.harvest.org

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HURRIED . . .

We rush around like crazy people these days, don't we? You could inscribe these words on the tombstones of many Americans: hurried, worried, buried. We are the only nation on earth that actually has a national monument called "Rushmore." And we can be so busy that we don't have time for God. *I would like to go to church, but I am so busy . . . I would like to pray, but there's so much going on—so many responsibilities . . . I would like to invest in the kingdom of God, but I have other financial commitments.* People are so preoccupied with their lives and what they are doing that they don't have any time for God.

We are just so busy. In fact, that is usually what people say when you haven't seen them for a while. "Hey, how are you doing?" "Oh, I have been busy." "Really?" "Yeah. Just busy, busy, busy." As though that is a great thing to always be—busy.

Now, there are things that are worth being busy in. But sometimes we can just be too busy, don't you think? Sometimes we can be so busy we don't have time to be alone with God. It is called the barrenness of busyness.

A good example of this is when the Lord came to visit Mary and Martha. You remember Martha went into the kitchen to prepare a great feast for Jesus (and I would have done the same thing if I were in her shoes). But Mary wisely recognized this as an opportunity to sit at His feet and drink in His words. Meanwhile, Martha is frustrated in the kitchen. She needs help. And she comes out and says, "Lord, will you tell my sister to help me out here?" And Jesus said, "Martha, Martha, you are too busy. You are cumbered about with too much serving. Mary, your sister, has chosen the better part" (see Luke 10:38–42). Essentially He was saying, "Martha, there is a time to work and there is a time to worship. There is a time to serve and there is a time to wait. This is a time to wait. This is a time to worship."

And sometimes we can be so busy with all of our activities we are never alone with our own thoughts, much less alone with God. In our connected society do we even have a moment to think? We are barraged with information on demand—texting, e-mailing, social media, and everything else. There is noise and activity and information and choices coming from a hundred different directions.

What about being alone with God? What about being quiet? What about listening? Commentator C. H. Mackintosh made this statement: “To be alone with God is the only true way of arriving at a just knowledge of ourselves and our ways. No matter what we think about ourselves or what others may think of us, the great question is, what does God think of us?”

Have you been alone with God? I think sometimes we are afraid to be.

MARY’S SECRET

We need to learn from Mary’s example and sit at the feet of Jesus. You might be thinking, “That all sounds very spiritual, and I’m sure you have a lot of time to do that, being a preacher. But I have a life. I’m busy. I have all kinds of things going on. I don’t have time to sit at the feet of Jesus. Could He just text me when He wants me to know something?”

It is possible to sit at the feet of Jesus. How? You make time for it. That was Mary’s secret, and it can be yours as well. Sometimes it means unplugging your computer or turning off your phone. But the Lord says, “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10).

There is a time for work, and there is a time for worship. Mary understood that. A lot can happen when you sit at the feet of Jesus

WRESTLING VS. RESTING

Jacob in the Bible was a busy guy. He didn’t like to sit still. But in Genesis 32, he finds himself alone with God. And a wrestling match ensues. It is kind of humorous—Jacob wrestling with the Lord as though he could beat Him. Sort of like a small child wrestling with Hulk Hogan. You know, when you wrestle with little kids, and maybe they hit you and you act like you really got hurt and you fall back—whoa!—and they are thinking they are really tough. That’s what it was like. The Lord was humoring Jacob. As He wrestled with him, He would put up some resistance and then let Jacob prevail a little bit, and then press him some more, and then let him prevail a little bit more.

What was this all about? God was waiting for Jacob to run out of strength. He was waiting for him to give up. And finally Jacob is exhausted. He has no energy left. And he goes from cunning to clinging—from resisting to resting. And he is hanging onto the Lord. The Lord says, “Let Me go. I’ve got to go.” And Jacob says, “I am not going to let You go until You bless me.” Now, that was a valid request on Jacob’s part—asking for this blessing—for in surrender to God’s plan he would find what he always wanted.

Here is some interesting commentary on this event from Hosea 12:3–4: “Even in the womb, Jacob struggled with his brother; when he became a man, he even fought with God. Yes, he wrestled with the angel and won. He wept and pleaded for a blessing from him. There at Bethel he met God face to face, and God spoke to him” (NLT). Interesting verbiage: “He wrestled with the angel and won. He wept and pleaded for a blessing.” This is the proper kind of wrestling with God, when you are desperately calling out to Him and not giving up because you believe what you ask for is His very will.

IF YOU ARE GOING TO STRUGGLE, LET IT BE IN PRAYER

There is a place for wrestling with God in prayer, in the proper way. Paul mentioned that Epaphras, one of his coworkers in ministry “is always wrestling in prayer for you,” speaking to the Colossian church (Colossians 4:12 NIV). And again in Romans, Paul alludes to this kind of persistence and struggle in prayer when he says, “Dear brothers and sisters, I urge you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Do this because of your love for me, given to you by the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:30 NLT). You see, sometimes prayer can be a struggle. We have wrestling matches where we say, “Lord, I am not going to let You go until You bless me.”

And we see these wrestling matches in other places in Scripture as well. We see Abraham, for example, praying with persistent intensity for Sodom in Genesis 18, interceding for them. We find Moses spending forty days and forty nights fasting and pleading for Israel when God was ready to judge them in Deuteronomy 9. We find Elijah pressed to the ground with his face between his knees, praying seven times for God to

send rain in 1 Kings 18. We see this kind of prayer from David, crying out to the Lord in Psalm 39:12, “Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry; do not be silent at my tears.”

“Lord, I am not going to let go until You bless me. I am going to keep praying.” There are certain things you just don’t give up on. You don’t give up praying for that unsaved person. I don’t care if it seems they have gotten further from God. You keep praying. Keep praying that God will get their attention.

Unless the Lord has directed you otherwise, you keep praying for healing. Keep praying for the will of God to be revealed in your life. Keep praying for open doors in ministry. Keep praying that God would send a spiritual awakening to your community, to your state, and to your nation. Keep praying; don’t give up.

DO YOU REALLY WANT TO CHANGE?

After Jacob’s wrestling match, the Lord asked him a provocative question in Genesis 32:27: “What is your name?” Now, why did the Lord ask this of Jacob? Because He didn’t know his name? Of course not. God asked it because for Jacob it was an admission—an admission he did not necessarily want to make, because the meaning of his name, Jacob, is essentially “heel catcher, supplanter, grabber.” In essence, the Lord was saying, “Are you going to continue living up to your name, deceiving others, or will you admit what you are and let me change you?” The Lord could ask the same thing of us in our busy lives. “Do you really want to change?”

Some people don’t want to change. They don’t want to get out of the behavior that they are in. They prefer the ways of sin. Oswald Chambers said, “Sin enough and you will soon be unconscious of sin.”

So the Lord effectively says, “Jacob, I have a question for you. Do you want to still be the conniver? Do you want to still be the supplanter? Or do you want to change? Would you like a new name?”

God asks, because He will not force His way into our lives. Jesus says, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you

rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me” (Matthew 11:28-29 NKJV). What does it mean when He says, “Take My yoke upon you?” Well, a yoke is a steering device for oxen. So if Jesus had given that statement today, He probably would have said something along the lines of, “Give the steering wheel of your life over to Me.”

RELINQUISHING THE CONTROLS

Now, that is easier for some than it is for others. I don’t like anyone to drive me anywhere. I like to drive the car. And anyone who has ever driven with me can tell you this because I am the worst backseat driver you have ever met—not just with my wife. I was talking with one of my fellow pastors and he mentioned that when I was the passenger in his car, I kept telling him what to do and I wasn’t even aware of it. I said, “There is a good spot. Get in there. *Pull in now*. Pull in now. Get ahead of that guy.” I can’t help myself.

The Lord says, “Give Me the steering wheel of your life. Let Me have control.”

Jacob has been scheming, trying to make it all happen in his own strength, and he has met with nothing but failure after failure after failure. The Lord is saying, “I promised it. I will deliver it. But I like to do My work in My way. Are you up for that? Do you want to change your ways, Jacob?”

Jacob agrees. And a new name is given to him. And that new name is *Israel*. What does Israel mean? Scholars differ as to what it should be translated to say. Some translate it as, “One whom God commands” or “Let God rule.” Another translation is, “One who fights victoriously with God.” Another translation: “A prince with God.” Even another: “God’s fighter.” But in essence I think we can say it means that there is a complete surrender that took place in Jacob’s life, to God and His will. Jacob is no longer the heel catcher and supplanter. Now he was a prince with God, God’s fighter.

Now God Himself would be his advocate and Jacob’s loss has become Jacob’s victory. Through loss comes gain. How can that be? Because up to this point he had been fighting for his will, his plan, his purpose. Losing.

Losing. Losing. Reaping what he sows. Time after time. Finally, he is worn out. He has run out of schemes. No more ideas. It is a mess. God says, “Now will you just say ‘Uncle,’ or better yet ‘Father,’ and let Me win?”

CHANGE COMES THROUGH SURRENDER

And immediately when he submits to the will of God, it all starts coming together so beautifully. “Here is My plan. Here is the way you do it, Jacob. Here is the way to see it take place.”

Maybe you have been fighting with God. *I don't want to do it that way. I don't want the Lord to have access to that one area of my life. I don't want to let go of this sin. This is something I really like to do. I don't want to let the Lord give His direction on how I use my finances. I don't want to slow down. I don't want the Lord to tell me I can't. I don't want the Lord to tell me to do this thing or go to that place. I want to stay in charge.* Oh, no. There has to come a moment where you surrender. But through your loss gain will come.

And this is exactly what Jesus meant when He said, “If you lose your life for My sake you will find it.” We are afraid to lose our life because, to us, it means losing control. But when you give God control of your life, my, how things will change for you.

Are you fighting with God right now? I suggest you surrender. And you will find what you have been looking for all along. Because God's plan for you is better than your plan for yourself. As Corrie ten Boom once said, “Don't wrestle. Just nestle.”

FIND SABBATH REST IN JESUS

God understands our tendency to be busy. God understands that we need rest. That's why He rested on the seventh day—the Sabbath—as an example for us to follow.

The Sabbath is not a legalistic day that we as believers *have to* observe, but it is a great idea to take some time off and focus on the Lord. For many

of us, that day is Sunday. I love to see Sunday set apart as the Lord's Day, just like the early church did.

We should make our first priority to worship with God's people. Maybe we will do some fun stuff afterward. But we shouldn't let anything stop us from getting together and worshipping and putting the Lord first. I think God will honor that in our lives if we do.

Even Jesus took time off. In Mark we read, "Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught. And He said to them, 'Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.' For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat. So they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves" (6:30-32).

I love that. I can picture the disciples talking to Jesus, "Lord, this happened! And that happened!" Jesus asks, "Have you guys had lunch yet?" They say, "We are too busy to eat." Jesus tells them, "Come on. Let's get some lunch. Relax a little bit. You need to chill. You need to recharge. Come aside with Me."

If we don't come aside, then we will come apart. During the next 24 hours, your heart will beat 103,000 times, and your blood will travel 168 million miles. You will breathe 23,000 times and inhale 480 cubic feet of air. You will move 750 muscles and exercise 7 million brain cells. No wonder we all feel tired. We're constantly going.

The principle of the Sabbath is taking time off, recharging, and focusing on the things of God. When is the last time you deliberately slowed down and rested in the Lord?

WORRIED . . .

When I was in Australia a number of years ago, I noticed they had an expression there that I really like. You will be talking to an Aussie and ask them a question, or ask them for directions. They are very friendly and they will usually respond: "No worries, mate . . ." and then they will answer your question or tell you how to get where you want to go.

I like that: “No worries, mate!” That is good theological advice. We have a lot of worries, don’t we? A lot of things that weigh us down. A lot of things that concern us. A lot of things that cause us anxiety. We worry about what we are going to eat. We worry about what we are going to wear. We worry about where we are going to live. We worry about our employment. We worry about our family. We worry when things are going well because we are concerned about when they are going to go bad. Then when they are bad, we worry about if they will ever be good again. We worry about everything.

Would you classify yourself as a worrywart? I think of that great theologian Charlie Brown, who made this statement about worry: “I have developed a new philosophy. I only dread one day at a time.” Are you a Charlie Brown when it comes to worry?

Now let me quote a real theologian, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who said this: “The result of worrying about the future is that you cripple yourself in the present.”

Yet there are so many things happening in our world today that could cause us to worry. There are the bigger problems of the world, like terrorism and disease and the economy. Then there are personal problems: problems at your job, problems with your family, problems with your health. Life is just filled with so many worries.

Studies have been done among Americans, asking them what they worry about the most. They are predictable things. Middle-age Americans worry most about their finances. They also worry about being audited by the IRS. (Maybe there is a connection there.) A growing concern today is a fear of being hacked—that someone would get your personal information, or that your smartphone or computer would be stolen.

There was an article that was out a while back about a bunch of celebrities who were upset because their phones had been hacked and now naked photos of these people are on the Internet. I have a thought about that: don’t take pictures of yourself while you are naked—ever! That pretty much solves the problem, doesn’t it?

Among the studies that have been done asking people what they worry about the most, usually at the top of the list is: appearance. That is

amazing. “I don’t care if I lose my house or I die in a nuclear blast. How do I look in this outfit?” Also at the top of the list is usually the fear of public speaking. In fact, the fear of speaking publicly is usually higher than the fear of dying. Can you imagine that? “You can die right now or give a short speech. What’s it going to be?” . . . “Kill me.”

WORRY CAN GET US

There is an old fable that is told about the dangers of worry. As the story goes, Death was walking toward a city one morning. A man stopped Death and said, “Where are you going?” Death said, “I am going into that city to take a hundred people.”

“That is horrible,” the man says. Death responds, “That is what I do.” The man ran ahead of Death to warn everyone he could. Evening fell and that man met Death again. The man said, “I thought you were only going to take a hundred people. Why did a thousand people die?”

Death responded, “I kept my word. I took only a hundred people. Worry took the rest.”

That is how life can be. Worry can get us.

Did you know that 75–90 percent of all visits to primary care physicians are stress-related complaints or disorders? Know this: most of what we worry about never actually happens. Dr. Walter Calvert conducted a survey on worry that indicated only eight percent of the things people worried about were legitimate matters of concern and the other 92 percent were either imaginary or never happened.

WHAT’S THE SOLUTION TO WORRY?

Here is the question: how can we overcome fear and worry? Christ Himself addresses this topic in the Sermon on the Mount:

Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put

on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?

So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

Therefore do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. (Matthew 6:25–32)

Then comes the most important verse: “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (6:33). Every Christian should commit that verse in particular to memory.

THE BELIEVER NEED NOT WORRY

Jesus is not saying that the believer should not be concerned about the necessities of life. He is not saying that we should not think about them or plan for the future. The Bible encourages us to work hard, to save our money, and so forth. What He is saying is that we should not worry about these things. Verse 25 plainly says: “Do not worry about your life.” Another translation could be: “Don’t have anxiety about the issues of life.” The word *worry* in the old English means to choke. Worry chokes you out.

The other day I was playing with some of my grandkids. They started choking me. They thought that was very entertaining. Then they kind of took it up a few notches and they are jumping on my back and grabbing me from behind. I said, “OK kids, let’s back off a little bit. You are hurting Papa.” They came back a few days later and asked, “Can we choke you again, Papa?” A great form of entertainment—choking your grandfather.

That is what worry does to us. It chokes us. It cuts us off. In the Greek this command of Christ to not be anxious includes the idea of stopping what has already been done. Effectively, Jesus is saying, “Stop worrying about your life. Stop it. You have been doing it up to this point and you need to stop doing it.”

WORRY IS NOT A VIRTUE

Interestingly, we sort of elevate worry as a virtue. “Because I care, I worry.” Wait a second. Is worry a virtue? I don’t think it is at all. In fact, I think worry can be a sin. I am not saying all worry is a sin, but I am saying it can be a sin. And I would readily admit it is a sin I have committed. I have worried about things unnecessarily. I have fretted and been filled with anxiety just like you have. Why is it a sin potentially? Because it is a lack of trust in God. What I am really saying when I worry is, “God isn’t in control. God is not taking care of me in this situation. I am not trusting in the providence of God.” If you are a real Christian and you believe the Bible, you will know this: God is in control of all circumstances that surround your life and there are no accidents in the life of the Christian. That is an important thing to know.

Yet we will worry about a lot of things. Corrie ten Boom identifies the problem with worry: “Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows. It empties today of its strength.”

RESTING WITH THE LIONS

The story of Daniel is a good illustration of a guy who could have worried but didn’t. His enemies hatched a plot to have him killed because they wanted him out of the way. They were jealous of his power and influence with the king. The king unwittingly signed into law a decree that no man could pray to any god but the king. Because Daniel was a man of prayer, he ended up in a den of lions—so he was going to die, no question about it.

By the way, I recently read an article in the paper about a man in a Ukrainian zoo. I guess he thought he was some kind of a modern Daniel.

He decided to climb into the den of the lioness in the Kiev Zoo and he screamed out, “God will save me if He exists.” Well, God exists, but He didn’t save this crazy guy and the lion killed him immediately. There is a difference between trusting the Lord and testing the Lord.

Daniel was not testing the Lord. He was put into a lion’s den because of his faithfulness to God. What is fascinating about this story is that the king himself could not reverse the law he ignorantly set into place, yet it was the king who spent the night worrying and Daniel spent the night sleeping like a baby. The guy in the lion’s den had a good night’s sleep. The guy in the palace did not.

That is how it is when you are walking right with God. You can just kick back and rest in Him. The Bible even says, “He gives His beloved sleep” (Psalm 127:2). I bet Daniel used one of those lions as a pillow. (I am sure a lion would be really comfortable to lie on, if it isn’t hungry.)

CAST YOUR CARES ON JESUS

The Bible tells us we should cast all of our care on Him, for He cares for us (see 1 Peter 5:7). It would be like if you just got off of a plane and you are carrying a bunch of extra weight. You have a lot of carry-on stuff. You have your backpack, you are schlepping along your roller bag, and you have another suitcase as well. A friend says, “Hey man, let me take that load.” Your response is “Gladly. Thank you, buddy!” Jesus wants to take that load off of you. Take your worries and cast them on Christ.

I like what Martin Luther said: “Pray, and let God worry.” Obviously, God is not going to worry. Prayer is the real secret. In Philippians, it says that you should not worry about anything but pray about everything, and the peace of God that passes all human understanding will keep your heart and mind in Christ Jesus (see Philippians 4:6). Turn your worries into prayers. The next time you are gripped by fear and worry—*What if this happens? What if that happens?*—turn it into a prayer. Send the worry straight to Heaven. “Lord, I don’t know about this, but I trust You and You are in control and I commit this to You right now.” We need to be looking to the Lord and allowing Him give us His peace.

Jesus says, “Look at the birds. Do they worry?” Have you ever seen a stressed out bird? Birds wake up every morning and they are just singing away. They are just happy. No bird has ever been promised eternal life. No bird has ever been given the hope of Heaven. Yet they sing their hearts out every day. Jesus is not saying the birds sit by idly and wait for the food to come to them. They take action. They go and get food for themselves. But they don’t worry.

Then Jesus says, “Why do you worry about clothing? Consider the flowers of the field. They neither toil nor spin, and yet even Solomon the king in his royal robes was not dressed like one of these beautiful flowers” (see Matthew 6:28–29). So now He is talking about the way that you look—your appearance. We have a culture that is so obsessed with the way that they look. We are always wanting to look better—change our bodies. We want to look like those people on the magazine covers. The problem is, the people on the magazine covers don’t even look like the people on the magazine covers! Have you ever heard of Photoshop? Those people you see on the covers don’t exist in real life.

It is a good thing to want to look your best on the outside, but don’t neglect the inside. You can have a chiseled body and a dying soul. The Bible even addresses that in 1 Peter 3. It says, “What matters is not your outer appearance—the styling of your hair, the jewelry you wear, the cut of your clothes—but your inner disposition. Cultivate inner beauty, the gentle, gracious kind that God delights in” (verses 3–4 MSG). This is so relevant for today. There is a place for staying in shape. I don’t want you to misunderstand me and say, “It doesn’t matter. I’ll just let myself go. I want to be obese for God.” No, that is going too far the other way.

WORRY DOESN'T MAKE YOUR LIFE LONGER

Here is what Jesus is saying: “Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?” (Matthew 6:27). Here would be a better translation for us: “Which of you by worrying could add one day to your life?” God determines the date of your birth and the date of your death. You have everything to say about that little dash in the middle and what you do with it. You cannot lengthen your life. Only God determines how long a man or a woman will live.

I watched a show on TV years ago about a guy who had made it past 100. I waited until the end of this program to hear the guy's secret for living past 100. Want to know what he said? "Eat a hot dog every day." I'm telling the absolute truth. They took him into the supermarket and showed the hot dogs he bought, and they weren't Hebrew National. They were the cheap kind with rat tails in them—the ones that taste really good.

There is a balance we should keep in mind. As 1 Timothy 4:8–9 says, "Physical exercise has some value, but spiritual exercise is much more important, for it promises a reward in this life and the next. This is true and everyone should accept it" (NLT).

No, worry doesn't make your life longer. It just makes it more miserable.

AN ALTERNATIVE TO WORRY

Jesus gives us the secret to living a worry-free life. Instead of worry, put God and His will first in your life. Matthew 6:33 says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." What does that mean? The Greek translation of the word *first* means first in a line of more than one option. There are many options I can seek to live for in life. I can live for my physical appearance. I can live for a successful career. I can live for having pleasures. I can live for a lot of things. But Jesus says that among all those options, put God in the number-one position. Seek first the kingdom of God. If you want a life free of worry and anxiety and fear, put God's kingdom before everything else.

You say, "Well what does that mean?" Let's take your career for example. The business that you happen to be in. Ask yourself this question, "Is this career choice—this line of work that I am doing—really for God's glory?" In other words, "Am I seeking God first in what I am doing?" You say, "Greg, you are a pastor. That is your job. It is easy for you to seek God first. My job is different than yours and I work in the real world with real people." I understand what you are saying, but here is what your goal should be: to honor God in everything that you do. I don't care what you do. If you can't honor God in what you do, get a new job.

Here is what you have to ask yourself, “As I am doing this thing, what is my goal?” If your goal is just to make money, no matter what it takes, you have got the wrong goal. Your goal should be to honor God, give honest work, and have personal integrity and a good testimony in the workplace.

I know Christians who are successful in business but have a bad reputation because they cut corners or don’t do the job right. That’s not good. When the day is done, you want to have a good name and a good reputation. Proverbs 22:1 says, “Choose a good reputation over great riches; being held in high esteem is better than silver or gold” (NLT).

There are people in life who do cut corners. There are people in life who cheat on the test and pass the exam when you studied hard. There are people in life who lie on their resumes and get the position you were hoping to get. There are people in life who flatter the boss and move up the ladder a little more quickly than you do. There are people in life who do it the wrong way, and get ahead in life. You say, “You see, the integrity thing doesn’t work.” Just hold on a minute, Buckaroo. If you live a godly life and you live an honest life and have integrity and work hard, God is going to bless you for it. There will be times when others seem to be doing better than you, but just wait a while and see how it plays out. The Bible says a person will reap what they sow.

A LONG-DISTANCE RACE

It’s a little bit like the tortoise and the hare. You are the tortoise, just doing your thing—walking with the Lord—doing it the right way. An honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay. Then, in time, you get that promotion or the other position. And just like that, you are elevated. I am not saying this will always happen. My point is simply this: God will honor it. You seek Him first and He will take care of you.

When you seek God first, life will find its proper perspective. “All these things shall be added to you.” What things? What did Jesus talk about? What I am going to eat. What I am going to wear. We could expand that: Where I am going to live. Where I am going to work. What I am going to drive. What I am going to do. God is saying, “I will take care of all of those things if you will seek Me first.”

A BLANK CHECK FROM GOD

The Lord came to Solomon, who was to replace his father as the King of Israel. His dad had died. The Lord came to this young man and said, “I will give you whatever you want. Ask it and I will give it.” Can you imagine? What would you do if God came to you tonight and said, “I will give you whatever you want? You want riches? I will give you riches. You want fame? I will give you fame. What is it you want?”

Solomon says, “I want wisdom to rule your people.” The Lord says, “That is good. I’ll tell you what, buddy. I am going to give you the wisdom you asked for. And because you didn’t ask for long life and riches, I am going to give you those things as well.” Solomon demonstrated what it means to seek first the kingdom. He didn’t seek that stuff. He sought God. And God said, “I am going to bless you for that.”

IS THERE A LINK BETWEEN WORRY AND MONEY?

In Matthew 6:25 Jesus said: “Therefore I say to you do not worry.” Notice it starts with the word *therefore*. Whenever you read the word *therefore* in the Bible, find out what it is there for. Jesus is drawing upon what has been previously said. What did Jesus say prior to this? We go back to Matthew 6:19–21: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Jesus is not saying it is wrong for you to have stuff. Effectively, He is saying it is wrong when stuff has you.

In fact, it is interesting that this phrase *lay up* is used. It means to lay something horizontally, as in storing it permanently. He is talking not about the man who is saving, but the man who is stockpiling. He is talking not to the woman who merely has possessions, but to the woman who has them to flaunt. Some people love to flaunt their stuff. They tell you what they paid for everything when you didn’t even ask. “Do you know what I paid for this? Do you know how much that cost? I own this. I own that.” Why? To impress people. Jesus says not to do that. Don’t lay up treasures in that way. Seek first the kingdom.

Many believers struggle financially today because they have not learned the simple principle of seeking first the kingdom in their giving. The Bible tells us as Christians that we are to bring our tithes and our offerings to the Lord. By the way, those are two separate things. Every Christian should tithe. You say, “What is a tithe?” A tithe is ten percent. You bring your income to the Lord and give it to Him on a regular basis. An offering is above and beyond that. We say, “I can’t afford to do that!” As far as I am concerned, I can’t afford not to. I have found that when I am faithful in my giving to the Lord, He blesses me because I am seeking first His kingdom. That is exactly the context of this statement.

In fact, in Proverbs 3 we read of God saying, “Honor the LORD from your wealth and from the first of all your produce.” That is seeking first the kingdom. “So your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine” (verses 9–10 NASB). God is saying, “You take care of this—you put Me first in all things—and I will take care of you.”

Paul tells us that if you sow sparingly, you will reap sparingly. If you sow generously, you will reap generously (see 2 Corinthians 9:6). Put God first. Jesus says, “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Luke 6:38 NIV).

There is only one time in the Bible when God says, “Test Me on this. Put Me to the test on this.” It is in the last book of the Old Testament, the book of Malachi. God says, “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this . . . and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it” (verse 3:10 NIV).

You say, “Greg, I think you are saying we should give to get.” Not at all. If you think that, you are misunderstanding. Here is what I am saying: because we have received, we should give. The Bible says, “Freely you have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8). This is not giving to obligate God. This is giving because God has done so much for us.

When I do this, I lay up for myself a treasure in Heaven. It’s been said,

“Do your giving
While you’re living.

Then you're knowing
Where it's going."

You can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead.

BURIED . . .

There is an afterlife. There is a Heaven, and yes, there is a Hell too. A lot of us just spin our wheels in life: hurried, worried, buried. We spend our whole life running. We are so agitated and stressed out. Instead of wasting your energies on chasing nothing, why don't you channel them into chasing after God? Seek Him and put Him first. You just watch how He will change your circumstances.

Perhaps your family is starting to unravel. Maybe you are having friction with your wife or husband. Or your kids are rebelling. There are all kinds of troubles. Try putting God first. Have you been a godly person? A godly husband? A godly wife? A godly parent? Have you started praying about these things? Put the Lord first and watch what happens.

The same is true if you are single. The same is true with your business. The same is true with your finances. The same is true with everything you do. Put God first and then watch how the Lord will bless.

ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE. GOD IS LOVE.

Many people just throw their lives away. Some time ago, I read an article about Billy Joel. At the time I read the article, he was 65 years old. Billy had a resurgence of his career in New York City, doing monthly concerts at Madison Square Garden. His concerts sold out in advance. Making \$2,000,000 per performance. Billy sold 150 million albums. He has been inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. In 2013, he was a recipient at the Kennedy Center's Honors.

In this article, Billy Joel said he has always felt like he was a failure because he never had love. He said, "You know, you just need one love. One person out of millions to know and accept and love you for being,

well, just the way you are.” Billy has had three tortured marriages. Here is his conclusion (it sounds like something Solomon said): “You can have all of the money in the world. You can have mansions. You can have properties. You can have yachts. You can have limousines and motorcycles, but without love it doesn’t mean a thing.”¹

I will take it a step further: without Jesus it doesn’t mean a thing. That is what Billy needs. That is what we need. Jesus is what we need. With Jesus, we have hope in this life and the life to come.

Put God first. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. And all of these things shall be added unto you. You will be able to say with the apostle Paul, “To live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21).

If you say, “For me, to live is money,” then for you, to die is to leave it all behind. If you say, “For me, to live is fame,” then for you, to die is to be forgotten. If you say, “For me, to live is power,” then for you, to die is to lose it all. If you will say, “For me, to live is Christ” then you can also say, “For me, to die is gain.”

Understand that this doesn’t mean Christians walk around hoping they will die. “I hope I die today! That would be so awesome!” Some may, but they are weird. Christians love life. I think we love life more than anyone. Because we know who controls life. We know who gives life and we know who takes life. And we can just leave that in God’s hands. If I live ten, twenty, or even thirty years more, it is up to the Lord. I am going to enjoy this day and put God first in all I say and do and seek to honor Him. When that day comes, when He calls me home, I am going straight to Heaven because I have put my faith in Jesus Christ. That is the hope of the Christian.

A PRAYER OF SURRENDER

I ask you now, do you have that hope? Do you know with absolute certainty that if you were to die you would go to Heaven? If you don’t, let’s get that settled right now. There has to come a moment when you

1. http://pagesix.com/2014/10/26/how-billy-joels-three-wives-stole-his-heart-and-his-money/?_ga=1.120131201.828817556.1387848014

pray to God and ask Him for forgiveness. It is not just some little prayer you pray and then go on your merry way in life and forget about God and then reconnect with Him later on. This is a whole life changer. It is a relationship with God. Do you have it? If not, do you want it?

Jesus says He stands at the door and He knocks and if we will hear His voice and open the door He will come in. He can come into your life right now. He is just a prayer away:

“God, I am sorry for my sin and I believe that Your Son Jesus Christ died on the cross for me and shed His blood for me. I believe He rose again from the dead. Now I want Jesus Christ to live in my heart and life as my Savior and Lord. I want to follow Him. Help me to live for Jesus from this point on. Amen.”

If you prayed this prayer, you can find out more about what it means to follow Jesus Christ by visiting KnowGod.org.

A PRAYER FOR THE BUSY AND BURDENED

Maybe you already have a relationship with Jesus Christ, but you are reading this book because you are just too busy. You are stressed and anxious. You’ve mixed up your priorities in life and haven’t made God number one. You are hurried, worried, and buried under the pressures of life. It’s time for you to get things right as well. Pray to the Lord and ask Him to help you get back on track:

“Lord Jesus, I’m sorry I have not been seeking first the kingdom of God. I ask that You would help me to do that now. I give You my time. I give You my finances. I give You my anxieties. I give you my relationships. I give You my calendar. I give You my life and I ask that You would lead and guide me in all that I do so that You will be glorified. I want to sit at Your feet like Mary. I want to stop wrestling against You like Jacob. I want to experience Your perfect rest like Daniel. I want to put Your priorities first like Solomon. Thank You for Your forgiveness. Amen.”

I am so glad that God is there for us, aren’t you? I don’t know how I could have gotten through so many things I’ve had to face in life without

the Lord. If He hadn't been there I would have just collapsed under the weight of life. But God has been with me and walked with me through the hardest times of life and I know He will do the same for you. I don't say it is easy. I don't say it is a cake walk. But I am saying that no matter what comes your way in life, God will be there for you, if you are His child. And that's a reason to rejoice and give thanks!