

CORE

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A FIFTEEN-MINUTE DAILY GUIDE
TO BUILD **YOUR BIBLE IQ** IN A YEAR

MARK E. MOORE

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WATERBROOK

CORE 52

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Overwhelming Worry

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

—PHILIPPIANS 4:6

Question: How can I reduce worry?

Few behaviors sabotage our effectiveness more than worry.

But this pandemic is treatable. After all, worry is internal. No one forces you to do it, no one but you can fix it, and no one but you is fully aware of the extent of it. Our worry is precisely that: *ours*.

It's triggered by circumstances but not caused by them. For example, worry isn't isolated to a specific economic group we call "poor." In fact, the economic poor often worry less about money than the economically advantaged. Our greatest worry is often caused by comparison, not need. On paper this makes no sense.

Worry is seldom reserved for the most likely immediate possibilities. In fact, most of our worries are about terrorists, tumors, kidnappings, and such. Our imaginations run amok. Why do we do this?

Worry stems from poor mental habits. It's unnecessary, unproductive, and

unrealistic. As the wise King Solomon said, “Anxiety in a man’s heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad” (Proverbs 12:25).

Worry Is Bad Theology

Worry isn’t merely a psychological problem; it’s a theological problem. The origin of worry is Genesis 3, which takes us back to the primordial sin in the garden. Eve determined to be “like God” (verse 5). She and Adam decided to run the world on their own. Rather than living under God’s authority, they chose to take on his status and responsibilities. They asserted themselves as rulers of their own universe. Consequently, they learned the stress of trying to control time, destiny, and morality.

No human being is capable of exercising such control. Yet all of us try. We play God and find ourselves overwhelmed by the pressure.

Worry is toxic to our souls because it blinds us to what God has done and blocks us from what he could do—all because we focus on ourselves rather than God. Our craving for self-sufficiency disables trust.

Jesus diagnosed our condition in a simple parable about soil and seeds. One of the soils he identified was thorny. This, Jesus said, is like a life choked by worry. You may make temporary spiritual progress, but soon your growth is choked by the weeds—those cares of life that consume our nutrients and leave us fruitless (Matthew 13:22).

All this is neutralized by faith. Both the Old and the New Testaments have a simple solution: trust God. This is not blind trust as much as trusting God’s track record. He has proved himself faithful. Jesus said as much:

Do not be anxious, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matthew 6:31–33)

Jesus is, of course, only echoing the ancient hymn: “Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved” (Psalm 55:22). Peter later reiterated the idea: “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7, NIV).

That’s easier said than done. For the essential steps we can turn to Jesus. The Gospels have more to say about eliminating worry than almost all other books of the Bible combined.

Practical Steps to Minimize Worry

It’s unlikely that many of us will completely overcome worry. Nonetheless, we can make progress. Jesus gave us practical advice. We’ll start there and allow the apostle Paul to add a couple of exclamation points at the end.

1. *Look at the world.* The first step to minimize worry is to just look around at the natural world. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave the longest address on worry in Scripture. He gave two tangible illustrations.

First, “Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” (Matthew 6:26). If you’ve ever questioned God’s goodness, go outside and look around; there are always birds somewhere. Where is their worry? In the heat of summer or the dead of winter, they always find food. The Sonoran Desert of Arizona (where I live) receives a sparse seven inches of rain a year.¹ How anything in nature survives is astounding. Yet every day there’s the chatter of quail, the strut of a roadrunner, the flitting of sparrows, the hum of hummingbirds, the proud soaring of the hawk, and the call of the majestic owl at twilight. The birds of the air are proof of the absurdity of worry. Even in a desert, they thrive. Do you really imagine God is less concerned with you? Even in your own desert, your God is an oasis where life can flourish.

Likewise, Jesus directed our attention to a field in bloom:

Why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?
(verses 28–30)

Flowering fields are fleeting. Yet hardly anything compares to the beauty of a field in full bloom. It's a display of epic extravagance. The golden poppies of California or the bluebonnets of Texas, the columbines of the Rockies or the sunflowers of Kansas, the violets of Illinois or the black-eyed Susans of Maryland. All are breathtaking, inspiring—and fleeting. Their beauty is unrivaled by the best wardrobe on any red carpet. A mere glance should silence the silliness of worry. God graces his creation with extravagance. Will he not cover you more carefully than a field of grass?

2. *Listen to God's Word.* Luke alone recorded the interaction between Mary, Martha, and Jesus over a meal in their home (Luke 10:38–42). Martha dutifully prepared the matzah and hummus. She wanted the meal to be perfect. After all, she was hosting the Lord of hosts. One would assume you would want to get that right. Mary, like a younger sister, acted irresponsibly by neglecting her duties in order to sit at Jesus's feet. How dare she!

As the evening rolled on, Martha rolled her eyes with every plate she brought from the kitchen. Finally, fed up with her sister's negligence, Martha exploded from the kitchen, her apron all in a bunch. Her frustration burst into a fury: "Tell her then to help me!" (verse 40).

One would expect Jesus to have replied by affirming a good Judeo-Christian work ethic: "Mary, do your part." Nope. He rebuked Martha instead: "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and

troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her” (verses 41–42).

3. *Conquer your thoughts.* Worry is a battle of the mind. What we focus on will determine the direction our thoughts go. Neuroscientific research has given us the fascinating insight that protein branches hold our thoughts. In a real sense, thoughts create real estate in our brains. The more we dwell on a thought, the larger the constellation of proteins becomes.² We give over space and place to the thoughts we allow to dominate our minds.

This modern insight sheds light on the ancient advice of Paul:

Do not be anxious 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.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, *think about these things*. (Philippians 4:6–9)

Paul elsewhere wrote, “We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). This isn’t just about defending Christianity. It’s about mental, emotional, and spiritual health. When Satan accosts us with negative thoughts, we wrestle those to the ground and expel them from our minds.

The trick is that we can’t just rid ourselves of a thought. That leaves a vacuum in its place, and the negativity gets sucked right back in. We must replace negative thoughts with God’s truth.

Scripture, sermons, and Christian music are powerful resources for mental transformation. The space and place you give to thoughts will grow roots in your brain. What we fertilize most will win the battle for our brains.

Worry is the result of feeding the wrong thoughts. Since negativity is the default in our world, only diligence will posture us to take every thought captive for Christ.

Key Points

- Worry is negative psychology. It's under our control, and it only hinders our effectiveness.
- Worry is bad theology. It started with sin in the Garden of Eden, and it always minimizes our trust and joy in God.
- Jesus (along with Paul) offered several insightful steps for controlling our thoughts.

This Week

- Day 1:** Read the essay.
- Day 2:** Memorize Philippians 4:6.
- Day 3:** Read Genesis 42–45.
- Day 4:** Meditate on Matthew 6:33; Luke 10:41–42; 2 Corinthians 10:5.
- Day 5:** Do a media audit this week. Each day, simply record the amount of time you spend with TV, social media posts, and radio. Compare that with time spent listening to Christian music, going to church, and reading your Bible. According to that analysis, which side has the advantage over your mind?

Overachiever Challenge: Memorize Matthew 6:33.

Bonus Read: David A. Carbonell, *The Worry Trick: How Your Brain Tricks You into Expecting the Worst and What You Can Do About It*.



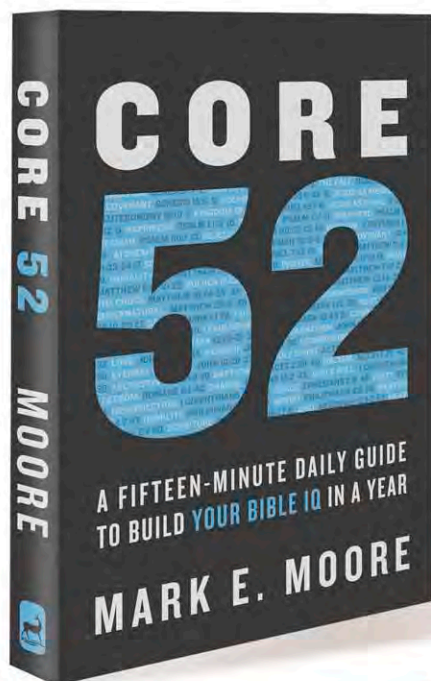
[Watch this short video](#) from Mark Moore on the subject of worry!

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