

Breaking the  
Worry Habit...  
Forever

*Elizabeth George*



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# *An Invitation to Win over Worry... Once and for All*



*I*f you're holding this book in your hand, I'm sure there's a good reason—you're tired of paying the price for your habit of worrying. You know it's harmful. You know it's useless. And you know it doesn't change a thing. Instead, it's destroying your health, relationships, and peace of mind.

Well, good news! You are not alone. Worry affects everyone. In fact, for decades worry was my constant companion. After I realized worry denies the power of God and produces no positive results, I knew it had to go. Because my own methods of getting rid of anxiety weren't making any difference, I turned to the Bible for help. That's when—and where—I found God's life-changing truths that showed me the way to break my habit of worrying. I invite you to join me, a recovering worrier, as I share what I discovered that works. And because it comes from God's Word, it can work for you too.

*Breaking the Worry Habit...Forever!* looks at 12 areas of daily life that cause anxiety in a woman's heart. For example, have you ever had a health problem, or a child who struggled, or aging, sick, or

dying parents? How do you handle money problems, fear, your life circumstances, and guilt? Does making a tough decision send you into a fresh worry fit? And then there's wondering about what people think of you! Take heart. There's no need to worry about anything...ever again. By the grace of God and with His help, you can eliminate worry altogether...and forever.

## *What's Wrong with Me?*



*And who of you by being worried  
can add a single hour to his life?*

MATTHEW 6:27 NASB



There are certain red-letter days in every woman's life. The memory of one of mine—and recalling the anxiety that arrived with it—will never go away. It all began with a routine annual well-woman exam. The first alarm that went off was the look of concern on my doctor's face. The second sounded when she said, "I don't like the look of things. I'm going to order a biopsy." Then came an even louder alarm. The biopsy results contained one very frightening word—"abnormal."

I stared at the floor, not wanting to hear what my doctor was saying but hearing it nevertheless. "We can't be certain whether it's cancerous or not until we take a further look. But things are definitely not normal. I'm ordering a surgery to remove the growth."

In the end, my abnormal cell formation was not cancer. For that I am deeply grateful! But, believe me, that was one time in my life

when I went through a serious bout with worry, fear, anxiety, and speculation.

Health issues are fertile soil for the all-too-easily-cultivated habit of worry. I know, and I speak from experience. My real call to battle was not for war in the *physical* realm. No, it was for war in the *spiritual* realm! I went into a full-throttled tailspin spiritually. It was as though I dropped to ground zero in my faith and trust in God. After a time of total, out-of-control failure, I realized I had to get my act together. I had to stop moving in the destructive direction I was letting my mind and emotions take me. I had to halt, regroup, retrain, and move out in an entirely different direction—a better direction, the right direction. I had to chisel away on my worry habit so I could live with the peace that only God can provide when we trust in Him with all our heart.

### *The Vast Scope of Worries*

Once something is wrong—or even *might* be wrong—with us, our minds run wild! We can start worrying backward about what triggered a health crisis and rapidly work our way forward through every possible scenario and development...right up to the sound of dirt being dropped on our casket in a grave! Nothing and no one is spared from being included in our vast scope of worries.

“What about the kids? What will their lives be like if I die or am disabled? And my husband? What in the world will he do without my help? Why, he can hardly find a pair of matching socks! And my parents? Oh, dear! They have enough health issues and worries of their own. It’s not natural for a child to precede parents in death!”

On and on...and on!...the anxieties cascade. And so does the adrenaline...and the stomach acid. And up and up...and up!...go our heart rate and our blood pressure. At times we’re so distraught we can’t eat a bite. And then there are those days when we eat nonstop, hoping that we will find some “comfort food” in the mass ingested. Maybe we even consider—or ask our doctor for—some kind of

medication to help us cope with our overwhelming anxiety, to calm us down, to at least allow us to get a good night's sleep. Each night brings no rest, and each day's sunrise offers no hope or relief. It seems we may as well be dead.

## *God's Take on Health, Life, and Death*

Have you ever heard the axiom, “The moment you are born, you begin to die”? Or the one that says, “The two things you cannot avoid in life are death and taxes”? Life and health are both gifts from God and should never be taken for granted. But it's also true that both are fleeting. Moses addressed death and put life into its transitory perspective when he wrote:

*The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away*  
(Psalm 90:10).

So, as you can see, you can't avoid death. And as Jesus implied in His query in Matthew 6:27 — “Who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?” — you cannot add to the length of your life. Therefore, as Jesus is suggesting, why should you worry about the reality and timing of your death?

But health and life still need to be understood from a proper biblical perspective. Consider these truths drawn from God's Word.

*Good health is natural and normal.* What a great and gracious God we have! He allows the rain to fall on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). The vast majority of people on earth enjoy relatively good health for most of their lives. Oh, there's the occasional flu bug, bad cold, or strained muscle. But normally most people experience good health. Day after day, even year after year, we go merrily on our way without a thought about our health because there are no physical issues or ailments. And that's the way it should be. Even in

the midst of a sin-cursed world, God has engineered our bodies to feel good and function without pain when we are well. Mankind is allowed to enjoy His grace when it comes to physical health.

*We are not guaranteed a life free of pain or illness.* When sin entered the world, it brought pain, disease, illness, and death. As a human, you, along with every other person on earth, are under the curse that resulted from Adam and Eve's sin in the garden of Eden. Jesus

*No matter what comes your way here on earth, no matter what pain or agony you face, set your worries aside and look heavenward!*

wanted His followers and you and me to know the hard truth. Bluntly, He said, "In the world you will have tribulation" (John 16:33). Such tribulation can be in the form of religious persecution, strained personal relationships, or the relentless process of growing old! God never promised His children a life of health. Maybe this is why the apostle Paul never asked others to pray for his health. Nor did he ever pray for the *physical* health of his readers. What he did pray for was their *spiritual* health (Colossians 1:9-11).

When my husband pastored and taught a senior citizens' Sunday school class some years ago, he heard many of these dear people share one particular verse that comforted them after a spouse died. It was from a description of "the new heaven": "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4). This scripture describes the reality and angst of suffering in life...but also the welcomed delights and promised well-being that await God's people as they spend eternity in His presence. No matter what comes your way here on earth, no matter what pain or agony you face, set your worries aside and look heavenward!

*Physical pain is not necessarily bad.* It's great to enjoy health and a vibrant body, but you and I can be thankful our bodies also alert us when things are not right. Depending on the location and nature of the pain, a medical professional can usually help us. We may have to bear a short-lived illness or condition, but generally we are soon back on our feet and everything is back to normal. If the pain hadn't developed, we wouldn't have known something was wrong. I'm sure you've heard of or known someone who went to the doctor with an early problem or pain and was told that action at the sign of an early symptom actually saved their life. So the next time you have an ache or pain, first thank God for the warning. Then take action. Don't wait! Find out what's causing the pain and get it taken care of.

*Physical pain is an opportunity to trust God.* Sometimes our pain is caused by a condition that lasts for a longer period of time—weeks, months, years, or even a lifetime. What do we do when this happens? The typical first response is to ask, “Why, God? And why me? What have I done to deserve this?” But a better response is to pray, “God, what do You want to teach me?”

The apostle Paul had one of these painful, lingering conditions. He called it his “thorn in the flesh.” Paul struggled with his thorn. In fact, he prayed God would take it away. And he prayed that same prayer three times (2 Corinthians 12:7-8)!

What was God's answer? He assured His servant Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (verse 9). The Lord showed Paul that even though he was suffering, he—Paul—was not alone. God was with him, strengthening him. Paul's pain and suffering remained, but the resource to deal with it was there as well. He just had to trust God to strengthen him as he suffered through pain that was not going to go away. At last Paul got it! He was able to declare:

*Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities,  
that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I*

*take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong* (verses 9-10).

When we as Christians suffer, it's always an opportunity to trust God and give Him glory. And when we trust Him, we rest in Him... which brings us peace of mind and soul. As I'm sitting here at my computer experiencing (at least for today and for the moment) reasonably good health, it's easier for me to talk about trusting God during times of pain, illness, and physical decline than it would be if I were actually suffering physically. But I always pray that when that time comes—and it will!—I will follow Paul's example and trust in God's grace through the pain and suffering. And I pray the same prayer for you. When we as Christians suffer, it's always an opportunity to trust God and give Him glory.

When long-term suffering shows up on your doorstep, remember these words from American preacher Henry Ward Beecher: "Every tomorrow has two handles. We can take hold of it by the handle of anxiety, or by the handle of faith."<sup>1</sup> The choice is yours. Be sure you grab hard on the handle of faith!

*Spiritual health is more important than physical health.* I'm sure you value your good health as much as I do. But when you become a Christian, your physical life takes a backseat to your spiritual life. A Christian embraces and nurtures an eternal perspective. Your concerns—and mine—should take on a heavenly dimension. Again, Paul has help for us. He shows us the way we are to view life and health:

*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body* (Philippians 3:20-21).

How many prayer times or meetings have you been in where most of the requests were for people's health? These prayers are important, but I remind you again that Paul never asked the readers of any of his letters to pray for his health while he was suffering or in prison. What were some of the things he asked others to pray for on his behalf?

- ✧ *A courageous heart.* Paul desired boldness in his preaching, a boldness only God could give (Ephesians 6:19).
- ✧ *An open door.* Paul needed an open door from God to preach the gospel (Colossians 4:3).
- ✧ *A clear message.* Paul wished for his preaching to clearly communicate the message of Christ so that many could hear and believe (Colossians 4:3).

And what were his prayers for his readers? Here are a few of many:

- ✧ *Wisdom and knowledge.* Paul wished that his readers would also be filled with God's wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 1:9).
- ✧ *A worthy walk.* Paul desired that Christ's followers would "walk worthy of the Lord" (Colossians 1:10).
- ✧ *Inner strength.* Paul wanted believers to be strengthened with power through God's Spirit in the inner man (Ephesians 3:16).

I'm sure you're getting the message. Your life and health are important. However, they're only temporary and earthly. But you, as a child of God, are moving toward a better existence, one that is eternal and heavenly. You are merely a sojourner and a pilgrim

passing through this life (1 Peter 2:11). But while you are here and on your way to glory, be a good steward of the body God has given you for His work here on earth. Take care of your health, but don't dwell on it too much. And by all means, don't worry about it! Instead be disciplined and do your part.

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## Doing Your Part

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I've spent most of this chapter encouraging you not to be overly concerned about your physical health. But did you notice the key word—"overly"? To make sure you keep your worry about your own health (or that of family members or friends) in perspective and under control, here are a few things you can do in the form of a to-do list.

- ✓ *Watch over your body.* Even though you are a kingdom citizen, you still reside in a body, which has a stewardship attached to it. Your body is "the temple of the Holy Spirit" and "you are not your own" (1 Corinthians 6:19). Paul then added, "You were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Taking care of your body is one way you can glorify God.
- ✓ *Watch what you eat.* God wanted to protect His people so He prescribed a set of dietary laws for them. For example, the heathen nations in the Old Testament had no understanding of disease and the need to cook food before eating it. But the Israelites had God's instructions. Even though most Christians don't strictly follow the Old Testament dietary laws today, the principles behind them are wise ones: Watch what and how much you eat, and how it's prepared. Reading the back of any package or can of

food will tell you if you should eat it or not! For several decades I've read books and articles regularly on diet and nutrition. Try it! It will keep you more aware and knowledgeable—and careful—about what you put into your mouth...which goes into a body that belongs to *God!*

- ✓ *Watch your weight.* This will probably take care of itself if you watch what you eat. But it also helps to weigh yourself every day. Select an “ideal” weight for your health, body structure, and lifestyle. Then strive to stay as close to that weight as possible. I track my weight daily on a graph. As the saying goes, one picture is worth a thousand words! I can see exactly what's going on (or up, or down)! Don't do what I did. For years I read and knew that I should watch what I eat and watch my weight, but I just didn't do it. Wow, what a difference these two practices make each day! Also remember that self-control is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). This makes your eating habits and your weight spiritual issues as well as physical ones.
- ✓ *Exercise regularly.* Doctors and nutritionists agree that regular exercise promotes good health. Paul told his protégée, young Timothy, that “bodily exercise profits a little” (1 Timothy 4:8). So plan some exercise into your life, even if it's only a little! Again, it's a matter of stewardship, of taking care of God's body. I have less than zero time to exercise. I have to weigh the benefit of each decision I make about the use of my time. But I do try to fit in at least a time to walk each day. I've learned to view exercise as an investment, not in the longevity of my life (that's up to God), but in the quality of my life (that's my contribution).
- ✓ *Have regular checkups.* Jim and I have a longtime friend who recently had his annual physical exam. The doctors

found a problem and immediately removed a cancerous growth before it had time to spread. Regular doctor visits don't catch everything, but they are one way we can do our part to detect or prevent illnesses. You can sit at home and worry about the possibility of a problem...or you can have a checkup and know that everything seems to be okay. Action and information will check your habit of worrying about the unknown and have a calming effect on you.

*You can sit at home and worry about the possibility of a problem... or you can get a checkup.*

- ✓ *Follow up on warning signs.* I said earlier that pain is a bodily mechanism that alerts us to a problem. Well, it seems some people would rather worry about their pain than go to the doctor to find out the cause. They're so afraid of what it might be that they put off a checkup until it's too late to find out and make a difference. When you have a pain, which could be something or nothing, don't worry about it. Do something. Go to the doctor and find out!
- ✓ *Keep your focus on heaven.* Warning: If you're not careful, you can become so attached to this world and your physical health that you lose sight of your heavenly calling. This doesn't mean you're not to care about physical things like your health. What it does mean is that you are to hold on to your physical well-being "lightly." Then, if and when ill health and even death arrive, they can be viewed as merely a transition. The apostle Paul had this upward, heavenly focus when he declared, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." He also desired "to depart and be with Christ, which is far better" (Philippians 1:21-23). As the hymn teaches, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full

in His wonderful face, and the things of earth shall grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace.”<sup>2</sup>

- ✓ *Trust in the providence of God.* Do whatever is necessary to nurture this trust! It's vital to breaking any tendencies you have to worry about anything, including your health. Your consuming passion should always be for God's will—*not* your own. This means you should pray for and desire God's will above all things—including feeling good, being healthy, and living a long life. Pray as Jesus did: “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). Also make it a habit (. . .and this is a good one!) to read your Bible on a regular basis. This habit, like nothing else, will keep your mind focused on God. Then when things happen, your first thought will be, “Don't worry. Trust God instead.” Because you've seen God in action in the pages of your Bible, you'll know about His nature, strength, and power. And that translates into a growing trust in Him.

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## Breaking the Worry Habit. . .Forever!

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I'm a person who used to sleep with my pillow under my stomach to comfort my bleeding ulcer instead of sleeping with the pillow under my head. Finally I acknowledged that worry is a terrible sin. . . and a terrible habit. As I read my Bible and grew as a Christian, I couldn't help but notice there are so *many* commands in the Bible telling God's followers not to worry! I grabbed onto these two and began to pull them out when I felt my stomach burning or caught myself wondering and worrying. Jesus commanded: “Do not worry about your life” (Matthew 6:25). And Paul commanded: “Be anxious for nothing” (Philippians 4:6).

The truth is, worrying goes against God's will for your life. Worrying also affects your health. Medical studies have affirmed this observation by Dr. Charles Mayo, cofounder of the internationally renowned Mayo Clinic:

Worry affects circulation, the heart, the glands, the whole nervous system. I have never known a man who died from overwork, but many who died from doubt.<sup>3</sup>

I hope you're agreeing that worrying is a bad habit. It offends God. And it damages your life and health. A habit is anything you do on a regular basis. Habits can be good ones...or bad ones. Reading your Bible and praying are good habits that you want to be a part of your life. But any habit, whether it's an action or attitude or thought process that tempts you to turn your heart away from God and onto yourself is a bad one and must be changed and dealt with dramatically and drastically.

Worry is definitely one of the actions that takes your eyes off God. Worry says that "this" (whatever "this" is that you're worrying about) is something that can't be handled by God, with God, or by His grace. This attitude is the exact opposite of trusting God. You might as well be wearing a T-shirt or pin that says, "I don't trust God." The goal of spiritual growth is to exchange the bad habit of worrying with the excellent habit of trusting God. Whatever your situation, do your part. Do all you can. But most of all, be sure you turn your concern over to God!



*Trust in the LORD with all your heart.*

PROVERBS 3:5

*Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.*

PSALM 2:12

