

DON'T YOU WORRY 'BOUT A THING

Inspired by the Stevie Wonder Song

Week #4 of a 5-Week "Songs of Life" Series

Rev. Richard Maraj

Sunday, May 5, 2024

Fresh out of business school a young man applied for a job as an accountant. And he was being interviewed by a guy that was very anxious, and he was the guy who founded and ran the business. "I need to hire someone who is an accountant, but I really am looking for someone who will do all my worrying for me."

And the accountant says, "Excuse me?"

He said, "Yeah; you know, I always worry every single day about this business and I don't want to worry anymore. I want to hire you to run my business and take all my money worries off my back."

And the accountant says, "I see. So, how much do you pay for this? What's the salary?"

He said, "The starting salary is \$120,000."

And the kid says, "\$120,000? That's fantastic! But how does a small business like this afford a salary like that?"

And the owner says, "Well, that's your first worry." [Congregants laugh]

So how many people here worry? Anybody worry? How many people have ever worried so much that it affected your ability to concentrate and even sleep? It affected your sleep? How many people worry so much and, if you have nothing to worry about, you get worried? Anybody ever get that worried?

Everybody worries. We all worry! Men worry; women worry. Carnivores worry; vegetarians worry. Republicans; Democrats. Everybody worries. And we worry about everything! You know, we worry about our children; we worry about our partners; we wonder what worry about our parents. We worry about our money or the economy. We worry if people will like us. We worry if we'll get the job; we worry if we'll keep our job. You know, we'll worry if our outfit looks good or we're having a bad hair day, We worry about identity theft, national security. You know, will we get everything done in time? We worry and worry and worry ... about big things; about little things; about real things and even imaginary things we worry about. We worry a lot!

When you look at it, worry is a form of thinking about the future ... but often projecting negative outcomes and possibilities that leave us feeling a sense of anxiety, of a sense of fear, and a sense of doubt. And it's because we not only are projecting negative things in the future, but we keep dwelling on them in the present to the point that we do feel a sense of anxiety. Almost even agonizing over what may happen or what may not happen.

We have gotten so accustomed to worry, we just see it as a normal, natural part of life. You know, we almost try and justify our worrying. You know, like we conflate three things with worry to try and make worry better.

The first one is we join worry as equaling care. How can I not worry about my family? How can I not worry about finances? And the message we give is that worrying is a sign of caring. You know, it's really not true, but it makes a lot of sense in a certain way.

Another one is worrying and seriousness. I had a lady in my previous church; she'd always say, "*Richard, if you aren't worried, you clearly are not understanding the gravity of the situation.*" And so she would

think that worrying was a sign that you're taking it seriously ... and if you're not worrying, you're not taking it seriously.

And the third one is worrying and problem-solving. We think if we're worrying, it means we'll be able to figure out the solution. But worrying is -- the nature of it is -- projecting negative and getting anxious about it. Critical thinking and problem-solving and creative thinking is about solutions, strategies and coming up with a plan.

And so, you know, every one of us worries. And worry -- if you look at it in an isolated way -- it is a poor choice. It is not and not a good practice. And it is probably the least positive and effective way to use your mind and to use your feelings and your imagination.

The Bible warns us over and over again not to worry; don't invest your mental energy in this activity of worrying. You know, Jesus said, *"Do not worry about your life: what you will wear, what you will eat."* You know, *"Worry will not add a single hour to your life."* He said, *"Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself."*

The Apostle Paul said, *"Do not worry or be anxious about anything."*

And finally, Proverbs 12 says, *"An anxious mind weighs a man down."*

You know, worry is not a good and effective practice. It does not lead us to peace and happiness. In fact, it leads us in exactly the opposite direction. You know, the word "worry" comes from an English word, "wrygan," which means to choke off. When we worry, we choke off or restrict the flow of our awareness of God's peace and the flow of joy and fulfillment and creativity and greater possibilities and levels of happiness. Worry absolutely limits the level of good in our lives, and the level of happiness and joy.

So we're in Week #4 out of our five-week "Songs of Life" series where I take a famous song and try to and extract a spiritual message to help us live our lives more fully. And today we're looking at a song by Stevie Wonder. I loved Stevie Wonder when I was a kid. I used to memorize all the lyrics. I saw him three times in my life. And the first one was 12 years old. I was just such a huge, huge fan of Stevie Wonder.

Today's song comes from 1973: his hit, "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing." And in it, it's a song where he's encouraging his lady to go out there and explore all the possibilities of life ... and don't worry about anything, because I'll be right there with you. I'll be right at your side. "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing" is a reassuring song to live your life fully and forget about the negativity. Don't worry about that stuff. Just live your life without worry.

And so, how many people would agree that your life could be better, it could be more positive, more joyful and successful if you were to reduce the amount of worrying in your life? Everybody.

So today we're going to look at four spiritual practices that will help us reduce and lessen the amount of worry in our lives so we can make greater use in a more positive way of the power of our minds.

And so the first way to reduce the amount of worry in our lives is through **THE PRACTICE OF MINDFULNESS**. You know, the first thing we need to do to worry less is to calm and quiet our minds. Just to relax and slow down our minds.

You know, the human mind tends to run around and jump around quite a bit. You know, there used to be a commercial that's like the Energizer Bunny that just keeps going and going and going. Sometimes we have a hard time shutting off our mind. Sometimes it's referred to as "monkey mind." Our minds just kind of jump and bounce all the way all over the place to a lot of crazy and sometimes ridiculous and irrational things.

You know, worry is really our minds gone wild. And I really believe that our minds excel in what I call MSU: Making Stuff Up. We are really good! And often “awfulizing” and projecting the very worst and negative things we can think about.

You know, it's like, if we didn't get a job, we start worrying that we may never get a job. You know, if somebody at the office looked at us funny, we think, “Wow!” We start worrying, “*They hate me. I know they hate me, and I bet there are other people who hate me.*” Or if, you know, we hear the pilot say that there's some turbulence, we think, “*Oh my God, we're going to die. We're going to crash!*”

How many people have ever worried about things irrationally? Anybody ever have any irrational thoughts? You know, Mark Twain once said, “*I've had many, many worries in my life. Thank God most of them never happened.*” Because we worry and just make stuff up and sometimes drive ourselves crazy. Our minds can get distracted by worry and by fear. And the best thing we could do is learn how to calm it down. Just relaxing and quieting the mind is one of the most powerful and effective ways to not only reduce worry, but to increase the power and the use and the efficiency and effectiveness of our minds.

And the funny thing is as simple as just breathing in and breathing out -- just following your breath in and following it out -- calms the mind; it brings us to the present moment; it increases the level of peace and positivity; it gives us a sense of perspective. And all we need to do is follow the air as it comes in and follow the air as it goes out. It is amazing how simple and calming that is to reduce a level of worry and crazy thoughts in our mind.

So, everyone just take a deep breath. And, as you exhale, feel your body relax. As you breathe in, feel your body expand. As you exhale, feel your body relax. Breathing in; expand. And breathing out; just relax. Again, breathing in; expand. Breathing out; just relax. One more time: breathing in; expand. And then exhale and just let go and relax.

How many people would say you feel a little bit more calm in your mind than you were before? It is so amazingly simple and so effective! And yet, we don't use it. If we were to just do that two or three times a day, and particularly when we were having a little flare-up of worry or concern or anxiety, it is amazing the difference that it can and will and does make.

My sister, Arianne, lives in Montreal and at 7 a.m. -- usually on Thursday morning or Friday morning -- we FaceTime each other and we do breathing exercises. And there is a fabulous, fabulous application -- app -- I'd recommend. It's called Brahma Kumaris, and it's got like 15 recorded little meditations that are only like a minute that focus on your breathing. And you'll be amazed how calming and centering and grounding it can be.

Our minds are the greatest gift that God has given us. It is the most creative, powerful tool -- with our imagination, with our thoughts, with our ideas and intentions. It is powerful! And the way to use its power the most is to learn how to calm it and quiet it down. To renew, to restore, to refresh. I mean, our minds are incredible, but we need to learn how to use it ... not only to reduce worry, but to utilize our minds to create and attract and enjoy things at even greater levels.

Something else I'll just add to this idea about mindfulness and quieting the mind. Something I find really effective about worry is to journal. And you would just journal, “*What is worrying me right now?*” And I find when I journal about what's worrying me, it somehow calms me and it kind of takes the power away from whatever it is I'm worrying about. You know, because what happens is: what's in my head is really, really scary. But when I write it down, it's less scary. And you'll really be surprised! It's like something like writing seems to kind of release some pent-up energy and gives us some perspective when we actually see it in the written form.

Because when it's here, it can get really, really frightening. But when we actually write it out, it actually is calming. And we realize it's not as bad and scary as we thought when it was just up here.

You know, and something else to do is: if something comes up that you're worried about during the day – like, I'm worried about going to the dentist -- you could just say to yourself, *“Okay, I'll journal about that later”* or *“I'll do a meditation about it later.”* That sounds silly, but learning how to defer and postpone worry actually helps you regain your power.

You ever had a worry control you and you couldn't stop thinking about it? This one you say, *“Okay, I got that, and I'm going to just put it aside for now.”* And what that does is give us a greater level of power over the creative energy of our minds. Does that make sense? Okay.

And the other one is: if you want to go to another level with the writing, you could say, *“Is this perspective the most positive? And is there another outcome that is good that is possible?”* And just ask yourself that. Because then that begins to lead the mind to other possibilities other than what you're worrying about.

Someone said, *“Worry never stops the sorrow of tomorrow; it only robs today of its joy.”* And so it's an important thing for us to learn how to quiet our mind. Because that will reduce the amount of worry and increase the creative power of our minds.

The second thing to reduce worry is to **TRUST THAT GOD LOVES YOU.** You know, a sign of worry ... Well, worry is a sign that we don't trust that everything's going to work out; that's why we're worrying. We're freaking out, because we don't trust that it will work out in the best way; in the most positive way.

Worry is a sign that we really don't trust that God loves us and God wants the best for us. We don't trust that God has a plan and purpose. We don't trust that things will work out for the best. Because if we trusted more that everything was going to be okay, we wouldn't be worrying as much in this present moment.

How many people can remember what you were worrying on this day, May 5, five years ago? Anybody? How many can remember what you were worrying on this day two years ago? How many people remember you were worrying on this day a year ago? And here's my suggestion to you -- is that those things worked out. Or at least they're not bothering you as much as they were.

And the question is -- for what you're worried about right now -- think about what you're worried about right now. Can you trust that, in the same way those things five years ago and two years ago worked out, that what you're worried about right now can work out? Are you willing to trust that? Are you willing to trust the same God that has blessed you in so many ways -- and brought so much joy and love and goodness into your life -- Is the same God you could trust to work out this thing out and bring something good forth from it?

The more we're able to trust that God loves us, the more we're able to trust that things will work out for the best; to trust that the universe is supporting us; that we will absolutely reduce and release the amount of worry.

Trust is a powerful, important thing. In Proverbs 3, Verse 5-6, it says, *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart; and lean not to your own understanding, but in all ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths.”* Trust God with all your heart is the key to reducing worry and fear and anxiety.

“I trust God with all my heart.”

Sincerely, let's say, it together: [with congregation] *“I trust God with all my heart.”*

Take a deep breath. Half voice together: [with congregation] *“I trust God with all my heart.”*

Open your heart. Take a deep breath. And one more time: [with congregation] *"I trust God with all my heart."* Deep breath.

Because the more we trust God, the more we realize that God loves us; God made us; God wants the best for us. God has a plan for us, but we have to be willing to let go and absolutely trust with all our hearts.

The third thing to reduce the amount of worry in our lives is to **DEVELOP A GRATEFUL MINDSET**. You know, I believe nothing in this world transforms negativity into positivity, or lack into abundance, than having a mindset of gratitude.

Gratitude does four fabulous things. Number one: it helps us see the good that we sometimes don't see, that we take for granted or we're blind to. Second thing: it makes us feel thankful and appreciative for all that we have. Third: it acknowledges God as the Source of all our blessings. And then four: it creates a magnetic attracting force that attracts even more good in our lives; even more things to feel grateful and appreciative for.

You know, developing a daily practice of gratitude. ...We've all heard it. We all have done it at times. It's the consistency of doing it, because it makes a difference. And there's so many things to be grateful for! I try and do five every single day. You know, and there are way more than five! Every one of us ... But we have to do the practice of actually feeling grateful; actually thinking about gratitude and seeing the good. I mean, being grateful for our health; for our homes; for our family; for our friends; for nature; for the sunshine. You know, for the mountains; for the sunset; for air conditioning; for ceiling fans; for bottled water; for our swimming pools. I'm grateful for my chiropractor. I'm grateful for my cleaning lady. I'm grateful for my car starter. And I'm grateful for my air fryer. [Congregants laugh] There are a lot of things we can be grateful for! There are so many! There are countless things!

And I say those things kind of jokingly, but I'm trying to make a point that there are so many little things to be thankful for. So many little things! You think we've got to be some out-of-the-park home run thing before I can let myself feel grateful.

There are countless ways that God blesses our lives with good and abundance. The question is: is our mindset there to acknowledge it, to see it, to enjoy it, to feel it, and to open ourselves to the fullness and the goodness of it? What are five things you can think right now about what's great about your life? And what you are thankful and grateful for?

This week I had two friends come over -- a couple of friends a couple of times. And it was so fabulous! I hadn't seen one in a really long time, which was a real treat. And another friend came another day. And the only thing better than friends coming to visit you is friends coming to visit you and bringing breakfast for you. [Congregants laugh] And I had that happen twice!

I mean, there are so many things to be thankful for! It is amazing and it is powerful. You know, when you think about the Law of Attraction ... And it's why I love the vibration of gratitude. It's a very, very high energy and life vibration. And the Law of Attraction: we will get more things drawn to us by having a vibration and a mindset of gratitude.

Now think about this, if the Law of Attraction works -- and it does! -- what will we be attracting if we're always worrying? What kind of ... Because there's negative energy; there's anxious energy. It's like, *"Oh no; this will go wrong!"* energy. And so we need to really be careful about the worry. Because the question is: What is it attracting in our lives? It isn't just blocking up our minds in the moment, it is actually affecting our ability to attract even greater things in our lives.

Again, what does gratitude do? It helps you see the good that we don't always see. It helps you feel thankful and grateful. It acknowledges God as the Source of all of our blessings. And it creates an attractive, magnetic power that attracts and draws even more good to you.

One of my favorite quotes by Socrates is, "*A grateful mind is a great mind that eventually attracts to itself great things.*" A grateful mind is a great mind that eventually attracts to itself great things. Compared to a worried mind, a grateful mind -- the difference in the use of the power of our minds to attract greater good -- it's not even close. And so what an endorsement for worrying less and being grateful more!

And then the final one is to **FOCUS ON OUR VISION**. To spend more time focused and working towards what we want to create than worrying about what we don't have.

Farrokh Bulsara was an Indian kid in prep school in India. And he wanted to be a rock and roll star and a musical legend. But he had some buck teeth, and things weren't really in his favor. But he didn't worry about what he didn't have. And you know, India is not exactly a hotbed for rock stars, so the conditions weren't exactly perfect. But he didn't worry about that. You know what he did? He invested his time and energy on what he wanted to create: on what his vision was. He'd write songs. He would study bands; he would do all those kind of things.

When he was 18, his parents -- they moved to England, and he experienced racism and all kinds of different things. Didn't stop him! Kept writing; kept writing; kept singing. And then, of course, he changed his name to Freddie Mercury. They formed Queen, and he is considered the greatest frontman of any band in music history.

But the point I'm trying to make here is: he didn't focus on worry. He worked towards where he wanted to be. And investing our energy towards what we want, and working instead of worrying, will make a huge, huge difference.

I'm doing a funeral for an amazing guy this afternoon. His name is Maurice. He was born into poverty. And his father died when he was two years old, and his mom was so broke the church and some other people would help them pay their bills. And he didn't have the amount of money to go to school and, of course, he got kicked out of school. So then that was not possible. So there he is: poor kid; no education and no skill.

And somebody wanted to teach him how to be a bricklayer. And the funny thing is: he didn't think about how poor he was. He thought, "*I can have a great life. You know, I'm going to have an even better life than this.*" And what he started to do was working hard on what he became; he became a great bricklayer. And he became so hard on focusing on where he wanted to be, he ended up owning his own business. He met the love of his life and had a happy relationship, a happy life.

And then he got rheumatoid arthritis. They said he'd be in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. And he started doing yoga and swimming and running. And he went into remission for 12 years, and ran 17 marathons -- and eight Boston marathons -- and had an amazing life. But it all came down to: his conditions weren't ideal, but he didn't worry and lament all those things. He worked and knew where he wanted to go and what he wanted to create.

So where are you going? And what is it that you want to create? And would you be willing to take the energy that we put in worry and put it towards working to create a vision? And working towards that vision?

Stevie Wonder was born six weeks premature. And while he was in this little incubator, they put too much oxygen in, and somehow it detached his retinas. So he, after just a couple of weeks of being born,

he was blind for life. But he didn't worry about blindness. He didn't worry about any disadvantage. He just worked on the gift of music within him and worked towards being the star he wanted to be. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Interestingly, the name of the album that "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing" is on -- it's called "Inner Visions." And so he had to use this "Inner Vision" to see where he wanted to be. But even with blindness, inner vision will always lead you further. And the work that accompanies it will literally transform your life.

Instead of worrying, would you be willing to spend some time and think about: Where do I want to be in a year? What is my vision for two years or five years? What is it in me that I'm called to create or become or do or want to achieve?

Scripture says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." And I always flip it around to say, "Where there is a vision, people prosper." People progress. Amazing things happen when you know where you want to go; where you know what you want to achieve and experience and create.

Here's an Irish poem on worry:

In life, there are only two things to worry about.

You are either well or you're sick.

If you're well,

there's nothing to worry about.

But if you're sick, there are only two things to worry about:

You're either going to get well or your'e going to die.

If you get well,

There's nothing to worry about.

But if you die, there are two things to worry about.

You're either going to go heaven or you're going to go to hell.

If you go to heaven,

there's nothing to worry about.

And if you go to hell,

you'll be so busy shaking hands with your friends you won't have time to worry. [Congregants laugh]

Worry is a poor choice and a poor practice and a sign of our lack of mental discipline. You know, it is a sign that we aren't using the gift of the power of our mind and its creativity and its incredible abilities to attract and create greater things in our lives.

The best way to reduce the amount of worry: A) Is to practice mindfulness. By just using your breath a few times to calm and quiet your mind or do some journaling to release those worries from us. Secondly is: To trust that God loves you. You know, trust God with all your heart -- the same God that got you through all the things of the past and has blessed your life is the same God you could trust for whatever's worrying you in your life right now that it will work out. Third is: Develop a grateful mind. Just practice five things a day to be grateful for. To feel grateful, to see the good in your life. And finally: Focus on your vision. Spend more time working on your vision than worrying about your circumstances.

These are the four spiritual practices inspired by Stevie Wonders' "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing."

God bless you all!

“Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing” Song Lyrics

*Everybody's got a thing
But some don't know how to handle it
Always reachin' out in vain
Just takin' the things not worth having*

*But don't you worry 'bout a thing
Don't you worry 'bout a thing, mama
'Cause I'll be standin' on the side
When you check it out, oh*

*They say your style of life's a drag
And that you must go other places
Just don't you feel too bad
When you get fooled by smiling faces*

*Don't you worry 'bout a thing
Don't you worry 'bout a thing, baby
'Cause I'll be standing on the side
When you check it out
When you get off your trip
Don't you worry 'bout a thing
Don't you worry 'bout a thing
(Come on)*

*Everybody needs a change
A chance to check out the new, yeah
You're the only one who sees
The changes you take yourself through
Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh-oh-oh*

*Don't you worry 'bout a thing
Don't you worry 'bout a thing
Don't you worry 'bout a thing
Don't you worry 'bout a thing*

Oh

*Pa-pa, pa-pa-pa-pa
Pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa
Pa-pa, pa-pa-pa-pa
Pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa*

*Don't you worry 'bout a thing
Don't you worry 'bout a thing, mama
'Cause I'll be standin' on the side
When you check it out
When you get off your trip*

*Don't you worry 'bout a thing
Don't you worry 'bout a thing, mama
'Cause I'll be standin' on the side*

*When you check it out
Don't you worry*

*Don't you worry 'bout a thing, mama
'Cause I'll be standin', I'll be standin' for you
Oh-oh-ooh-oh-ooh
Oh-oh-oh
Don't you worry 'bout a thing*

Copyright 2024 Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center/Rev. Richard Maraj