

Getting at the “*Heart*” of Worry

⁵ *Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.*

⁶ *In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)*

Dear Friends in Christ,

After accepting the call back in 1996 to serve as mission developer here in Wake Forest, the staff of the Southeastern District, LCMS with whom I had served for five years held a fun-filled, farewell luncheon to celebrate our ministry together. They presented me with a new set of stoles, which I’m still using today. Then each staff member shared a story or anecdote which included a silly gift or a serious memento - one being this stuffed moose. My colleague then went on to say, “*I always appreciated the fact that during our staff meetings, you were always willing to ‘let the moose loose on the table!’*”

Now, I knew what it meant to deal with the “*elephant in the room,*” but this was my first intro to the phrase, “*let the moose loose on the table.*” So Carole explained it, affirming that whenever there were staff tensions, unspoken feelings, hidden agendas, unresolved questions, hesitant voices or conflicts over differing ideas, I always tried to call the group to accountability and honest conversation. It’s always been important in team ministry – and in life - to talk together and get to the “*heart*” of every opportunity, problem and challenge. There’s nothing, you see, that God’s people can’t manage and work on if they’re willing to talk about it and “*let the moose loose on the table!*”

My goal today is to do just that when it comes to the tension and imbalance of *worry and trust* in our lives as Christians. Focusing on Proverbs 3 and the other Scripture Lessons, I want to get to *the “heart of the matter”* when it comes to worry and anxiety, telling it like it is, stirring reflection, inviting repentance, taking you deeper into the Word of God where the Holy Spirit can spark new insight, changing your heart and life, your attitudes and actions by grace through faith in Christ! So, if you’re a “*worrier,*” let’s get at it and put the “*moose loose on the table!*”

First, let’s read together the text from Proverbs 3, printed in your bulletin:

*⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.*

*⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.*

Proverbs 3:5-6 English Standard Version (ESV)

For comparison and deeper wisdom, contrast that translation with this paraphrase from The Message:

*Trust GOD from the bottom of your heart;
don’t try to figure out everything on your own.*

*Listen for GOD’s voice in everything you do, everywhere you go;
he’s the one who will keep you on track.*

Don’t assume that you know it all.

Proverbs 3:5-7a; The Message (MSG)

So, what’s the core spiritual issue identified in Proverbs when it comes to “*worry?*” It’s a matter of “*trusting*” God with all our “*hearts!*” Sounds simple, doesn’t it? Trust God or self! Have God on your side, or go it alone? Is that really a choice that’s going to work out well for us? No, because our “*hearts*” are so often in the wrong place, focusing on what’s going wrong or not going our way or according to our time frame. God

knows, we worry, don't we? Get anxious? Have deep, legitimate concerns? Struggle with loss, illness, conflict, meanness, evil, death, brokenness, sin and heartache? I even found myself "*worrying*" this week if I was going to be able to say anything new compared to what Pastor Puls has already preached and taught! Now that's trivial to be sure, but troubles and trials, tension and turmoil are not, which is why we need to keep pressing in and holding ourselves accountable to the encouragement, invitation and command of God in His Word: "*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge him!*"

So, if I "*let the moose loose,*" how would the conversation go around your table at home, within your family circle, hanging out with friends, co-workers and classmates, sharing in a small group setting? When talking about life's challenges and setbacks; expressing your feelings from day to day, would people be able to discern "*which way you "lean" during the "lean" times?*" In other words, when dealing with the deep down and dirty, unfair, horrible, no good, very bad days, is your first response that you "*trust God with all your heart,*" or is your first response when life does you bad or people let you down to go negative, whining, griping and complaining, your mind consumed by your fears, anxieties, upsets and worries?

So, let's talk about it! Are you "*trusting God from the bottom of your heart*" or just trying to figure it out all on your own? Are you listening for God's voice speaking in the promises of His Word? Are you praying in the Name of Christ to the One whose death and resurrection declares you the "*victor*" rather than "*victim?*" What's your/my "*fail safe*" mindset when anxiety creeps in? Do we first "*lean*" towards faith, trust, calm, hope, courage, peace, confidence...or do we first "*lean*" toward pessimistic, angry, frustrated, fretful, upset,

worked-up, worrisome and out of control, trying to figure it out or fix everything on our own, rather than “*trusting God with all our hearts...in all of our ways?*”

Now, I would never minimize the tough stuff that brings worry, anxiety and fear; never would I minimize the inner battles of the mind which can so depress the spirit and overwhelm our souls, but the “*moose is loose on the table*” today and the Word of God is very clear, the prophet Jeremiah mincing no words: “*Cursed is the man [the person] who trusts in man [self]...whose heart turns away from the LORD. [They] are like a shrub in the desert...and dwell in the parched places of the wilderness. Blessed are they whose trust is in the Lord*”
Jeremiah 17:5-6 English Standard Version (ESV)

I’ve been to those locations before...and so have you. The wilderness and parched places, the “*lean times*” when we just feel like we can’t take any more or add anything else to our plates; when we’re at the end of our ropes, down in the dumps, feeling abandoned, lost, helpless and alone! So, which way do we “*lean*” during those “*lean*” times? What’s our “*go to*” faith mindset when wandering through the wildernesses of life? What’s the Biblical promise that soothes our souls and brings inner calm and peace? Oh, for the witness and confidence and faith like that of the Apostle Paul, writing from a prison cell, persecuted for proclaiming the name of Jesus, shipwrecked, stoned, ridiculed, misunderstood, shackled, whipped, and ultimately martyred for the faith, yet nonetheless declaring:

*I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.
I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound.
In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty
and hunger, abundance and need.
I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*
Philippians 4:10-13 English Standard Version (ESV)

Paul learned in his life and spiritual journey that he couldn't make it on his own; that he needed God's "*grace sufficient for every weakness,*" calling upon the mighty Name of Jesus, believing that "*in any and every circumstance: [no matter the worry, fear, anxiety, challenge], that he "could do all things THROUGH CHRIST who strengthens him!"*" The Apostle was claiming by faith, as we all must do, the very promise Jesus made to His disciples:

"The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance [into your heart!] all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

John 14:25-27 English Standard Version (ESV)

There, my friends, is the starting and ending point for dealing with worry. It's a matter of the "*heart!*" It's a faith realization that the heart of Jesus is always centered on those whom He came to love, forgive and save from sin and death. Every time we look at the Cross we are reminded and invited by the Holy Spirit to remember the promise of Jesus, the Son of God, Crucified, Risen, Ascended and Coming Again: "*I will be with you...in all things...in all your ways...always!*" "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding.*"

So, the next time you find yourself worrying too much and trusting God less, I invite you to unleash the "*moose loose on the table*" and pick up your Bible. Read God's promises! Come to this table! Receive God's pardon and peace! Trust, overcome, persevere and believe with all your heart that in "*any and all circumstances, you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you!*"

Will you pray with me...AMEN.