

January 11, 2015
Overwhelmed
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Matthew 6:25-34

Opening words: John H. Johnson once said, “*Dream small dreams. If you make them too big, you get overwhelmed and you don’t do anything. If you make small goals and accomplish them, it gives you the confidence to go on to higher goals.*” I am not so sure how I feel about that quote. However, it does lead to an interesting question. When was the last time you were overwhelmed?

I began thinking about this sermon series about a month ago. It is amazing what you can hear, if you listen. In one way or another, people told me they are overwhelmed by some aspect of their life. Some were overwhelmed by their own expectations. No one wants to be failure. Some were overwhelmed by financial concerns. No one wants to go bankrupt. Others were overwhelmed by responsibility. Is anyone here carrying their world on their shoulders? Others were overwhelmed with concern for loved ones. Others were overwhelmed with the fear of loneliness. What overwhelms you?

Today, I begin a new six-part sermon series called *Overwhelmed*. By the time we are done, I am going to look at what the Bible says about those topics. I hope to give you some practical advice as you live out the faith. I wrote this sermon series for you. However, it is starting to speak to me. Our Gospel lesson for today comes from Matthew 6:25-34. Let me call this message, *Overwhelmed*.

Matthew 6:25-34 ²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? ²⁸ “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

We begin our study in the Gospel of Matthew. The early church fathers stood united in their belief that the author of this Gospel was Matthew, one the twelve disciples. He wrote it about the year 50 AD to prove to his own people, the Jews, that Jesus was the

Messiah. We are looking at part of the sixth chapter. The words are just a small section of the Sermon on the Mount.

The world has changed a great deal since Jesus's time. However, certain things remain the same. For example, people have always worried. In the text for today, Jesus tells them (and us) to stop worrying. We should stop worrying about food and drink. We should stop worrying about the clothes we wear. We should stop worrying about those things because those things really don't matter. I have said it a million times. The only things worth worrying about are those things that matter in one hundred years. What matters in one hundred years? The only thing that matters in one hundred years is Jesus. Verse 33 is the key verse in the entire reading. It says *"But first seek his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you."* Jesus wants us to stop worrying, because our worries distract us from what really matters, God. Do your worries distract you from God? The answer is, "Yes." If you have ever been overwhelmed with worry, say, **"Amen!"**

USA Today reported sometime back on their findings on worry. They asked people what was the primary source of their greatest worry. This is what they found:

1. 36% work
2. 22% money
3. 10% children
4. 7% health
5. 5% marriage
6. 5% parents
7. 5% said they have no stress at all
8. 19% said they have little stress

What do you worry about? What situation keeps you up late at night overwhelmed? That is the question I have asked a variety of people in my life over the last few weeks. There was no hesitation in their answers. Everyone answered immediately and with clarity. The answers changed depending on gender and age. However, one thing is clear, everyone worries and occasionally feels overwhelmed. This is my partial list:

1. Money
2. Health
3. Professional Success
4. Loved Ones
5. Public Image
6. Loneliness
7. Church
8. Future
9. Death
10. The World (someone told me they worry about the spread of ISIS)

I could go on but I won't. Is your greatest worry on my list, or did I miss it? If you have ever worried, then this scripture lesson is for you.

My goal this morning is not to help you eliminate the worries from your life. That is impossible. My goal is to help you control the worries in your life through knowledge. That is possible. Our problems generally fall into three categories. Some problems are universal. They are so big we have no influence on them. The best we can do is **shed** them by turning them over to God. Most people have so-called social problems. They are problems we have that others have experienced in the past. People who are experiencing social problems join support groups or talk to others to gain both insight and strength. The best we can do with social problems is **share** them. Some people have personal problems. They are the most difficult problems, because they are created by making some poor decision. The only option you have is to **shoulder** them. Remember, my goal is to help you control and understand your problems so you can spend more time with what really matters in life, Jesus! If you are ready to begin, say, **"Amen!"** These points are not original. They came from Jerry Shirley of the Grace Baptist Church in Decatur, Illinois.

Shed

Since Wednesday, the internet and news outlets have been filled with the story of the terrorist shooting in France. Unless you have been living in a hole, you know the story. Masked men walked into a French news magazine armed with AK-47s. When the shooting was over, 12 people were dead, including the editor and two police officers. A massive manhunt followed. The question is always, "Why?" The answer is clear and disturbing. The magazine had published a cartoon of the Muslim Prophet Muhammad. That story is a sad commentary of our time. That story is not isolated. Our world is filled with so many complex problems. They are coming from every continent. Some grab the headlines. Others are like a growing cancer. It is overwhelming. This is the truth. There is nothing you can do about any of those universal problems as an individual. However, it is not just true of international problems. Sometimes we also have very little influence over personal problems.

I have a wonderful friend who has served the church for years. She is one of my favorite people in the world. I call her every day when I am walking Macy, my beagle. We talk about local church issues and things happening around the Annual Conference. Once in a while we talk about personal issues. One day she started talking about her great granddaughter. She said, "Russ, I worry about that little girl's future. She is inheriting an ugly world." I said, "Kay, don't worry about her future. God will be there for her as he has been here for us. It is out of your control."

Some problems are Universal. What problems do you have that are out of your control? What problems do you have that you need to shed? What overwhelming problems keep you up at night? Do yourself a favor. Recognize your human limitations and trust God. Do you remember the words from the psalter lesson? *Cast your care upon God because the Lord cares for you.* (Psalm 55:22) Henry Ford must have known that scripture. He once said, *"I believe God is managing affairs and that He doesn't need any advice from me. With God in charge, I believe everything will work out for the best in the end."*

So what is there to worry about?" If you need to shed a problem or two, say, "Amen!"

Shared

In 1935, Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith created a new organization called Alcoholics Anonymous. Their goal was simple. They wanted to stay sober and help other people stay sober. They developed a Twelve Step program of spiritual and character development. I don't know why it took until 1935. Alcoholism has been a problem in our world for a long time. However, Wilson and Smith recognized something new. They knew the organization's success depended on alcoholics supporting other alcoholics. Countless AA groups meet around this community all the time because it is a 24-hour-a-day battle. We have a group that meets here at Western Reserve every Monday. I am so proud of them because they are simply trying to be better people. They will tell you, people need people. It isn't just true of alcoholics, but it true for everyone. People need people.

Some problems are social problems. They are problems that every single person has sometime in life. Everyone here has experienced the death of a loved one. Everyone has had to face their own mortality. Many have had to live through a mistaken marriage or a life threatening disease. It is at those moments that others can help you. There seems to be a support group for everything. Some problems need to be shared. It may be in the form of an organized group, or it may be the listening ear of a close uncritical friend. Sometimes we need other people. Who do you share your problems with? God designed us to live in community. That is why the church is so great! And all of God's people said, "Amen!"

Shouldered

Several years ago, the St. Louis Dispatch published an article about murderers. They said murderers become murderers for two reasons. First, their birth was difficult. Second, they were rejected by their mothers. I guess, if they would have had an easy birth or a loving mother then they would have become productive citizens. That study drives me crazy. I am tired of people making excuses for their poor behavior. Maybe they became murderers because they made a poor choice?

Some problems are personal problems. You made a poor decision and now you have to live with the consequences. You cashed in your retirement funds to buy an RV. You drank too much at the Christmas party and got caught on the way home. You cheated on your spouse and got caught. Those are personal problems that you created by a poor decision. You only have one option, shoulder it! What personal problem are you trying to resolve right now? And all of God's people said, "Amen!"

I love the story of the old Chinese woman who was consumed with self-pity. She was lost in a sea of depression over the loss of her son. She went to a wise man for help. He told her that relief was possible. All she had to do was go to the home that did not have any problems and take a single mustard seed from it. She should return it to the

wise man, who would plant that seed. Then, her son would be returned. She left the wise man full of hope, but returned a month later dejected. She had failed in her task to find a mustard seed because she failed to find a home without problems. Everyone does not have wealth, but everyone does have problems. Everyone gets overwhelmed.

So let me end with the question I have asked everyone else in my life. Why not you? What do you worry about? What overwhelms you late at night? Is it your health? Is it your personal finances? Is it your loved ones or some world event? Let's be honest. We cannot eliminate all the worries in our lives, but we can control them. How many of your problems do you need to shed? Admit your human limitations and trust God. How many of your problems do you need to share? People need people. How many of your problems do you need to shoulder? What problems have you created yourself? English philosopher John Locke once said, "*What worries you, master's you.*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"