

UPWARD CALL

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but this is my one aim: to forget everything that's behind, and to strain every nerve to go after what lies ahead. I press on toward the finish line, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God

IN KING JESUS.

(Philippians 3:13-14)

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Worries of Life—“Be on Guard”

"Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the **worries of life**, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap; for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. "But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man." (Luke 21:34-36 NASB [bold italic added])

Each night, it is not unusual for my wife and I to ask each other how we are doing. Well, one night she asked this and, frankly, I was not doing so well. Actually, I told her I was in a "bad mood." She asked me why, a question to which I really had no answer. When I woke up the next morning, I asked the Lord if He had a word for me. So, at 6:04 am, I heard: **Be on guard**. With this word, I realized what was bugging me, and the Lord was telling me. It is called **the worries of life**, something we Christians are told not to have, but we seem to osmose to anyway, at least I do. But there is good news in this. As my good friend, my pancake-eating buddy, keeps telling me, God is not worried. If we can just keep this perspective, we will discover that we don't need to fall into the trap of worry either. After all, God is sovereign, and He has all things in His control, and He is working out His grand plan to achieve His ultimate purpose of being all in all through His Son.

Now, having said this, allow me to embarrass myself by recounting my day.

The first thing that happened is that one of the bulbs of the front headlight on our car burned out, so we had to drive at night with the high beams on in order for my aging eyes to see the road. You would think this was not such a big deal, since this happens at least once a year because the lights are set to be on when the car is running, and they tend to burn out sooner than later. The problem for me is that I dread replacing these lights on my own. I have done it many times and each time it seems not to go so well, giving me the sense of dread when the time comes to repeat the ritual of self-inflicted wounds. I say *self-inflicted* because, almost without fail, whenever I lift the hood of the car and just stick my hands into the engine compartment, something in there decides to attack my hand and draw blood. This is not an unusual happening for me; I can pick up a hammer or screwdriver and within minutes draw blood due to some unidentified source that seems to be lurking out there in the world of mechanics. Just the other day, I was using my new battery-operated chain saw; just enough power to do small jobs but not enough to get me into too much trouble. So I thought, until I managed to nick my chin with it resulting in blood literally running down my chin. Don't ask how I did it; but I will tell you, thank the Lord, the saw was not running at the time. Perhaps, this is why I prefer to write; to date my computer or keyboard has not found a way to cut me.

Well, back to replacing the bulb. I decided to put my fears behind me and opened the hood of the car. As I did, I began repeating over and over: *Lord, we can do this!* I reached in and pulled out a bulb and began to replace it when I realized I had removed the wrong bulb; it was the high beam bulb that was working just fine. I sighed, *Ugh! How stupid can I get?* So, I proceeded to put the good bulb back in place, but then a part fell out and I had to go searching for it. All the while, I kept repeating: *Lord, we can do this.* That I figured out where the fallen part belonged and how to get it back in place was a victory for me. Many years ago, I restored portions of my 1968 Mustang. When I was done, I had a box of leftover nuts and bolts and other parts that I had no idea where they came from or what purpose they served. I never made an attempt to find a home for them either. The good news is that the car served me well for many years in spite of my mechanical lack. Come to think of it, the Lord must have been keeping an eye on me; back then, I think my chant was: *I can do this.* Chalk that up to youth. But I digress again. Back to the bulb; much to my surprise, I replaced the bulb in record time with no blood; my hands didn't even get dirty. *Lord, thank You; we did this!*

You would think that this settled my mood and I was ok, but not so fast. As I was checking the light to make sure it worked, which it did, I began listening to the engine and something didn't sound quite right. I know the car and its every noise; this one sounds like something is not very happy since it is rumbling, perhaps grumbling. Maybe it is a reflection of its owner? This is yet to be resolved, but not by me; to the shop you go, but that is for another day.

However, the day was not done. Some channels on our television have not been working. Since I had installed the cable for this particular set, a job that did draw blood, I figured my non-mechanical skills had caught up to me once again. I was particularly proud of that job. I had to run a cable from a splitter through the attic and down a wall. I was amazed at my skills, in spite of the blood. I had kept promising my wife that I would check it out but went to bed with an unfulfilled promise. On top of this, the refrigerator, specifically the in-door water dispenser, decided to freeze up so water would not flow. This I know how to fix, and generally without self-inflicted wounds. At any rate, all of these seemingly little things of life, along with other embarrassing things I do not care to share to highlight my "worried, bad-mood Christian" status, were weighing on me when I went to bed; thus, my bad mood. Sort of reminds me of Jonah: *Do you have a good reason* (i.e., for being in a bad mood)? Of course not! The spiritual thing to say is that these are momentary light (very light) afflictions, so get a grip on it. Yes; but you tell that to the car, the cable, the refrigerator, and the dozen or so other things that are bugging me that I refuse to put out there to expose myself any more than I have already.

To make the story short, I woke up this morning and the Lord gave me this word to be on guard for the worries of life. I set a heater before the refrigerator to thaw the frozen water line. While I waited for this miracle to occur, I decided to tackle the cable problem. I opened the panel behind which sat the splitter and moved cables around. Lo and behold, the television is now working just fine. Not sure what I did, but whatever it was, it worked. Just as this was fixed, I heard the refrigerator make a popping sound and water released from the frozen line. *Lord, we can do this! Yes!!*

So, now I am in a good mood. Well at least right now, I am—not sure this won't change if the car's grumbling turns for the worse. Maybe I should start worrying about this now. What if this? What if that? What am I going to do about whatever it is that is going to happen that I have no control over or no clue as to what and when it might happen? Worrying about if and what takes a lot of energy.

Perhaps this is the American way. Do you realize that Americans have much to worry about? If you don't think so, then you are not paying attention to all the advertisements out there that keep telling us ad nauseam all the things that can and do go wrong in our lives and in our bodies that need help by someone or something. Did you know that you are going to die if you have no health insurance? Got news for you; you are going to die with health insurance. What about all those drugs we need to be asking our doctor about that will save us? You know, all those drugs with weird names that have a dozen side-effects, including death. So, the ads tell us we need these drugs to treat our symptoms (by the way, not the underlying cause); but in treating the symptoms, we might die. What could be more effective in eliminating symptoms than to kill the patient? Come to think of it; isn't this hidden somewhere in the Affordable Health Care Act? To the list of worries, we could add the incessant reminders we need affordable insurance coverage for everything in life (e.g., life, funerals, cars, identity theft, pets, etc.). If we don't have these things, boy, we really need to worry. But then there is another worry; if we file a claim with an insurance company, our rates might go up. In addition, what about all those things the ads convinced us to buy that we didn't really need in the first place so that we could add them to all the treasures (*aka* junk) in our garages, attics, and closets that we didn't need either? How about worrying that the house is too small for all this stuff? What if something happens and we lose it all? Now, that's a lot to worry about! And so, the list goes on and on and on of things we need to worry about. What's in *your* worry?

Dear people, a day is coming that will reveal the foolishness of our present worries. If we cannot deal with these trivial and insignificant things of life *now*, how will we be ready to stand before the Son of Man *then*? Let us be on guard; let us guard against the worries of life. GOD'S NOT WORRIED! Now, that puts me in a good mood.