

IN THE MARGINS: Worry vs. overthinking – finding freedom in Christ

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Editor

We've all been there – lying awake at night, mind racing with what-ifs. Sometimes we worry, and sometimes we overthink. But what's the difference? More importantly, what does God say about these struggles? Let's dive in and see if we can make sense of these two mental habits – and discover the peace God offers us in the process.

Worry and Overthinking: How Are They Alike?

Worry and overthinking share a lot of similarities. Both happen when our minds get stuck in a loop of anxious thoughts. They thrive on uncertainty, make us feel paralyzed, and distract us from living in the present moment.

Worry tends to focus on *fear of what could happen* – we dwell on potential problems and try to predict every outcome. Overthinking, on the other hand, often involves a hyper-focus on *past events* or decisions, analyzing them from every angle in hopes of gaining control. In both cases, we get stuck in a cycle that pulls us away from trusting God.

Jesus addresses worry directly in Matthew 6:25-34 (ESV):

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on... But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

Jesus isn't saying that life will be free from challenges – He's reminding us that God has already made provision for

every need. Worry doesn't add to our lives; it takes from it. Similarly, overthinking convinces us that if we replay situations in our heads enough times, we'll find a way to fix or control them. But the truth is, God invites us to let go, even when we don't have all the answers.

Where They Differ: The Direction of Our Thoughts

While worry focuses on *future unknowns*, overthinking likes to *rehash the past*. Worry asks, "What if things go wrong?" Overthinking asks, "What should I have done differently?" Both keep us from experiencing peace in the present moment.

Here's the thing: God doesn't dwell in the past or the future. He meets us right here, right now. When we obsess over tomorrow or yesterday, we miss what God is doing in the moment.

The Apostle Paul speaks to this in Philippians 4:6-7 (ESV):
"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Notice how Paul links prayer with thanksgiving. Gratitude is an antidote to both worry and overthinking – it roots us in the present and shifts our focus back to God's faithfulness.

A Message of Hope: You're Not Alone in This

It's easy to feel like you're the only one stuck in your thoughts, but you're not. The Bible is filled with stories of people just like us – people who worried, overthought, and even doubted God. Think of Moses, who feared leading Israel out of Egypt, or Martha, who got caught up in worries while Jesus was in her home. Yet God met each of them where they were, offering grace and direction.

The same is true for us. 1 Peter 5:7 (ESV) reminds us:
“Cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”

This verse is such a beautiful promise. God is not asking us to manage our worries or overthinking alone. He’s inviting us to hand them over to Him. Even if you have to cast your cares a thousand times a day, His care for you never runs out.

Practical Steps for Freedom

If worry and overthinking have been weighing you down, here are a few simple things you can try:

1. **Pray Immediately** – When anxious thoughts creep in, pause and pray. Even a quick, “Lord, help me trust You,” can shift your focus.
2. **Journal Your Thoughts** – Writing down your worries can help you release them and see them more clearly.
3. **Practice Gratitude** – Make a list of things you’re grateful for. Gratitude shifts your heart from fear to trust.
4. **Get Moving** – Sometimes our minds need a break. A walk or a change of scenery can help quiet racing thoughts.
5. **Meditate on Scripture** – Memorize verses that speak to God’s peace and faithfulness, like Isaiah 26:3: *“You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.”*

The Final Word: Trusting the One Who Holds It All

Worry and overthinking are part of being human, but they don’t have to control us. The enemy would love for us to stay trapped in cycles of fear and doubt. But God offers us a better way – a way of trust, peace, and freedom.

You don’t have to have everything figured out to experience God’s peace. The key is trusting the One who already knows the beginning and the end. As Proverbs 3:5-6 reminds us:

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”

So the next time your thoughts start running wild, take a deep breath and remember: God is with you in this moment. You don't have to fight your battles alone – He's already working behind the scenes, and His peace is only a prayer away.