

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: Worrier or Warrior?

Lesson: Luke 10:38-42

³⁸ As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

⁴¹ "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Distraction caused by worry and anxiety has always been a part of my life. I confess to having been a professional *worrier*. And don't get me wrong—though the pronunciation is similar, I'm not saying I was a *warrior*. No, I've been a professional *worrier*.

Because I've always been full of worry, I've constantly paid attention to every detail, planned out everything I need to do, and in my mind, I'm always thinking ahead—what to do next, and what comes after that. I prepare for what I can control, worry about what I can't, and sometimes I even worry in my dreams, not just when I'm awake. Occasionally, I have nightmares about preaching without any preparation, completely flustered. I'm sure some of you have had similar dreams, haven't you?

Let me confess one more thing: recently, I've been reminded of just how much of a worrier I am. My wife and I get blood tests once a year to check on our health. I thought, being relatively young, I wouldn't have any serious issues. But while the results weren't dire, I was told that if I don't start managing my diet and exercising regularly now, things could become serious in ten years. When I compared my blood test results from the past few years, I could clearly see the numbers creeping up. I felt a sense of urgency.

So, after my parents returned to Korea, my wife and I resolved to manage our diet, cut out sugar, and no matter what, run or briskly walk for at least 30 minutes every day. We put our plan into action. We went to the park daily and ran. Back when I was in the Korean Army years ago, I was used to running two miles, but doing it again after so long wasn't easy. Still, running every day helped relieve stress,

improved my sleep, and made me feel refreshed in the morning. That was the week before I attended the North Central Jurisdiction Korean Clergy Conference.

Looking back, I think I might have felt a slight pain in my lower abdomen at the time, but it was so faint I brushed it off as temporary and didn't take it seriously.

Then I attended the conference. My original plan was to keep running at a nearby park during the conference whenever I had time. But by the second day, the pain had worsened to the point where I could no longer ignore it. So, belatedly, I visited urgent care. The doctor ran some tests, pressed on the painful area, and suspected a hernia. That was the first time I learned what a hernia was. The next day, I had an ultrasound, and that evening, the doctor confirmed the diagnosis: it was indeed a hernia.

From that moment, my professional worrier instincts kicked back into high gear. During the conference, I worried about whether I'd make it home safely, whether I'd find a good surgeon, whether I'd be able to have surgery soon, and above all, how I'd cover the cost of the surgery. All kinds of worries swirled back and forth in my mind, relentlessly.

As I struggled to choose a hospital and a doctor amidst all these worries, I thought of the church members I've visited in hospitals over the years while pastoring here. I realized that many of you have likely faced similar challenges—choosing a hospital, feeling anxious, and wrestling with worry. Now that I'm facing surgery myself, I think I'm starting to understand a bit of what you've been through.

Amidst all my worries, anxieties, and doubts about whether I was making the right choice, I met a surgeon. Thankfully, I could tell he was experienced, which brought some relief. But at the same time, the reality that I was actually going to have surgery hit me, and my emotions became a tangled mess.

When I returned home and parked the car in the garage, I felt ashamed as both a pastor and a Christian. I remembered what I had said in a sermon exactly two weeks earlier: "When we face difficulties in life, we first worry, seek advice from those around us, consult experts, and only when the problem still isn't solved do we, as a last resort, turn to God in prayer. But Jesus was the opposite. He first went up to the mountain to pray all night, then taught people, fed the poor, and healed and cared for the sick."

I felt ashamed for two reasons. First, I wasn't living out what I had preached. Second, I realized that in the face of my difficulties and the resulting worries and anxieties, I had forgotten to trust Jesus and keep Him at the center of my life.

This difference, I believe, is exactly the difference between Martha and Mary in the story we read today.

This story is simple—it's not complicated. Jesus raised Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary, from the dead. As an expression of gratitude, Martha and Mary invited Jesus, His disciples, and others to their home. In today's terms, they threw a party. What do you need when you host a party? Lots of food. Let me tell you about Martha: she was a diligent and highly responsible woman. As the host, she wanted to serve delicious food to everyone. In her efforts to prepare and serve the food, she was busy—frantic, even. Behind her busyness was a desire to make the party a success, but also likely a worry about ensuring there was enough food served on time. So, in the midst of all this busyness, she couldn't understand why Mary wasn't helping her and was instead sitting at Jesus' feet, listening to Him. It probably even made her angry.

I'm sure some of you can deeply relate to Martha's feelings. Any Marthas out there? Raise your hands! I relate to Martha too, because I've been a Martha myself. From Martha's perspective, neither Mary nor Jesus, who seemed to approve of her, made any sense. Some of you Marthas might even feel uncomfortable reading this story.

At first, when I read this story, I thought it was saying that sitting and listening to Jesus' words is more valuable than the labor of serving. But after reading it multiple times, I realized that's not the point. This story isn't saying that Martha's service was worthless. It's about what fills the center of Martha's life. If Martha's service had been centered on Jesus Christ rather than worry, anxiety, and frustration, Jesus would have seen her heart and praised her just as He did Mary.

But Jesus already knew that Martha's life was centered more on her responsibilities as a host, her worries, and her anxieties than on Him. That's why He praised Mary, who had made Jesus the priority and center of her life.

As a professional worrier who's done more than my fair share of worrying, let me ask you this: does worrying and fretting make those worries go away? From my recent experience, absolutely not. The more I worried, the more worries piled up, one after another, in an endless cycle. Isn't it ironic? We worry because we're

worried, but instead of decreasing, our worries just keep growing and never seem to end.

As you all know, we can't predict or prepare for everything in life. A few weeks ago, one of our church members shared how they couldn't understand why a sudden illness had struck them. It's stuck with me. I have a hernia now, and I have no idea why it happened to me so suddenly. It makes no sense. We don't know which hospital or doctor is the best choice. We don't know what unexpected things might happen during or after surgery. All of these things are beyond our control.

So, I've decided to let it all go. I've done everything I can within my power—I've researched thoroughly, found an experienced surgeon, and scheduled the surgery. That's the best I can do. For everything beyond my control, I've chosen not to worry, not to fret, but to let go, trust God, and leave it all in His hands.

As I've continued to read and reflect on the story of Martha and Mary, I believe it's telling us there are two ways to live: a life as a professional worrier, trembling in fear and doubt within the cycle of worry and anxiety, or a life as a warrior, doing our best but trusting in God—who works all things together for good—for the things beyond our control.

When worry and anxiety distract us from focusing on Jesus, let's take a deep breath, exhale, listen, focus, pray, and sit at the feet of Jesus, making Him the center of our lives in this moment, and this moment, and this moment. Amen.