

Letting Go of Joy Stealers

Presented by Mary Lowman

Air Dates: July 22-26, 2024

Day One

There is a verse in Song of Songs that I want to consider this week:

Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom (Song of Songs 2:15).

I want to talk about the “little foxes” in our lives—the things that may seem insignificant when in reality they are stealing our joy and keeping us from God’s peace. For example, harboring hurt feelings is a common “little fox” that is very harmful.

Why do we hang on to hurt feelings so long, since we heap unhappiness on our own heads? We certainly don’t get any revenge on our offenders by hanging on to hurt feelings. If you think a pity party will relieve some of your hurt, think again! The more you feel sorry for yourself, the more you will try to find comfort in self-pity—it’s a vicious cycle that never works!

Years ago, God began to reveal to me how hooked I was on pity parties. And for the first time I realized God sees it as a sin. Whether you or I have a legitimate complaint, wallowing in self-pity, nurturing our hurt feelings is simply wrong.

I recognize some hurts may indeed require some time and help for healing. But just think about the little things that hurt your feelings in your everyday life. Like when a person ignores you, a friend speaks to you in an unfriendly way, a relative didn’t call when she knew you were not feeling well, when your boss didn’t give you credit for an important project, or your husband didn’t notice your new hairdo. These are all little foxes that ruin your attitude and steal your joy.

How do you let go of these little foxes? Well, the hurt is in your mind, your thoughts, so you have to bring those hurtful thoughts into captivity, as the Bible says, and refuse to let your thoughts go there. Replace those thoughts with good ones—thankful thoughts, praising thoughts.

Easily hurt feelings produce pity parties, and they are pitiful. If this is one of your little foxes, make it a matter of regular prayer and allow the Holy Spirit to remind you to think about good things and not those little hurt feelings you tend to nurture.

Day Two

What are the little foxes that are ruining your joy and causing you pain? I’m focusing on the small hurtful things that we allow to ruin our days and steal our joy. Solomon wrote:

Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom (Song of Songs 2:15).

We want to catch those little foxes and get them out of our lives. Now we know fear is one of the enemy's favorite weapons and we are all vulnerable to what I call "petty fears." Let's address a few of those smaller ones, those joy-stealing fears that are truly unnecessary.

Fear of a Dreaded Outcome: These are the fears that something bad just might happen, so to avoid that possibility we limit our activities and set unnecessary boundaries in our lives. These fears interfere with your everyday life, limit where you go and what you do, and can keep you from experiences that are often enriching and delightful.

Fear of Change: "That's the way we've always done it" can be a verbal cover-up for petty fear. Change can truly bring petty fears out of the closet!

And there are lots more. Getting over petty fears doesn't mean you get rid of the emotion that accompanies these fears. It means you go forward despite them:

- You get on that airplane with your knees knocking, but you get on.
- You say, "Sure, I'll try" when asked to step out of your comfort zone.
- You agree to a change in procedures, even though you wonder how you'll ever learn that new software.

Once you take a first courageous step to overcome a fear, you begin to see new avenues of interest, new opportunities, and things to learn and do that were hidden to you before. And conquering fear in one area gives you strength to tackle other areas of fear.

Other petty fears can plague us, so if you recognize a little fox you need to get rid of, like everything else, it is done through prayer and God's Word.

Day Three

I'm sure you recognize the most useless and unproductive thing most of us do very often is to worry, and yet we worry. I'm talking about the little things—the little foxes—that often steal our joy and make us miserable.

How do we let go of worrying? Is it really possible to come to a place where we truly don't waste time worrying? After all, life is full of worrying things, and are we supposed to be cavalier and nonchalant, as though those things don't bother us at all?

Jesus fully understands our propensity to worry, and he addressed it strongly in his Sermon on the Mount. Basically, he said don't worry about your life—what you eat, what you wear, or where you will live—because your heavenly Father promises to provide what you need. Jesus said,

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself (Matthew 6:34).

Worrying is totally worthless, but even more than that, worrying is faithless! I just don't think we often put worry into the category of sin, do we? We worry and worry and never think to apologize to God and repent of this sin of worrying. Paul wrote,

Everything that does not come from faith is sin (Romans 14:23b).

Worrying does not come from faith. Therefore, continually worrying about anything is a sin. Worrying can become addictive. You can get into such a rut of worrying that you are in worry mode most all the time. If you truly want to get over worrying, the first thing you need to do is to confess your worrying sins. What do you worry about most? Here are some common ones:

- Paying the bills
- Finding a cure for a health issue
- Finding a job
- Finding a mate
- Trying to control something or someone
- How to control your children/mate/siblings/parents
- How will you be able to retire

What is on your list? I encourage you to ask God to forgive you for anything you worry about and be specific. As you learn you can, by God's grace, get rid of that little fox, it will encourage you to continue to let go of worrying.

Day Four

What is false guilt? Do you know how to recognize it? I'm talking about the little foxes that can ruin our attitudes and cause harm to our Christian witness. And pretty high on that list for many of us is false guilt.

False guilt is a guilt we impose upon ourselves. We allow it to take root in our minds, to start causing all kinds of bad feelings, to feed us all kinds of lies, which we begin to believe. Here are some examples of it:

- What we feel when we keep remembering what God has forgiven and forgotten!
- What we feel when someone appears to be disappointed in us.
- What we feel when we have to say no.
- What we feel when we try to please people and fail.
- What we feel when we allow others to dictate what and who we should be.
- What we feel when we are unfairly accused of something.

And believe me, there are many more. Notice each one begins with what we feel. It's a feeling—not grounded in truth—but nonetheless strong and real. One of the first signs you are dealing with false guilt is you can't seem to pinpoint exactly why you feel guilty. If you had to state why you feel guilty, you'd say things like, "Well, I just never seem to get it right," or "She's always telling me that I need to improve" or "I just can't seem to make anyone happy."

Perhaps the false guilt we suffer from the most is guilt over our past. We tend to go back and remember the sins of the past, and even though they are forgiven, and God remembers them no longer, we don't seem to be able to purge our memory. Is that true of you?

The first and most important step in learning to manage false guilt is to recognize it as false. The second step is to replace wrong thinking with right thinking. You start praising the Lord, singing a good song, or reciting all your blessings. Refuse to allow the thoughts of false guilt to have a place in your mind. And the more you do this, the less false guilt you'll have to deal with. You can have victory over this little fox through prayer and bringing your thoughts under control. Life is so much nicer when you get rid of false guilt.

Day Five

Wise Solomon wrote,

Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom (Song of Songs 2:15).

What are the little foxes that ruin your days and attitudes and rob you of joy and peace? We've looked at four of these little foxes this week: hurt feelings, petty fears, worrying, and false guilt. The final one today is the fear of trusting God.

I spent many years "doing my own thing," as we say, not obedient to God's voice in my life. As I look back on that time, I now recognize the underlying problem as a fear of trusting God with control of my life. I was actually fearful of allowing the God of the universe to run my show. How I could have been so stupid for so long?

Are you hanging on to the controls of your life, afraid to trust God, as if to say you know what's better for you than God does? Of course, you don't think those thoughts; I didn't either. I just lived my life that way. Maybe you are, too. If you have been fearful of trusting God, I pray you will recognize it and see how foolish and sinful it is to fear trusting God.

I remember well the sleepless night when I finally said, "God, I'll trust you." It became clear to me he couldn't possibly do a worse job at running my life than I was doing! That was the beginning of learning to trust God. In the intervening years, I have learned to trust him more and more, and know the joy and peace of his fellowship. And I testify to you today that God is trustworthy.

The fear of trusting God is not such a little fox that ruins our lives. It is a big one, and I pray you'll determine to get to know God better and better, because when you do, you will trust him and you'll gladly let go of the controls to a God with all power, who loves you and wants only the best for you.