

**The Naked Truth About Ourselves is:
We Worry too Much. #1
March 22, 2009**

(Sermon notes are a transcript from the sermon with only minor editing, retaining the conversational style.)

This morning we are starting a new series entitled: *The Naked Truth About Ourselves*.

The story that I want to read to you this morning is taken from the Book of **Genesis chapter 3:8-10**

8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

9 But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

10 He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

Ever since that moment we have been trying to cover ourselves. Of course I believe that this passage means more than being naked physically. But from the beginning of time we have done everything possible to hide/cover ourselves emotionally and spiritually. We don't like to look at ourselves with a magnifying glass because it reveals ugly things about us that we don't want to take a look at.

I pray that throughout this series you will have the courage to cross-examine yourselves and dig below the surface.

A.A. Step 4:

"Make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."

This morning the first Naked Truth about ourselves is this: we simply worry too much. We are all filled with anxiety.

The late **Erma Bombeck** who use to write humorous newspaper columns wrote this piece about a little boy named Donald who was going to go to school for the very first time. The night before little Donald was filled with anxiety.

Listen to what Donald said. *"My name is Donald. I don't know anything. I have new underwear, a loose tooth, and I didn't sleep last night because I'm worried. What if a bell rings and a man yells, 'Where do you belong,' and I don't know? What if the trays in the cafeteria are too tall for me to reach? What if my loose tooth comes out when we have our heads down and are supposed to be quiet? Am I supposed to bleed quietly? What if I splash water on my name tag and my name disappears and no one knows who I am?"*

The fact is there is a little Donald inside of each of us. We are scared about the economy. We are scared about our health. We are scared about our children. We are scared about.....You fill in the blank.

John Ortberg writes, *Anxiety is so spiritually toxic that the command to not be afraid or anxious or fearful is the most frequently repeated command in the Bible. Anxiety cuts us off from the flow of the Spirit like almost nothing else. It robs us of joy and paralyzes our ability to trust God.*

And he goes on to say: *Those living with uncontrolled anxiety mistakenly think they deserve the punishment or pain of a prolonged string of anxiety-producing thoughts or they live under the illusion that worry enhances the control factor. Anxiety can keep us from saying yes to God's callings on our lives. We need to learn to cast our anxiety on God and choose peace.*

Worry is an expression of fear and robs us of our full energy for living. Unfortunately we accept anxiety as norm in this high pressure society.

As one person writes:

*Don't worry if you worry,
Don't let it cause you pain;
It is vitally normal,
And absolutely sane.*

The fact is, worry robs me of life. Worry robs me of joy.

- * It makes me more self-preoccupied and less attentive to loving other people.
- * It makes temptations look attractive, because I want to do anything that will help me escape this inner pain.
- * It erodes my ability to feel grateful.
- * It increases my irritability.
- * It destroys my appetite for growth.

Anxiety will poison our relationships as a church, as a community, because when I'm anxious, my focus is on me. I can't really love others fully. And maybe worst of all, anxiety paralyzes my ability to trust God. When you study the Bible, more than any other factor, fear or anxiety is what keeps people from saying yes to God. God calls people. God challenges people to a great adventure. But more than anything else, anxiety is what causes them to say no. That's why God so often says, *Don't be afraid.*

The truth is we live in a world where anxiety is so epidemic that we don't even realize how deeply we carry it in our bodies. We all know that doctors agree that emotional stress can bring actual changes in the organs, glands, and tissues of the body. **Bio-feed-back** is telling us much

more in this field. It's not so much

What I'm eating as *What's eating me* that's getting me down.

When an **automobile breaks** down it is more often the fault of the driver than the fault of the machine. Engines today are tough and are made to stand a great deal. Engines can actually go a million miles. But the drivers of the car often lack the common sense or the discipline to change the oil and do daily maintenance. We all know that over a period of time, if the engine is not maintained, it's inevitable that the car will break down.

It is the same with the human body. It is made to stand a great deal of stress. But frequently the soul-mind, the driver of the body becomes consumed with anxiety/stress and the body gets sick and breaks down.

Doctors and psychiatrists tell us this over and over again. Fear, worry, and anxiety are among the forces that attack the soul-mind and bring about the breakdown of the body.

Now I don't want to be glib. I really don't, because I know that there are such things as anxiety disorders, and I know there are times when we are faced with a tremendous amount of stress and to say, *Don't worry, sounds too glib*. Today, let me share with you a few verses from Scripture and give you one or two golden nuggets that you can take home with you.

Paul makes it very clear in our passage.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7).

Paul commands his friends in Philippi not to be anxious for anything. That's a heavy statement to hear.

This word for **anxious**, that Paul uses is commonly used in other Greek literature. The word anxious used in those contexts means, and I'm quoting *"Those things that cause the person to lose sleep, from which refuge is sought in love or drink, the cares of this life which only death could end."*

One person defined anxiety as **a gap** between one's demands and one's resources, and when the demand level is up here and you feel that your resource level is down here, anxiety is that gap.

It's easy to be anxious and yet Paul says there is a prescription for anxiety. He asserts, *Are you anxious? Then ask God*. That's very simple and yet complex.

One commentator said that anxiety and prayer are more opposed to one another than fire and water.

I like the way a church sign said it, *"If your knees are knocking, kneel on them."*

That's the same kind of idea that Paul is expressing here.

Now it's important to remember the context, Paul is in prison writing to the church of Philippi. He is probably chained to a damp wall in a dark pit, and so it's very clear from the context that **perfect circumstances are not the clue**, they're not the key to freedom from anxiety. And that's important because we think, many times, like a kid with a boo-boo, "*Lord, if you'll just take this away I would be fine.*"

But the Lord is more interested than just a fix-it approach to anxiety. He wants us to **shift** our anxiety. **It's not a fix-it mentality we're after. It's a shift-it mentality that we're after.**

God's promise is that when we do shift our anxiety to God in prayer, the very peace of God will flood our soul and our mind. And when God's peace comes in, worry gets put into its proper perspective.

Did you know, according to the **National Bureau of Standards**, that a seven-city-square block area, if it was 100 feet deep with fog, that you can take that 100-foot, seven-block area of fog, that it could be condensed into less than a glass of water.

And that's a good metaphor for the way worry is. Stress fogs our mind, and the challenges that face us look a lot bigger than we think. If we really shift our anxiety to God it will be shown for what it really is, nothing more than a few drops of rain.

1. The first way to deal with anxiety is a Shift of Attitude.

High Ropes Course. (Myself, Honey Rock Camp)

John Ortberg tells a story when he was at Camp Paradise several years ago, it had several sections to their high ropes course. One was called *Jacob's Ladder*. One is called the *Leap of Faith*. The last one is called *The Screamer*.

John Ortberg said, *Do you want to guess why it's called The Screamer*. He talks about his experience on being on the high ropes.

Any respectable camp would not dream of having someone up on high ropes without safety harnesses. The ropes and carabineers have the capability to hold several thousand pounds. No person even comes close to weighing that much. There's a 99.99% change that nothing will ever happen that will harm you.

Usually before the group goes up on the high ropes the staff will give a lecture of how strong the harnesses are and how the ropes that are attached could support tons of weight and how the carabineers are indestructible. You have no reason to worry up there. You are in more danger when you are in your car driving. Here's the interesting part. Nobody disputes the facts. Everybody

believes that they will be safe, that is while standing on the ground. But something happens when you get 15 - 20 feet off the ground. A person takes his eyes off that safety line and begins to look at the ground. Before you know it their knees begin to buckle. Their stomachs don't believe they're safe. And their armpits don't believe they're safe. Their glands don't believe they're safe. A person begins to think, *This is too high. This is not safe. I'm going to fall to the ground and be splattered like a bug.*

Their attitude has shifted from the safety of the ropes to the fear of falling.

Here's another interesting thing, if you were to look at a staff people who have worked the ropes hundreds of times, they don't show any fear. They are convinced down to the very core of their stomachs that these ropes are perfectly safe. They show no signs of fear or anxiety. They have absolute trust in those ropes despite how high they are. For the staff they have shifted their attitude from falling to the safety of the ropes.

Life is a ropes course. Yes, the events in our lives get a little shaky. This is an opportunity to lean on God and to shift your attitude not on the circumstances, but towards heaven. Learning to trust God fully, knowing that He will not let you go.

If you are in God's will, despite how high and how wobbly you might feel, it's the safest place to be. The safest place for the disciples when they were in that storm with Jesus while He was sleeping, was in that boat.

Usually when I find myself feeling great anxiety more times than not, one of the key problems is, I try to **control too many things** at the same time. There are the normal stresses of life, but God never intended for you to keep 5 or 6 plates spinning in the air like they do in the circus. We are to shift our focus on one thing at a time.

A **young pastor fresh out of seminary** came to his first church, preaching his first sermon. He only preached one sermon in his life, and that was in class, and he was scared and uptight.

Just as he went into the pulpit for his first service, Mrs. "X" came up to him and said. *"Preacher, Mrs. Jones is in the hospital. Now don't forget to see her this afternoon."* There he was with a sermon in one hand and Mrs. Jones in the other. As he got up to preach he kept remembering, *"Now don't you forget Sister Jones. Now don't you forget Sister Jones."* Instead of focusing on the sermon he was focused on Mrs. Jones and this left him in a drastic nervous state. In fact he developed a mental block trying to hold on to two things at the same time.

In his state of panic God spoke to him and said, *I'm not expecting you to preach and take care of Mrs. Jones at the same time. I'll take care of Mrs. Jones while your are preaching.*

God never intended for you to be multi-tasking and be carrying burdens that you were never

intended to carry. Focus on the one problem that confronts you today, not the problems of yesterday, nor the problems of tomorrow, but today.

Jesus makes that very clear in the Sermon on the Mount, This is how *The Message* translates verse 34 in chapter 6 of Matthew,

"Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, (Shift your attention to the immediate moment) and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes. The first way to deal with worry is to do an Attitude Shift.

2. The second thing that God calls us to do is an Action Shift.

I find myself filled with anxiety when I don't let go. We have all heard that phrase hundreds of times, *Let Go and Let God*.

Any of you ever go **bowling**? Here, I've got a bowling ball.

Have you ever watched what people do after they let go of the bowling ball? It's a fascinating thing because all people have their own kind of style when they walk up to that line that you're not allowed to cross. And then they let go of the ball. And what's really fun to watch is what they do after they let go of the ball.

They wave at it. They talk to it. They threaten it. Most of all, they contort their bodies. Did you ever watch this? People lean over to one side because it's going the wrong way. They start hopping on one foot. They hunch their shoulders up as if they had some kind of magic control over this object that is no longer in their hands.

Here's one of the secrets to fun-filled bowling. **Let it go!** Just let it go. Do all the things you can when it's in your hands. Get your footwork right. Bend your knees appropriately. Have a correct back swing. Look for the right release point. But when you let it go, just let it go—and realize that little ball is no longer in your control. So stop pretending that you're controlling it. Just wave goodbye to that little ball as it's going down the lane and say, *OK, God, it's up to you now.*

Bill Hybels put it like this. He said, *"When I have a concern, but that concern involves something that's not in my direct control right now ... it's something where I can't take further action or maybe it wouldn't be appropriate for me to do further action and I've done all that I can—then when it comes to my mind and I feel concern about it, I put it in God's trust bank. I just put it in the trust bank."*

You know how some people have **IN boxes and OUT boxes** on their desks? Put your anxieties in God's IN box, because you always have access to God's IN box. Just put it in God's trust bank and say,

All right, God. I've done what I think I ought to do about this concern; I want to put it out of my mind, so I'm giving it to you. I will cast my anxiety on you.

That's exactly what Peter says in **1 Peter 5:7**, Peter doesn't say that when you have anxious thoughts, you ought to beat yourself up for not having enough faith in God. He doesn't say that. He doesn't say that when you have anxious thoughts, you should try harder to have more faith. He says that when anxiety comes, pass that anxious thought right along to God.

Anxiety and worry are our way of trying to control something that feels very uncontrollable . When we are filled with anxiety, we are trying to grab control of something which is out of our control.

That famous verse in **1 Peter 5:7**, *Cast all your anxieties on Him, because he careth for you.* That word **CAST** comes from the verb *epiriptein*. *To throw upon.* **A word which suggests great effort.**

Common literature it was used like throwing a saddle on a horse. Or it's used for one wrestler, throwing one down, slamming another person down on the mat. To put a loose translation of that verse it can read,

Slam your worries on God because He cares about you.

Slam your worries about finances, job security, future, health, slam them all at the foot of Jesus.

Tyndale Commentary writes: To cast... *"It's a single decisive action of committal."* *Here are my worries Jesus. I'm tired of carrying them around. I am making a decisive decision to commit all my anxious to You. Period.*

The **Amplified Bible** translates **1 Peter 5:7** this way, *Casting the whole of your care all your anxieties, all your worries, all your concerns, once and for all on Him, for He cares for you affectionately and cares about you watchfully.*

The second point is simply to go from an attitude shift to an action shift. Let it go!

LET GO, AND LET GOD PRAYER

*Today I let go and I let God
Take charge of this life of mine.
Now in the dark corners of my soul,
His light is beginning to shine
All of the cares and worries that
I have carried around so long
He has lifted them from my shoulders,
and filled my heart with love.*

*Problems that were overwhelming
suddenly seem very small,
and come what may, starting today,
I know I can handle them all.
If you are troubled,
"Let Go and Let God"
take charge of your life for you, and
however dark life's shadow seem,
His light will come shining through.*

Uncle Milford was telling me to jump off the pier when I was three years old. Scared.

Do you honestly have faith in God, that he securely holds you firmly in his arms? Do you honestly believe God is going to let you drown?

What would you have said to little **Donald** on the first day of school that I mentioned early. As a parent you probably would have said something like, *Donald, you are big boy. You can do this. Things will work out. You don't have to worry.*

Repeatedly, that is exactly what God tells us numerous of times in the Bible. *Fear Not*. It would take me an hour plus to go through all the passages in the Bible telling us not to fear. Not to worry. God is in control. God is Almighty. God is all powerful. What part of *Fear Not* don't you get?

When we come to God with our truckload of fear saying, *God I don't know what to do about my finances? I don't know if I'll have a job next year. I don't know about my health? I don't know about my children? I don't know about _____?*

God looks at you with all the love and compassion as we would look at little Donald and say, *I know. Trust me. Has the carabineers ever snapped? Has the rope ever broke?*

Psalm 37. NIV Psalm 37 is called the "*Fret Not*" Psalm. *Fret not yourself*.

Psalm 37:1-9

*1 Do not fret because of evil men
or be envious of those who do wrong;
2 for like the grass they will soon wither,
like green plants they will soon die away.
3 Trust in the LORD and do good;
dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.*

4 *Delight yourself in the LORD*

and he will give you the desires of your heart.

5 *Commit your way to the LORD;*

trust in Him and He will do this:

6 *He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn,*

the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.

7 *Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for Him;*

do not fret when men succeed in their ways,

when they carry out their wicked schemes.

8 *Refrain from anger and turn from wrath;*

do not fret—it leads only to evil.

9 *For evil men will be cut off,*

but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land.

This morning the first Naked Truth about all of us is that we worry way too much. More than God ever intended for us. Anxiety is part of life. Acknowledge it. Be honest about it. Don't minimize it.

Here's the kicker, we serve a loving God who cares about us. He's in control. We serve an Almighty God. Today He is wanting you to do two things:

1. Attitude Shift, to shift your Attitude towards heaven and not to be looking at the rough waters like Peter did. To shift my attitude on Him. The story of Peter walking on the water is a great example of that. He shifted his thoughts in the wrong direction.
2. Action Shift. To take concrete steps to STOP controlling things that God never intended for you to control. When will you decide to stop carrying this huge weight of anxiety around? (bowling ball) When will you finally let it go? *Let it Go and Let God.* Let Him do his work. Why would you want to carry this bowling ball around all day. This may come to a big shock to some of you, but God doesn't need your advice or help.

An old **Black Baptist Preacher who lived on the Mississippi Delta.**

His cabin was washed away every few years. **Kate McAlpine Grady** in the *Southwest Review*, put it into words some 75 years ago about his trust in God.

What you gonna do when the river overflows?

Sit on my gallery, and watch her go.

How you gonna act with the water in your room?

Sweep it out with a sedge-straw broom.

What you gonna do when your hogs all drown?

Gonna wish I lived on higher ground.

What you gonna do when the cow floats away?

Throw in after her a bale of hay.

How you gonna act when the cabin leaves?

Climb on the roof and straddle the eaves.

What you gonna do without no shelter?

Float with the current down to the delta.

How you gonna act when it come on night?

Trust in Gawd, and hold on tight.

What you gonna do if your strength gives way?

Say, "Howdy, Lord, it's Judgement day!"

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Here's what I most want to say: You're only going to go through this life one time. Some wonderful things are going to happen to you. Some people are going to love you, and some dreams are going to come true.

And some terrible things will happen to you. Some people will not like you. And some dreams will be dashed. And sometimes you'll experience pain and problems and disappointment.

You can go through this one-and-only life filled with worry and anxiety, or you can go through this one-and-only life at peace.

Life is too short, and joy is too good, and God is too wonderful, and your soul is too valuable, and you matter too much to throw away a single moment of your one-and-only life filled with anxiety.

The purpose of posting this sermon is for personal Bible study and resource material for pastors:

Resource Material used for this Sermon:

* Robert G. Tuttle: Coping with Fear, Worry, and Anxiety

* Rev. George Antonakos: Central Presbyterian Church, Baltimore, MD

* John Ortberg: Flow, Anxiety Part 1

