

# JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## A Prescription for Worry

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We live in anxious times. Virus scare, political uncertainty, dissension in the UMC, and frozen Iguanas falling from the sky! Is anyone anxious? Is anyone worried? Take a breath and relax for the next few minutes because I believe God has a word for our anxiety.

Perhaps the biggest issue I come across in people is worry. Worry can enslave people. Worry can become an obstacle to the life God desires for us. God never intended for his children to live in fear. In fact, the Bible says, "Perfect love casts out fear" (1<sup>st</sup> John 4:18). God intended for us to live with joy, freedom, courage, and fulfillment.

Unfortunately, we often find worry too irresistible. And this isn't healthy. Worry causes headaches, neck aches, back aches, muscle aches, and stomach aches. Worry makes us angry and causes us to lash out at others. Worst of all, worry affects our spiritual life. It is very difficult to have a vital relationship with God when we are consumed with worry.

The funny thing is most of what we worry about are not legitimate worries. Most of the things we worry about turn out to be nothing! I thought about this other day when I was driving through dense fog on the highway. It was very scary. I couldn't see anything in front of me but I was reminded what I learned about fog in college. I did show up to class every once in a while! I learned that dense fog covering seven city blocks to a depth of 100 feet is composed of moisture that is less than one glass of water! That means that if you took all the condensation and moisture in a patch fog 7 blocks by 100 feet, it would barely make up one glass of water!

It is the same way with the things we worry about. If we could see into the future and see our problems in their true light, we would discover that most of the things we worry about are not what they seem. By worrying we make our problems bigger and scarier than they really are. But even though we may realize this many of us continue to worry and rob our lives of joy, life and blessings.

This is why I am going to share solid biblical principles that will enable you to win over worry and live with peace and joy. If you apply these principles, you will experience a dramatic positive change in your life and go to the next level in your faith.

Before I share these life changing principles, I need to give you a disclaimer: there is a difference between healthy concern and worry. Jesus was concerned enough about the world that he died for it. You were concerned enough about your safety that you put a seatbelt on when you drove to worship today. You are concerned enough about your spiritual health that you showed up for worship. These are healthy concerns and this is not what I am talking about today.

What I am addressing today is that kind of worry that paralyzes people and sucks the joy and energy out of people's lives. The Greek word "worry" in the New Testament denotes an obsessive worry, a paralyzing worry. Jesus spoke of this neurotic worry when he told the parable of the sower and mentioned the seeds that fell among thorns. He said the worries of the world "choked" that good seed. Fear chokes many people. I have seen fear paralyze people. I have seen fear steal joy from people. I have seen fear stilt creativity and energy. I have seen fear put people into a frenzy. I have seen fear weaken churches. There are overriding fears that control and destroy the lives of people. This is what I am addressing today.

Worry does not have to ruin your life. You have a choice as to how you will handle worry. You can handle worry or worry can handle you. It is up to you. What I am about to share with you will change your life for the better if you will let it.

So, what is the cure for worry? How do we conquer it? I know many of us bring a lot of worry into worship today – we are worried about family members, worried about our future, worried about our health, worried about things at work, worried about getting on a plane and taking a trip, worried about a conflict that needs to be resolved. Worry is a problem for many of us. So how do we beat it?

Well, the disciples of Jesus had a problem with worry too. They were always wringing their hands and worried about something. One time Jesus taught them one of the greatest lessons about worry. I want to share this lesson with you because I believe it will be just as powerful as it was for them. This lesson is found in the gospel of Luke.

Jesus had been teaching and healing all over Galilee and he was tired. But he knew there was more ministry to be done. So, he decided to get on a boat with his disciples and cross the Sea of Galilee to the region of the Gerasenes to find others to help. It was during that boat trip that Jesus teaches us a wonderful lesson about worry. This is how it begins:

***One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." So they put out, and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A windstorm swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. –Luke 8:22-23***

*Jesus is tired, so on this boat trip he decides to catch some Z's. It wasn't long into the boat ride before a big storm came up suddenly. It sounds strange but this is how storms often operate around the Sea of Galilee. They come up quickly without warning. Here is a picture of the Sea of Galilee today. It is more than 600 feet below sea level. Notice the mountains and ravines that surround it. They often act like great funnels that draw down the cold winds from the mountains. And when there is enough wind, big storms arise.*

*Does that sound familiar? Do you ever feel like you are on a sinking ship in the middle of a storm? The winds howl. The waves crash over the bow of your ship and you think you are going down forever. You think there is no hope. You think the sun will never shine again. You think peace will never come to you again. You are worried sick about what is going to happen because there is nothing you can do.*

Sometimes when we are in the midst of the storm worrying ourselves sick, we do what the disciples did next in the story. Look what happens next:

***They went to him and woke him up, shouting, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" –Luke 8:24***

*Jesus is still asleep and the disciples scream at him, "Wake up! Wake up Jesus! We are about to die!" Now, I've always found it funny and a bit strange that Jesus*

*was sleeping through a storm. He wasn't inside a cabin on a yacht sleeping in a bed with Kenny G playing in the background. He was in a little boat unprotected by the elements just snoring away!*

*You can understand why the disciples acted the way they did. "Jesus! How can you sleep! Wake up! Wake up! We are in the middle of this monsoon! Do something!" When you are worried in life and facing storms, do you ever feel like Jesus is asleep in your boat? You have cried and cried to him and the storm still rages. The worry won't go away. The peace will not come. The pain is still there. Discouragement is still there. The tempest inside still rages on. "Jesus, Jesus! Do something! I am perishing!*

*But watch what happens next. Jesus does something powerful, but he also says something even more powerful:*

***And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, "Where is your faith?" –Luke 8:24-25***

*So, Jesus wakes up. "What's the problem? What's the big deal? I was in the middle of a wonderful dream and you wake me up for this? Calm down, wind, Calm down." Then Jesus asked the disciples a question that was astonishing, "Where is your faith?"*

*What a question! He didn't say, "We should be ok" or "Everything is fine now." He rebuked them, "Where is your faith?" Imagine the look on the disciples' face. "Faith?! We have faith, but we were about to die!"*

*I think sometimes folks misunderstand what Jesus meant by this question. I don't think Jesus was suggesting that if the disciples had enough faith they could have stopped the storm themselves. I think he was asking, "Why did you wake me up? Did you really think you would drown with me in the boat? Did you really think I would let you perish! Haven't you learned anything from me?!"*

*I don't know about you but I can really relate to the disciples. I find that sometimes Jesus calms my winds and waves immediately. But I've noticed that most often during my storms, the winds and waves take some time to die down. And during those times I cry out to him, "Lord! Lord! Aren't you going to do something about this?" And then I realize he's in the boat with me. I remember to trust him and I know that he will sustain me through any storm.*

I remember when me and my twin sister were little kids we would be terrified in the middle of the night when there was a big thunder storm. As soon as that thunder clapped and roared, we would run to my parent's room and lie between them. It was so soft and comfortable and safe. It did not take us long to fall back to sleep because we knew our parents were right there.

Now, did the storm always stop? No, sometimes it would continue to thunder and lightning but we would fall asleep knowing our parents were close to us. When we woke up the next morning the sun would be shining. We had slept in peace through the storm next to our parents.

I have learned to trust that Jesus in the boat with me and that he won't let me drown. I trust him with my whole life and give my worries to him. When I do that, I find peace in him. And that's what faith is. I like this definition of faith: "Faith is simple trust that our lives are in his hands, that he is always in our boat, and that he will never abandon us."

But the truth is we can know this in our head but sometimes it doesn't always get in our hearts, right? You may have big worries today and it's nice for you to hear that Jesus is always with you but you still don't have peace. You want to know how you can go from knowing about that peace to experiencing the peace that Jesus gives. How does that happen? Well, I am going to put handles on this sermon and give you some concrete things you can do today to help you overcome your fears and live life the way God intended – with joy, hope and peace.

### **Face Your Fears**

Fears are like bullies in the school yard. Once we stand up to them, they fold and go away. Most people forget this. I know people whose fears grow bigger because they will not face them. They deny them or cover them up, thinking they will just go away, but most fears just don't go away. What we must do is stand up to our fears and face them. Once we do this our fears become more manageable.

Today, write down all of your fears. Just get them down on paper. There is something about getting things down on paper that makes them more manageable. Next, write above all of the things you fear: *Over 80% of these things will never come to pass.* It is true!

Let me give you a great tip to help you get control of your fears. Whenever you get anxious about something, visualize it. Once you have a good, clear picture of your fear, then put in the front of your picture three big, green neon letters – W.T.W. See them flashing in front of you picture. The letters stand for "Wait to Worry." Wait to worry because most of the things we worry about never materialize.

### **Pray Your Fears Away**

Let me ask you a question. What is the first thing you do when worry takes root in you? Do you sit and stew? Do you call up friends and make them miserable too? Do you go to the fridge? Stressed spelled backwards is "desserts," you know! All of us have default habits we have developed that snap into place when we are worried, and many of these habits are not very healthy.

I often ask people who are worried, "What is the first thing you did when you started to worry about this?" They usually give me a list of things. You know what I rarely find in their list? I never find the words, "I prayed about it."

The Apostle Paul said, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6).

The most common advice I give to people who are paralyzed by worry is for them to spend the next seven days praying to God about their worries. I ask them to spend ten minutes with God each day for a week, giving to God their fears. Not once has someone come back to me and said, "It didn't work!"

J. Arthur Rank, an English executive, decided to do all of his worrying one day a week. He chose Wednesdays. When anything happened that gave him anxiety, he would write it down and put it in his worry box and forget about it until next Wednesday. The interesting thing was that on the following Wednesday when he opened his worry box, he found that most of the things that had disturbed him the past six days were already settled. It would have been useless to have worried about them.

The lesson in Rank's story and this sermon is this: ***Fix what we can control; give God what we can't control.*** The truth is most of us worry about things we have no control over. And most of us worry about things that we could easily solve. The problem is that we spend most of our energy and resources on those things we can't control instead of those things we can control.

When you make your list of worries today, I want you to circle the ones you can control, and take action on them. Next, cross out the ones you can't control and write next to them, "Given to God." Right now, think of something you are worried about that you can't control. Have you thought of it? Now, say to God, "Take it from here, Lord!"

If you want to take it a step further, here is some advice I found a while back on a website: "Find a shoebox. Tape the lid on, and then cut a little hole in it. Call it your 'worry box.' Whenever you feel tempted to worry, write your worry on a piece of paper and drop it in the box. You can say, 'Lord, this is my concern, and it has the potential to become a worry. You have told me not to worry, so here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to put it in my worry box and let you take responsibility for it. Anything that I put in this box will be there because I can't handle it. Once it's in the box, I'm going to trust you to handle it for me, Lord.'"

A colleague of mine remembers taking his daughter to see Snow White when she was a little girl. She was so excited because her dad was going to take her to see this movie. Someone said to the little girl, "But, won't you be scared of the wicked witch?" "No," she said. "When the witch comes on, I won't look at her. I'll just look at my daddy."

When the monster of worry appears in your life, don't give it power by giving it all your attention. Instead, look to your heavenly father who has the power to give you peace in the midst of any storm.

Worry leaves everything up to you; faith leaves everything to God.



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