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## JESUS AND ANXIETY

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### Part 54 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 12:22-34 | November 14, 2010

Luke 12:22–34

<sup>22</sup> And he said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. <sup>23</sup> For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. <sup>24</sup> Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! <sup>25</sup> And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? <sup>26</sup> If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? <sup>27</sup> Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. <sup>28</sup> But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! <sup>29</sup> And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. <sup>30</sup> For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. <sup>31</sup> Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

<sup>32</sup> “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. <sup>33</sup> Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. <sup>34</sup> For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

## INTRODUCTION

Well howdy, Mars Hill. We continue in our study of Luke’s Gospel. You can open your Bible or your app to Luke 12:22–34. As you’re doing that, we’re taking these two and a half years of studying Luke to really examine the life and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we find ourselves in Luke 12, amidst a three-week miniseries, where Jesus is talking a lot about wealth, finances, possessions, and the like.

So to serve you, Pastor Jamie Munson, my good friend and your lead executive pastor, has put together for you a book, *Money: God or Gift?* It’s free and he has also compiled for us a community group curriculum. So the community groups will be going through a chapter of the book each week in conjunction with the text of the sermon. If you didn’t get one please make sure to pick one up on your way out. We’re giving them away for free at the church. They can also be ordered at Amazon.com. And Pastor Jamie wanted me to tell you that if you’re struggling financially with making a budget, living within your means, or making some tough decisions, [money@marshillchurch.org](mailto:money@marshillchurch.org) is a place you can e-mail and certified financial counselors who are trained and love Jesus, people who are members of the church, will meet with you free of charge and help answer your questions and get your budget set up and give you some beginning counsel. And we’d love to serve you in that way if we could be of any help to you.

Second resource as well is that today, in conjunction with the sermon, I have a book that I’ll recommend. This one is for sale for \$14. It’s called *Running Scared* by Dr. Ed Welch, who is a very gifted biblical counselor and Bible teacher. And I read this book this week and it has helped me quite a bit personally and it also has helped the sermon that I’ll be preaching. So for those of you who like to read, we say that readers are leaders and leaders are readers, that might be a good resource for you to pick up on your way out. That being said, I will pray and we will see what Jesus has for us.

So Lord Jesus, we thank you that we get to be the church, that you’ve taken enemies and you’ve made them family. Lord Jesus, we thank you for the Scriptures, which reveal to us who you are and what you have done and what you have determined that we should do. As we open the Scriptures today, Lord Jesus, we invite you to send us the Holy Spirit. And Holy Spirit, we ask you to teach us about Jesus, to make us more like him, and to give us the power to follow in his example. So we ask this, Lord Jesus, in your good name, amen.

Let me say this, as we get into Luke chapter 12, we believe the Bible. We’re a Bible-believing church. We believe the Bible is true, but it’s not just true like a crossword puzzle. It’s true in a way that’s helpful and practical and personal. And because the Bible is timeless, it’s always timely for every person, every time, every place. And so when we open the Bible we receive it as truth. We look for it to be helpful and practical. And the only way that can happen is if we get to know Jesus. The whole Bible is ultimately about Jesus. And so what we have seen so far in Luke’s Gospel is the life of Jesus, that our God became a man, that he entered into human history, that he walked the earth and endured the kind of things that we endure. And he relates to us and loves us and sympathizes with us. And so Jesus is our example of how to live a life. He’s our instructor of how to live a life. And he is our savior who died and rose to take away our sin and send us the Holy Spirit so that we might live a life patterned after his life by the same power that he did.

So we saw early on that the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus at his baptism. We then learned, as we have studied Luke, that Jesus was filled with the

Holy Spirit and led by the Holy Spirit and rejoiced in the Holy Spirit. So we don't come to the Bible just to get principles so we can do better and try harder. We come to the Bible to learn the truth about Jesus and to have him take away our sin and have him send us the powerful presence of God the Holy Spirit so we might live a life that is obedient to his teaching and following in his example.

## FEAR AND ANXIETY

And this is really important as we get into this section today, because Jesus is going to talk about fear and anxiety. Fear and anxiety. And he is going to teach us some things, show us some things, but also then give us the power to obey them. Read with me. We'll read the whole thing to start with. Luke 12:22-34, "And he," that is Jesus, "said to his disciples, 'Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and all these things will be added to you. Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.'"

## FEAR IN THE MIND

Start with one of three questions based on the teaching of Jesus. Number one, what does your mind fear? What does your mind fear? Who, what are you afraid of? Jesus has this to say about fear, Luke 12:32, "Fear not, little flock." Fear not. This is the most frequently uttered command in the whole Bible. The first five books of the Bible alone have 613 commands. And if you take the totality of the Bible, the sixty-six books of Scripture, and you pull out every single command, the one that is repeated most frequently is fear not.

How many of you, that surprises you? This must be a perennial issue because the Bible was written over the course of a few thousand years by roughly forty authors in multiple nations. And one thing is consistent: People are governed by their fears. See the book is timeless and so it's always timely.

And Jesus says, "Fear not." Now what he doesn't say is, "Don't plan and prepare." See some of you are lazy or irresponsible or immature. You say, "That's why I don't make a budget. That's why I don't pay my taxes. That's why I don't have life insurance. That's why I don't have health insurance. Jesus says, 'Fear not.' So I don't!" You should. The Bible talks a lot as well about planning. If you read the book of Proverbs, much of it is about wisdom, storing up, planning, preparing, strategizing, anticipating your future, getting ready for it. And some of you would, in a very irresponsible way, consider yourself very mature. "I'm totally disorganized because I trust the Lord." God would say, "Administration is a gift that I gave. Meet someone who has it. Ask them questions. Get a budget. Get a plan. Get a schedule. Think about your future. Think about your children's future. Think about your children's children's future."

But don't fear it. Don't freak out about it. Don't stress over it. Do all you can and then trust God with that that only God can do. So if you're like me, we plan a little too much. The goal is to be ready for the future and to trust God in it so that you can enjoy it as it approaches.

## WHAT IS FEAR?

Now as we get into this as well, what is fear? Well, fear is our response to danger that is real or perceived. And it doesn't need to be real to be real scary. That's the whole point of Halloween. We just had it. The whole point is freak kids out. And they're not in real danger, but the fear is out of danger that is real or danger that is perceived to be potentially real. That's where fear comes from.

And everyone fears. Everyone fears. What do you fear? You fear sickness? You fear death? You fear death by drowning? You fear death by burning? You fear public speaking? You fear being single? What do you fear? You fear not being able to have children? What do you fear? Do you fear unemployment? What do you fear? Everyone fears something. Many of us fear many things.

And you can hear this one of two ways. (*sternly*) "Do not fear!" And that can sound pretty religious and not very helpful. It can come off as a command. Or it can be received as an invitation. (*calmly*) "Fear not." I had this experience this week. Two interesting experiences. What I find is, when I preach, God puts people in my path who are dealing with exactly what I'm studying because God is sovereign and good. And I met one man this week. A young man, he has a tattoo, one tattoo on his bicep. And it says, in the Greek that this was originally written in, "Fear not." So we had a quick little conversation about this. He said, "It's the issue of my life." I said, "You know what, if you're honest, I think it's the issue of everyone's life." Not everyone has a tattoo, but everyone has the same struggle.

I dealt with another man this week. He's on a performance treadmill, trying to get God to love him. He's got it all backwards, because God's a loving father. His children start with his affection. They don't have to earn it. They start with it. There's no good father who, upon holding his newly born child, says, "If you do a really good job, I might have affection for you someday." A father says, "I love you. Whoever you are, whatever you do, I love you." You start with the love. But he's got this performance mindset with God. And he brought it up. He said, "I have panic attacks. I have stress. I have fears. I'm anxious all the time. I really struggle with this. What do I do?" I said, "Well the most common command in the Bible is, 'Fear not.'" He said, "I know, and I read it and I just hear, (*sternly*) 'Fear not! Fear not! Fear not!' And it makes me more afraid." So I put a hand on his shoulder and I

looked him in the eye, and I said, “God wants me to tell you that he loves you. And he’s saying it like this, look me in the eye. (*calmly*) ‘Fear not. I’m your dad. I love you. I’m here. You’re not alone. I’m with you. It’s going to be all right.’” Grown man, started crying. He said, “Oh, I never heard it like that.” That makes all the difference.

See, Jesus’ words are, (*sternly*) “Fear not, little flock.” That doesn’t seem to make a lot of sense, does it? (*sternly*) “Fear not, puny little one.” “Well, that’s kind of why I’m freaking out. I’m the puny little one.” It’s an invitation. (*calmly*) “Fear not.” Fear not.

Who are you afraid of? What are you afraid of? Let me unpack fear for you. And fear begins in the mind. Fear begins in the mind. I’ll give you some insights on fear and on facing fear.

Number one, fear is vision without optimism. Some of you are visionaries. You can see the future. Not perfectly, but you know where the economy’s going. You know where your life is going. You know where your health is going. You know where your relationships are going. You know where your vocation is going. You have an idea of what’s next. You can see down the road. But you don’t have any optimism and so you’re fearful. “Oh my gosh, that’s going to go bad. That could go bad. That could go sideways. That could hurt. That could be costly. That could fail.”

Fear seems reasonable to us even when it’s irrational. How many of you have irrational fears? And people will try and reason with you. It doesn’t make any difference. You’re like, “You’re being crazy.” Okay, just so you know, if they are, reasoning probably isn’t going to fix it, because by definition they’re being unreasonable. So what we have is this entire list of things that people are afraid of. Some of them are irrational, but they’re rational to the people. They’re irrational to us, but they’re rational to them.

I’ll give you some examples. This is going to be an intense sermon, we need little emotional break. You’re welcome. All right. Are you afraid of that? Does that scare you? Okay. If so, here’s what you have, coulrophobia, a fear of clowns. It’s actually a diagnosis. And I’ll tell you what, I don’t care even if you don’t have this, if you see a clown after midnight, they’re scary. [*Congregation laughing*] That’s a clown up to no good. [*Congregation laughing*]

How about this one? Does this scare you? Peanut butter. If so, you may have—and I went to public school so I don’t know how this is going to go, but—arachibutrophobia, which means—it’s the clinical definition of fear of peanut butter sticking to the roof of your mouth. You say, “I didn’t even know I had that. Now I—”

How about this one? Okay. [*Congregation laughing*] Are you scared of that? If so, here’s what you have. Germanophobia. It is the fear of German people, which is a real bummer if you have that and are German. You’re very fearful.

How about this one? All right, my good friend, Dr. John Piper. If this frightens you, this man frightens you, here is what you may have. Homilophobia, which is a fear of sermons. Some of you say, “That’s it. That’s why I’m never coming back. I have a fear of sermons.” It’s actually a diagnosis.

And some of you don’t find this funny at all. You’re not laughing. It may be because you have geliophobia, which is a fear of laughter. So I apologize for making fun of you. All right, some fears are rational, some are irrational, but they’re always rational to the person who has them.

Back to the list. Here’s what fear’s about and I’ve observed this through counseling and being a pastor and dealing with people’s lives, including my own. Fear is about one of three things. Not getting what we want. So your hope is hung on something. “I want to get married. I don’t think I’m going to get married. I’m fearful.” “We want to have kids. I don’t think we’re going to have kids. We’re fearful.” “I want to graduate. I don’t think I’m going to graduate.” “I want a job.” “I want to serve God.” “I want to go into ministry.” “I want to own a house.” I—whatever. “I want a promotion. I don’t think it’s going to happen.” And the fear comes in. “I’m not going to get it. It’s not going to happen. The answer’s no.” And the fear comes in. “What will happen? What else will happen? How will I exist?”

Or number two, getting what we want and losing it. There’s a fear. That’s why sometimes success is more fearful than failure. “We’re married! What if we get divorced?” “We’re pregnant! What if we miscarry?” “The child was born! What if they die? Or what if they don’t love God?” “I got the job! The economy’s rough. What if I get fired?” “We got the house! What if we can’t make the mortgage? What then?” It’s the fear of getting something your heart longs for and then losing it. That can cause fear.

Or number three, getting what you don’t want. “I got cancer. I don’t want it.” “I got fired. That’s not what I wanted.” “My spouse left. Nobody wants to marry me.” “This isn’t what I wanted.” And fear comes. You feel that? You feel it in the room, can’t you? It’s real.

Fear reveals our values, our loves, our priorities, our longings. You only fear losing what you love. You only fear getting what you hate. It reveals a lot about what is essential to us, what is primary for us.

Number five, fear increases with more freedom. The more choices, the more potential scenarios for not getting what you want, getting what you want and losing it, or getting something you don’t want, getting it wrong. How many of you find as you get older and you have more choices and more freedoms, there’s more fear? It’s more stressful? This dawned on me not long ago at the grocery store. Walked down the cereal aisle, “Oh! I have to pick one. “And this will affect breakfast indefinitely, “which is the most important meal of the day some would say. “This could set in motion a whole month of my life “in a positive or negative direction. “Do I go for the bran? Do I go for the sugar? “I have gluten allergies, but all of those seem to be the tasty ones. Will I deny myself? Argh!” It’s amazing. How many of you just—the number of choices? “Where are we going to live? What are we going to do? What is my degree going to be? Who am I going to marry? There are a lot of people on the earth, I need to pick one. Argh!” You know, all these choices, they lead to fears out of our freedoms.

Fear turns us into false prophets. Ed Welch makes this point in his book. I think it's very insightful. False prophets are those who predict the future wrongly. And in our own lives we can be false prophets. "It's going to go bad! It's going to go horrible! This could be worst case scenario! Oh my gosh! Oh my gosh!" And then when we get there, we're like, "Nope. Sorry, I was wrong." How many of you, that's your life? You freak out about things that don't happen?

Just so you know, this is your pastor. I'll just come clean and tell you, that's me. I tend to be a visionary. I see the future, I know what's coming. I freak out about it and then it never happens. How do I know that? Because I was up at 4:30 in the morning many times this last week just thinking about things that probably will never happen. Meanwhile my wife is sleeping. *[Congregation laughing]* I said, "Well I'm studying, 'Fear not.'" She's like, "Hmm. I was sleeping." "Ah, you probably know more about it than me, because I was up stressing out." How many of you are false prophets? All right, yeah. Your future is bleak and you will freak out until it doesn't happen. You'll get that on the way home. I just pulled the pin on the grenade and I'll leave it there. It'll go off later.

Number seven, fear is not always sinful, right? Not always sinful. Right? You send your son off to battle as a soldier. There's real fear there. Your kid gets their driver's license. Your daughter goes on her first date, right? You're pregnant and you've had a bunch of miscarriages and you're hoping to carry to term. Some fears are real. Not all fears are sinful. You're kind of silly if you don't have any fears. You're probably not paying attention. But every fear is an opportunity to either run to or from God as the source of our comfort, hope, and help.

## ANXIETY IN THE BODY

Who do you fear? What do you fear? How do you fear? Fear is an enormous issue and it manifests itself with something called anxiety. Now let me say this before I go to the next slide. How wonderful is it that Jesus is talking about these issues that are so pertinent? So pertinent. Number one category of prescription medication in the U.S., antidepressants. One of the number one issues is sleeplessness. People are anxious and they're stressed out. They're freaked out. They're struggling. People are taking less of their vacations than ever, bringing their phones and laptops along to be connected to all of their responsibilities because they're so afraid of not having control that they can't even take a break. It's called anxiousness. Jesus is the wonderful counselor and he's talking to us about these things, because he really does love us and he wants to help us and serve us.

So here is what Jesus has to say and here's my second question. When does your body manifest anxiety? Okay, fear starts where? The mind, anticipating the future and then being fearful of it. And this manifests itself with anxiety in the body. And God designed our bodies in such a way so as to give us clues about our mental state. And Luke is a doctor. He's a medical physician. He's reporting what Jesus is teaching. Here's what Jesus says in Luke 12:22, "Do not be anxious about your life." Now that is a big category. Right? The life. Some of you say, "Yeah, but what about finances?" Life. "What about health?" Life. "What about relationships?" Life. Anything in life is something that could potentially produce fear-based anxiety and we need to not be anxious.

Luke 12:25, he says, "Which of you by being anxious," we call it stressed, "can add a single hour to his span of life?" Here's what Jesus is saying, "I don't want you to be anxious because you're going to hurt yourself. You're going to reduce the quality and duration of your life. You're actually going to shorten your lifespan if you're ruled by your fears and anxieties." Is that true? Does Jesus know what he's talking about? How many of you have gone to your doctor, say, "I want to live a long time." He says, "The key is to stress. That definitely will—you might see four hundred if you freak out. That'll help."

Fear in the mind leads to anxiety in the body. That's what Jesus says. Anxiety is the body's response mechanism to fear of the mind and it results in what they call fight or flight, meaning you're going to get amped up and go to war, or run for your life. Most people in varying situations do one or the other.

Now let me say this, and I'm going to talk about the physical, psychological signs of fear-based anxiety. And let me say this. I am chief of hypocrites. Okay? I'm chief of hypocrites. I'm not going to tell you, "Here's what I've learned and you should be like me." I'd say, "Here's where I'm a hypocrite. Let's be like Jesus together." My story is—some of you know my story. God saved me at nineteen. Married at twenty-one, in college. Fearful. There's no money. We're married. Statistically, if you get married at that age in college you're going to get divorced. It's going to go really bad. Need to finish school. Lot of fears. Graduate. Got to find a job. Got to move back to Seattle. Got to start a church. Fearful. We start the church. There's no money. No salary for three years. Wife gets pregnant. More fear. Least churched city in America. Who's going to come? Fearful.

Then I see the people who do come. More fear. Look at them. Look at them. And I felt God had called me to primarily reach young men who were single in their twenties. Then they show up and they're all broke. And they don't give and their girlfriends are all pregnant. More fear. Like, "If I succeed, that's still failure." All right? Like, "I have the people I'm trying to get. I don't even want them." I'm like, "Argh!" Fear, we don't have a place to meet. Fear, we're homeless. Fear, we have no money. Fear, it starts growing. We don't have enough leaders. Fear. Argh! It goes for a while, a decade. *[Congregation laughing]* Add more services, keep on moving.

And here's what I decide. I'm tough. And I am, just so you know. I'm tough. So I'm going to be tough—I'm just going to work hard. I'm going to work hard. I come from a blue collar, hardworking, dad's a construction worker, family. I'm going to work harder. I'm going to just grind it out. Preach, I don't know, fifty weeks a year. Six, seven times a Sunday. Travel, plant churches, family. Just grind it out and go. And then, a couple of years ago, I just tapped out. Some of you know my story. I just tapped out.

Now, I should have seen it coming. I wasn't paying attention. I couldn't sleep at all. Two or three hours a night. I could not sleep. I'd go to bed, wake up at two or three in the morning. Weeks of this. I mean I got black circles under my eyes. I am sleep deprived. I am dying. I have heartburn. I have

allergies. I had a sinus infection that lasted over a year. As a preacher, that's really a complication. Sore throat and can't breathe for a year. I started getting all kinds of sickness and stomach problems and headaches and just finally hit the wall.

I think probably, clinically, I don't know. I'm not a doctor, but I would say I would have met—I've read the "Are you depressed?" list. And usually at the end, it just pops up, "We're sorry," you know, every time I'd take one of those tests. All right, because, I mean, I'm a straight A student on the depression test. At least I was at the time. And by God's grace it's getting better. But yeah, I think I was depressed, because I got to the point I didn't want to see anybody. I would just sit at home, watch cage fighting. *[Congregation laughing]* And smile, like, "Look at that. Nice." That is a symptom of depression, right? When like the only thing that cheers you up is someone being assaulted? *[Congregation laughing]* Like probably depressed.

So I go to my doctor. My doctor says, "You need a new job." I say, "You know, that's a great idea right there. I'd like to be a mattress tester. That's what I've always wanted to be." But I remembered, "No, Jesus said to plant a church and preach the Bible and train men and marry Grace. So I got to do that." So then for me it was diet, health, nutrition, exercise. I started reading books on stress and adrenaline and cortisol and anxiety, counseling books, medical books. I'm still reading all this kind of stuff.

And you know what I found out? Jesus is right. Fear in the mind leads to anxiety in the body. So I'll share with you some things that I've learned through studies. And I tell you this not to judge you and say, "I've figured it out. Let me tell you how to do it," but as a guy who's always learning the same lesson over and over and over. I like to drive around the cul de sac.

## THE PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SIGNS OF ANXIETY

Here's what happens when fear in the mind results in anxiousness in the body. The brain signals the release of pituitary and adrenal hormones. Your hypothalamus kicks on. Your body becomes alert. You're on. All right? Your systems start to fire. This is like putting the key in the ignition for a car. Everything starts up. All the systems start firing. The adrenaline then starts pumping, as does the cortisol. You're going to live off of this energy source. For me, I lived off it for so long that I fatigued, tapped out, my adrenal gland. All right, my adrenal glands started taking vacations without me. It's like, "We're done. Good luck." No energy at all. So then I start drinking lots of caffeine and energy drinks and just trying to push beyond what God even intended for my body.

Your hair stands up, your heart races, you sweat, your stomach churns, your blood thickens, your blood pressure elevates. Endorphins are released to numb the pain so you don't even feel it. How many of you are athletes and when you're competing you don't feel anything? It's the letdown, the hours and days afterward, where the pain kicks in? So when you're pushing it, you're not feeling it. Okay, God designed our bodies, in moments of terror or danger, to use all of our energies for survival. But the problem is we live in a world where we're stuck on. We're always in that state of perpetual stress.

Glucose is released for quick energy. What happens then is as your adrenaline fires in seconds and is moderated by your cortisol, it can take hours to come down because you feel high. So for me, Sunday nights, it's quite frankly hard for me to get to bed before 2 a.m. Before 2 a.m., because it takes, usually for me, a good four hours—if you're under moderate stress, two hours, but if you're under a lot of stress, four-plus hours—for the adrenaline to just run its course and to come down from the high.

What happens as well, your vision is clear, your attention is focused, your memory's aware, you feel alert, you feel powerful, you feel on, you feel good. That's why people get addicted to the high. What happens though is, if you're in this perpetual state of anxiety, you get unusual mood swings, anger, depression. A pastor buddy of mine, he was out for a run in great health and found himself just sitting on the side of the road, bawling uncontrollably and he knew not why. Just his emotions were out of control.

Sometimes it's just exhaustion. You ever wake up, "Did I even go to bed?" See the average American is sleep deprived. They say it takes eight to ten hours of sleep—that's what the average person requires. Let's say it's an average of nine. Most of you are getting a few hours less sleep than you should, meaning you're paying for it out of your account of health and with things like coffee.

Nervous twitch. When I get stressed, I get a nervous eye twitch in my left eye. So if I'm preaching you think, "He's hitting on all of us. I do not know why." He's not hitting on all of you. He's freaking out. Pray for him.

How about disassociation or checking out? How many of you, there's whole days you, the day's over and you're like, "What did I even do today? I don't—I mean, I was on auto—I was mentally elsewhere." How many of you have had that commute? You get in the car, you drive home. You get home and you're like, "I'm home. I do not remember driving home. I'm going to look around the front of the car for blood. I don't know what happened on the way home. I was not there. I was disassociated, checked out."

One of the elders at Mars Hill, I won't tell you which one, but you'll know. He gets canker sores when he's stressed out. I'm like, "Are you stressed?" He's like, "How do you know?" "Well, I can tell." He gets canker sores.

Paranoia and suspicion. Weight change. You put on a lot of weight. You lose a lot of weight. Moments of panic, feeling overwhelmed. Fantasizing about dying. Some people get to the point where they're suicidal. For Christians, they tend to start reading books about the rapture. Kind of like, "I'm going to leave. Jesus, it's Monday. Monday's always a good day to take me home. Take me now." You start fantasizing about getting out.

Insomnia. You start self-medicating then with alcohol, trying to get yourself to come down from the high. But that negatively affects your sleep. Or tobacco, trying to calm your system. High blood pressure. Junk food, unhealthy eating. We call it comfort food. It's a way of regulating the body's systems.

Irritability. Reckless, aggressive driving. Like I did last night in traffic. Laid on the horn. Somebody went into the intersection and blocked it twice for an entire green light. And so I wanted to notify them. *[Congregation laughing]* Just trying to serve. *[Congregation laughing]*

Physical symptoms. Irritable bowel syndrome, headaches, heart trouble, chronic sickness, stomach troubles, a victim mentality. "Everybody's against me. God's not here to help me."

Some of you use shopping sprees. "I'm depressed. I'm going to the mall." Okay? Some people do that. Some of you ladies do that too. "I'm going to go buy clothes that make me feel better until I get the bill. And then I'll have fear of paying off the credit card." We go shopping as therapy.

A lot of caffeine, panic attacks. And pretty soon everybody starts to feel like yet another burden and God seems really far away. That is anxiousness. Jesus says, "If you have anxiousness, you are reducing the quality and length of your life. It's going to kill you."

There will be seasons of anxiousness and stress. Life in a fallen world is inevitably going to include those seasons, but particularly when they become consistent and constant that means that we are in the process of killing ourselves.

And that's our whole culture. I mean to me this really scared me some years ago. I had a bunch of buddies who had faster growing churches and were young pastors. All of a sudden I start getting e-mails and calls, like, "They're in the hospital." Why? "Panic attack. They thought they were having a heart attack." "Really? They're in their thirties." "Oh yeah, that person has cancer." I start studying that anxiousness depletes the ability of the body to fight against sickness and illness. It reduces the health and well-being of the immune system, which means whatever your weak point is in your health, stress is going to exacerbate it and is going to make you incredibly vulnerable. It's going to expose it. Buddy of mine's losing blood. A buddy of mine had a heart attack. Multiple guys with cancer. All young guys with fast growing ministries, living off of the pressure. Fear of failure, fear of the critics, fear of finances, fear of success, fear of failure, fear of expectations, fear of demands. Just completely overwhelmed. Completely overwhelmed. And you start thinking, "If that's the way that a lot of pastors are, how are their people doing?" It sets in motion a whole culture of sickness and death.

## JESUS UNDERSTANDS

So friends, how wonderful is it that Jesus would talk about these things? And you know what? He does so sympathetically. Here's what is so wonderful about Jesus. Unlike other religions' view of gods, where God is far away and he's never been here and God just says, "Fear not!" "That's easy for you to say! In heaven getting worshiped by the angels. That's really different than living here on the earth as a sinner in a crooked, fallen world with a bunch of people you can't depend on." And our God comes into human history. God becomes a man. His name is Jesus. In Hebrews it says, we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with us in our weakness because he's been here. He gets it. He knows it. He feels it. Great.

So when Jesus is talking about fear and anxiety, who could possibly have greater fears available to them than Jesus? Jesus is going to go to the cross and atone for the sin of the world and endure the wrath of the Father. Jesus does have some difficulty, some distress, and he works this through with the Father like we have to work it through with the Father. That's why in the garden of Gethsemane he is literally sweating drops of blood as he's anticipating his own execution and murder.

When Jesus says, "Fear not," he understands what it's like to suffer physically. He understands what it's like to die. He understands what it's like to have people malign your reputation. He knows what it's like to have your family think you're crazy or disown you or turn their back on you. He knows what it's like to have friends you can't depend on, because his were all asleep in the garden when he needed them the most. He knows what it's like to have someone you love sabotage their own life, steal from you, betray you, and kill themselves. His name was Judas and Jesus loved him and served him. Jesus knows what it's like to be single and alone. At this point he's broke and homeless, heading toward the cross. So isn't it wonderful that Jesus isn't just another religious guy with a cushy, comfy life giving us principles that he himself has no need of? That's not our Jesus. Don't you love this Jesus?

So when he says, "Fear not," "Okay. You understand. And you're not just giving me something to do. You're trying to lead me in a new way of life that's good for me because you love me." That's our Jesus.

## WHERE IS YOUR TREASURE?

And Jesus is going to go a direction that I would have never expected. Like I said, I've read a stack of books as tall as me on adrenaline, stress, anxiety, the psychological, sociological, philosophical, biological, theological aspects of fear and anxiety. And not one of them has gone where Jesus is going to go. Jesus is going to go a completely different direction. Every book I've read, it's about paying attention to yourself, getting to know yourself, loving yourself, taking care of yourself. And you know what? To some degree, you need to be a good steward of your body and a good steward of your life.

But what Jesus does, he redirects all of our focus away from ourselves. And he says, "You know what part of the problem is? If all you ever do is think about yourself, you're going to end up with fear and anxiety. And if you start thinking about your Father and those in need, it'll completely alter the way you face your life." See part of the problem is, if I worship me, then learning to worship me better only makes me more fearful and anxious. That's where Luther says that sin is ultimately the self turning in on the self. And repentance is, "What about God and other people?"

So Jesus' third question is, "Where is your treasure?" Your money, your possessions. Are you kidding me? Jesus goes to your stuff. He's going to go to your stuff. Are you kidding me? "Jesus I'm freaking out!" "Yeah, what about your car? What about your house? What about your job? What about your credit cards? What about your giving? What about the poor?" "What—Jesus, what does my stuff have to do with my stress? Is this just another sermon where you take my stuff?" Jesus says, "I'm not trying to take your stuff. I'm trying to take your stress. And a lot of your stress is connected to

your stuff.” This is unexpected.

Here is what he says. We’ll just unpack it. Luke 12:23, “For life is more than food.” Really? How many of you, food is a big deal? Jesus is not saying here, “Don’t eat.” I would recommend it. It’s a big part of seeing tomorrow. All right, feel free to eat. But what he’s saying here is that food can become all consuming. And in these times that Jesus is teaching, people only had food for the day. For us it’s a different problem. Their concern was starvation. Ours is obesity. They didn’t have enough to eat. We eat too much. They’re saying right now about a third of Americans are obese and within the next decade it’ll be 42 percent.

But you know what that is? That is, like Paul says elsewhere, our stomach becomes our God. Our stomach becomes our God. When we’re happy, we reward ourselves with food. When we’re stressed, we comfort ourselves with food. We have a relationship with food that is more akin to the relationship we’re supposed to have with God. “I’m stressed. I need comfort.” The Holy Spirit’s the comforter. “I don’t care. What’s in the fridge? I’m not going to go to God, I’m going to go to the fridge.” How many of you, like me—I ask my wife this every day. “What’s for dinner?” Because I like to think about it all day and prepare myself and if I don’t like it then I want to have an option. Food is an indicator of where we’re running with our fears and anxieties. How much of your time is considering food, preparing food, consuming food? Is it bad to enjoy food? No, God’s a good God. God gives good gifts. But are you expecting something from food that you can only get from Jesus?

“Life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.” Are you kidding me? This sounds like hippie talk, right? I mean, let’s just be honest. “You know life is not about clothing.” “Oh really, Mr. Toga? Really?” How many of you, really life is about clothing? You have to wear the right clothes. And they’re only right for a few months because there are new right clothes. They keep changing what is right clothes. That’s the whole point of the fashion industry. “This is fashionable. And now it’s not. You got to go shopping again. You want to be up with the times and the trends. Aren’t you afraid of what others will think?” “Yes I am, so I will go buy those clothes.” And then you have debt. “Aren’t you afraid of your debt?” “Yes! I’m afraid of my debt! I’m afraid of not looking my best and I’m afraid of paying for it!”

Is it a sin to wear clothes? No. Thank you for wearing some. Personally, I appreciate it. *[Congregation laughing]* But how much time is put forth presenting ourselves as someone we’re not? We want to look like we’re together. We want to look like we’re fine. We want to look like we’ve nailed it and we’re lying. “How are you?” “Great.” “Well you look great.” “No, actually I’m freaking out, but I was hoping you’d look at my jeans and not my face.” *[Congregation laughing]*

## RAVENS AND LILIES

“Consider the ravens.” This is—what? I never read this in an anti-stress book. Chapter four, nasty birds. What? Ravens are nasty birds, right? Nevermore. They’re nasty. They’re nasty. Pastor Bill said it. We were talking earlier. He said that ravens are on the list of unclean, nasty animals. They’re nasty. And they are. They are. Nobody has pet ravens. *[Congregation laughing]* All right, you don’t. If you do, call 911. There’s something profoundly wrong with you. If ravens show up, what do they do? They’re scavenger birds. They steal stuff. They’re horrible. I hate ravens. I just do. *[Congregation laughing]*

Jesus says, “Consider the ravens.” You’re like, “Mm, okay. Consider what?” “They neither sow nor reap.” Did you know that ravens are not farmers? They don’t have combines. Right, they don’t. Not like they’re all, right now, trying to figure out how to get their food to the raven grocery store. “They have neither storehouse nor barn, yet God,” does what? He “feeds them.” They’re unclean, nasty, and vile and he feeds them. I don’t even like them and God feeds them. Here’s the point. Some of you will feel like a raven. “I’m just dirty and nasty and vile.” And you know what? God loves you and he feeds you. And if God’s going to feed a raven, a nasty bird, he loves us more than those nasty birds and we bear his image, unlike them. And so he is willing and glad to help us.

“Of how much more value are you than the birds! And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his lifespan? If you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?” Here’s what he’s saying. There’s some stuff that’s just out of our control. Now... See, we believe here in the sovereignty of God, that God rules and reigns. And when we freak out, we’re acting like heretics. So I do this. Now what I wish I were is sovereign. I call it being organized. But what I mean by that is sovereignty, that I wish I knew the future and I could prepare for it so I could control it. But invariably, it doesn’t always work out like I was anticipating.

And what he’s saying is, “There is far more that is out of our control than we even imagine.” He’s not here saying, “Be irresponsible,” but he is saying, “Be reasonable.” If you’re trying to predict the future and control it, you are trying to be God. Now, it is not a sin to anticipate the future, and as a good steward, prepare for it. But if you’re trying to control it and if you’re fearful of it and anxious about it, you’re in the position that’s reserved for God. And that’s not good for you.

What are you worried about that really is in the hands of God? You’ve done all you can do. You got cancer? You’ve done everything your doctors said to do. That’s all you can do. All right, you’ve applied for a million jobs, you’re doing everything you can? You’ve done what you can do. You’ve pursued your spouse, you’ve tried to reconcile, you’ve forgiven them, you’ve prayed, you’ve made every effort to work it out? You’ve done what you can do. It’s hard to be there, is it not? And Jesus is saying, “If it’s out of your hands, don’t be fearful. Be faithful.”

“Consider the lilies.” What? Seriously, does this not sound like a community college prof who smokes a lot, right? “Consider the lilies... Oh, I love Philosophy 101. Yeah, lilies.” This is from a construction worker named Jesus. I think it’s supposed to be disorienting. “Consider the lilies.” Something I’ve never done. I’ve never had my lily day. Now don’t raise your hand, gentlemen, but how many of you have never had your lily day? You’re like, “Today I’m going to meditate on the lily. I’m going to observe the lily and I’m going to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to me deep spiritual truths from the

lily.” Okay?

Again, this just sounds weird. How many of you, this is not what you’re expecting? “Fear, anxiety, lily!” What? *[Congregation laughing]* “Or raven! Either one, whatever works for you! Nasty bird, pretty flower.” What? “Consider the—” “Okay, Jesus. You’re God.”

“How they grow; they neither toil nor spin.” Lilies don’t have fashion shows. Lilies don’t have malls. Lilies don’t have *What Not to Wear* episodes. And lilies look awesome. I mean lilies look good. How many of you love spring? The flowers come, you’re like, “That’s amazing. Thanks, God. Nice.” And the lilies aren’t freaked out about it. All right, “Does this petal make my butt look big?” They’re not freaked out about it. You know? I just made that up. *[Congregation laughing]*

“They neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon,” this rich, wise man, “in all his glory was not arrayed as well as these.” That’s amazing. “But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith!” Look, your Dad’s a good Dad. He’ll take care of you. “Do not seek what you are to eat or drink,” coffee, good coffee, wine, good wine, beer, microbeer, water, bottled water, filtered water, triple filtered charcoal filtered water. *[Congregation laughing]* Why? “Cause I’ll get cancer and die.”

“Nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them.” Are they bad? No. Your Father knows you have some needs like clothes and food and drink. It’s not a sin to have and enjoy them. It’s a sin to allow those needs to so dominate your life that it produces fearful anxiety.

“Instead, seek his kingdom.” It’s a kingdom that never ends. “And these things will be added to you.” These are blessings, benefits, and bonuses. “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

Now this is pretty fantastic. “Fear not!” “Why? I’m a little flock!” How many of you think—when you think, “Fear not,” you think a few baby lambs? All right, if any group ever had a reason to be terrified—not only lambs. No one is afraid of lambs. There’s never been a horror film, you know, with a lamb on the loose. Never on the news—it’s like, “There’s a cougar! There’s a bear! They’re loose! There’s a lamb loose!” Everybody’s like, “Well, good, I hope he comes to my house. I’d love to pet him.” You know, like there’s no fear of a—let alone a baby lamb. A baby lamb, right? You got a whole flock of them, you’re like, “That’s ridiculous. It’s like a cotton ball ad. That’s fantastic.”

And you think, “Okay, so God looks at us like baby lambs. And then he says, ‘Fear not!’” You’re like, “Well,” because he goes on to say what? What does he say? “It’s your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom—” “Oh, you’re kidding me.” He’s not saying, “There’s nothing to fear!” He’s not saying, “You’re tough, you’ll be fine.” What he’s saying is, “You have a Father who loves you and he happens to be a king. You’ll be all right.”

Generally speaking, when the Bible says, “Fear not,” it then tells you who God is. Because your theology results in biography, culminates in doxology, meaning this: who God is changes how you live and why you worship him. I love that Jesus is honest. “Life is scary. You’re not going to make it, unless you’re with your Father. Then you’ll be fine.” Oh, so all of a sudden my focus is to shift from my fears to my Father. “Oh, my dad is much bigger than my enemies. And he loves me and he’ll take care of me and he’s generous and good.” Wow, that makes a big difference, doesn’t it?

## GIVE YOUR BEST

So you say, “Okay, I believe this. I believe that God is a loving Father, takes away my sin, adopts me into his family through the death, burial, and resurrection of my big brother Jesus. I believe that God is my Father, that my heavenly Father is a king, that he has a perfect kingdom, that he’s a generous giver, and he wants to take good care of me. I believe that.” We’ll see. Again, Jesus is going to absolutely stun us with something unexpected. Jesus is the most unpredictable teacher in the history of the world. Faith is an internal conviction that leads to an external action. It’s what you believe that results in how you behave. So if you’re saying and agreeing, “Yeah that’s the issue. Fear is conquered by Father. That’s the issue!” Here is what he says, “Let’s see it.”

“Sell your possessions,” verse 33, “and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with the treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Your life follows your money. Where does your money go? Odds are your money goes to your fears. You want security, so it goes to a home. You want comfort, so it goes to entertainment. You want status, so it goes to possessions. You want approval, so it goes to clothes. You want friends, so it goes to gifts. He got us. He got us all, because he loves us all.

So God is saying here, “Give. If you really believe that the Father is a generous king, give. Give your best.” We call it first fruits. Don’t give your worst. Some of you are saying, “That’s a great verse. ‘Sell your possessions, give it to the needy.’ I have some junk I want to get rid of. That’s a great idea. That must mean garage sale in Greek. That must mean—” Don’t give junk. Don’t give junk to the needy, to the poor. Give good things. Take something you love, give it away. Take something you’ve worked very hard for, give it away. Take something that is very significant to you, give it away. Take something that actually pains you to lose, give it away.

Find someone who is needy. Not in a patronizing way, but in a perspective way. Because see, what can happen is all we think about is people who are better off than us and we become fearful that we won’t get what they get. We tend not to look at people who are more needy than us and think, “I’ve got it pretty good and I need to be generous.” So don’t give garbage. Give good things.

“For God so love the world he,” what did he do? “He gave his Son,” his only begotten Son. The gift that the Father gives to us is none other than the life, death, burial, resurrection, the righteousness, the salvation, the kingdom citizenship, of Jesus Christ, the second member of the Trinity, the Son of



God. God gave because he loved and God gave his best. We need to give our best. We need to give our best. And as we give our best, God isn't taking our stuff. He's taking our stress. He's taking our stress. It is such a joy to give. It's such a joy to be generous. It starts to reorient our hearts and our minds and our lives and our eyes away from ourselves. It allows us to get to know the Father. It allows us to get to love others.

And Jesus here with our possessions is saying, "What you really have is a heart problem. And just dealing with a heart problem will not be sufficient until you've dealt with the wealth problem because ultimately your heart follows your wealth. So don't just make this another psychological principle for health, cleansing, and transformation. Make it a financial principle for generous giving." Some of you say, "I knew it! I knew the megachurch pastor was gonna try and get my money! I knew it!" Fear not. *[Congregation laughing]* Fear not. God doesn't want to just take your stuff. He wants to take your stress and so much of your stress is connected to your stuff, that as you give, you're giving your stress to him, you're giving your stuff to others.

Let me close with this about your Father. A couple of things. You combat fear by knowing the Father. Amen? Your Father is a rich and generous king. Your Father's kingdom has nothing to fear. There's no lack, there's no thieves, there's no decay. The transmission will not blow up in the kingdom of God. Your Father has proven faithful. He feeds nasty birds and clothes little flowers. He'll take care of you. And your Father asks you to be generous as an act of faith. Why? Because one of the ways that the Father feeds and clothes others is through his sons and daughters.

And we're in this wonderful season. It's fantastic! Everybody's broke! Nobody's got anything! Everybody's freaked out! What an opportunity! We just had an election and the whole point of an election is freak everyone out, make them terrified! Whoever makes you the most scared, you'll vote for them to save you from hell. Hell as they define it. Not the real hell, but the one they're making you fearful of. And so then everybody just votes and they all vote, "No more taxes! No more programs! Downsize the government! We can't do anything for anyone! Everybody's on their own!" Yes! Yeah, perfect! We're finally needed! There's an opportunity here, when the voters say, "No," and the government says, "No," and the church says, "Yeah. Yeah."

Some of you say, "I don't have a lot of money." You got a lot of stuff. Have less. Give it away. Give some stuff away. Sell some stuff, give the money away. Be generous. Pick someone who's in need, not just nameless, faceless poor. Somebody you know. Single mom, underemployed, unemployed dad. Give it. See what happens in your heart. See what happens in your heart. See what happens with your fears. See what happens with your anxieties. Oh what a good season this is. What a great season this is. The world is teed up for an opportunity for the sons and daughters of God to just give.

We're going to collect our offering in a moment. Let me close with a few things. Who gives at Mars Hill? About three-fourths of the people. Out of 10,000, about 7,500 last year gave anything, a dollar once or regular giving. Additionally, the average person gives \$1,800 a year. The average deacon gives three times that. The average elder gives five times that, which is awesome, because where your treasure is and your pastors' hearts are in the most! Yes! Praise God for that.

How much do we give? So far this year, \$2.2 million away. Awesome, praise God. We want to give more and you're going to give individually as well to help the poor. We'll collect our offering as a church and then you're going to leave and you're going to figure out who you're going to give some stuff to, who you're going to sell stuff to give money to. Yes, we get to take our offering now! Yes, we get to take our offering now. All right, I'm going to pray. We're going to take our offering. You should be excited.

Father God, thank you that you're a Dad who loves his kids. Thank you that you feed nasty birds. Thank you that you clothe simple flowers. Thank you that your kingdom doesn't have a lack. Thank you that you gave us your Son. Thank you that you give us good things. Thank you that you give us eternal life. Thank you that you give us the truth. Thank you that you give us the Holy Spirit. Thank you that you give us one another. And thank you that one day the world as we know it will come to an end and we'll have nothing to fear. Until then, please teach us as a little flock to fear not for it is our Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom. God, thank you that you don't just take our stuff, you take our stress. We give it to you in Jesus' name, amen.

*[End of Audio]*

*Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.*