



# THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL OF WORRY

By Dr. Dave Currie

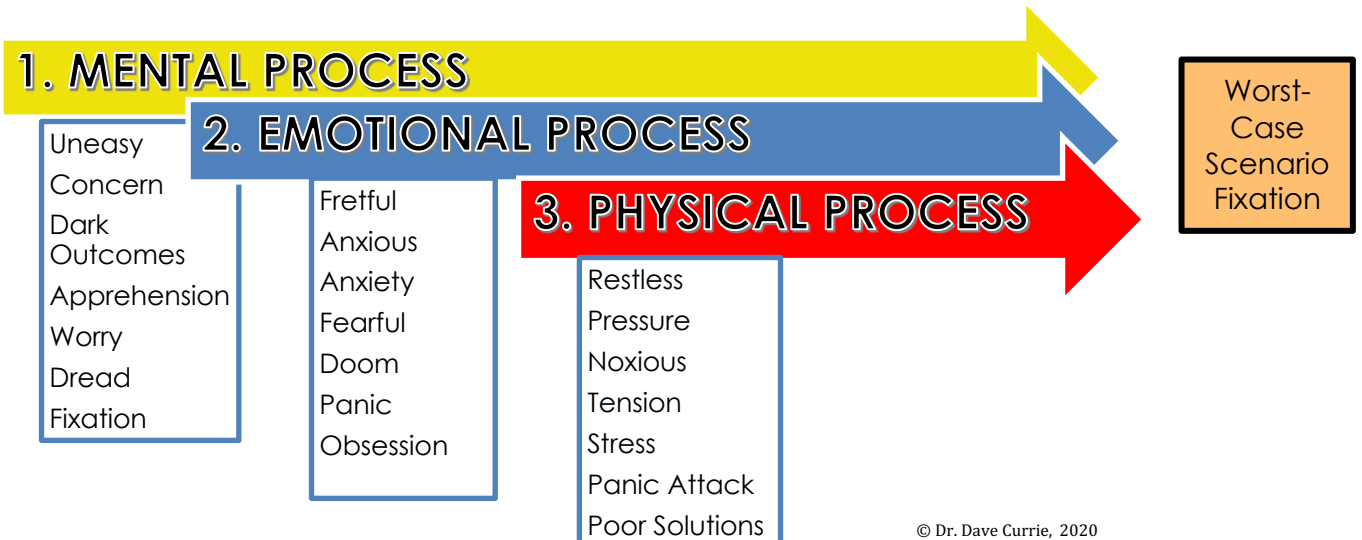
We are in a season that understandably spawns worry. Frequent media coverage incessantly repeating unnerving words like world-wide pandemic, infectious disease, death tolls, quarantine, and the need for social distancing causes concern on its own. Repeated government ads warn us to stay home. Businesses are shutting down – many closings for good. Jobs are lost. More worry. Flights are cancelled. Borders closed. Unprecedented government bailouts and delaying the tax deadlines??? What’s going on, people! You add the cancelling of all public gatherings, sports, theatres, concerts, conventions, weddings, funerals, church services – you name it, they’re all done for now. Fear can set in. Yes, our world is in a complicated and unprecedented time. In light of all these Covid-19 societal changes, I feel compelled to share what I have come to understand about the downward spiral of worry. Whatever your source of concern, a better understanding in this regard will strengthen you.

It appears that worry is already affecting average people more today than ever before. Maybe worries are affecting you more today too. For instance, my wife, Donalyn, was just out getting groceries and she said meeting people – whether strangers or friends – displayed a new “weirdness”. Everybody distanced themselves, went different directions to avoid her, looked away, and didn’t say hi or give even passing comments. There was no interchange period with almost an eerie-like suspicion. In these situations, you think to yourself; “Will they get mad at me if I’m this close? Do they think I am infectious? Are they? Am I too close?” Whether people are worried about proper virus protocol or worried about catching the virus from a stranger in a store, Donalyn noticed that people tend to get in and out of the store as quickly as possible – and largely because of worry.

Guiding people through worry, anxiety and fear as a pastor and a counsellor over the years has revealed some helpful insights for overcoming this journey. I describe it as the downward spiral of worry much like the flush of the toilet – everything starts to swirl, the bad stuff is spinning round and round, and pretty soon everything goes down the drain! It’s important to understand the compounding process of our fears and how they connect – mental – emotional – physical. See the Diagram below:

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Let me explain the Diagram: There are three dimensions that combine to create the worst-case scenario for our worries – the mental, the emotional and the physical. They build on one another and generate a compounding impact (the three arrows) on our personal well-being that if left unchecked and allowed to strengthen, leave us in a sorry state. Our thoughts shape our emotions which in turn steer our actions. The words in the boxes on the diagram show the kinds of thoughts, feelings and reactions we could be having.

### **OUR MENTAL PROCESS**

The battle starts in our thinking process. This is where you can really get off the rails quickly if you don't have any anchoring truth. Without having a God-honouring perspective on life and hardships, the minute difficult things happen or pressure situations arise, the downward spiral of worry can begin. Unchecked, our mind leans toward a sense of uneasiness as negative possibilities and dark outcomes appear likely. Once this growing, negative picture is created, our mind fixates on it. That's when the dark thoughts start to swirl and the mind starts to race. Your mind becomes like a lottery machine with all the numbered balls tumbling inside. There are so many possible combinations spinning in your head and only one is good. And all these tumbling possibilities start weighing on us. We feel uncertain and out of control. We start to get apprehensive and really worry about the situation we find ourselves in. The greater the fixation on negative outcomes, the mind slides from concern to apprehension to dread. Doom is pending as a myriad of dark outcomes are considered. Understand that the whole worry game starts in the mind.

### **OUR EMOTIONAL PROCESS**

Secondly, within the Worry Spiral, there's the compounding impact of the emotional process. This is where dark thoughts unchecked turn into fears and we feel this in the pit of our stomach. This is no longer confined to our head. This sinks into our heart – the seat of my emotions. Fixation on negative situational outcomes leads to an obsession to worry. I start to feel fretful or anxious. And when I feel I can't alter outcomes, what begins as nervousness accelerates to a gnawing anxiety and onto a full-blown, sickening panic. We all have a tendency to fixate on negative outcomes (mental strain) because nobody wants anything bad to happen. But the heavy burden in our spirit and on our disposition that goes with the negative fixation is extremely taxing (emotional strain). Research shows that 85 to 90% of the things we worry about never even happen (NBC News – 2017). But most of us still do it. This mental rumination of negative outcomes stirs us and makes us feel anxious. What starts by taking over my mind soon transitions to flood my emotions – the fear and anxiety can grip me. It is here that I am very consciously and emotionally preoccupied - I am worried.

### **OUR PHYSICAL PROCESS**

The third aspect of the Worry Spiral is the compounding effect that worry has on a person physically. As the negative mental shift happens, the dark emotional weight – fear and anxiety – shape your disposition and begin to alter your physical well-being. Rogue thoughts and unbridled emotions create physiological reactions. Negative outcomes – dark thoughts about the future – that you can't quit thinking about, charge you emotionally with worry and grip your present reality to the point that it affects your body. In the study of the impact of trauma on people, we find a strong connection between emotional pain and physical pain. It's called "visceral" – where actual residual pain in the body occurs through experiencing things deeply emotionally. Physical signs of the mental and the emotional preoccupation with dark outcomes start to surface. We start to feel restless – a sense of pressure builds up. Our temperature might rise – our heart rate might increase – we may feel nauseous – upset to our stomach. It's common medical insight that anxiety turned inward can be the cause of ulcers. Tension related to worry causes tightness, sore muscles and back aches. Ongoing stress is a critical factor in heart failure. This is where panic attacks fit in. Mental fixation and emotional obsession can create a shortness of breath and tightness in the chest. It's in this state that our poorest, irrational choices are often made. Physiological panic is emotional anxiety gone wild. So you see, the mental, emotional and physical processes build on one another to compound a sense of fear – the Downward Spiral of Worry.

## LET ANCHORING TRUTH HANDLE YOUR WORRY

Remember: the battle starts in the mind. If you win that battle, the emotions and reactions remain in check and stable. To move beyond worry, we have to face the hardship or trial with what I call, **“anchoring truth”**. Solid, undeniable truth is what you need in place to hold you when trauma or tensions come. What’s going to steady your mind – dominating any negative thought that attacks your peace? What is going to be your foundation – your bedrock? What truth is going to make you unshakable regardless of the challenging circumstances? I pray that you will be anchored to God’s perspective and the Biblical principles and life truths found in His Word. So, when something difficult happens – we remember our anchoring truth. Here’s mine... *“God hasn’t left me. He loves me and is in control of my life and everything that concerns me. I will trust Him. God’s got this!”*

Recently, I did a couple of video interviews requesting my perspective on the impact the virus is having on people and their families. I reminded listeners of the God perspective on the virus that should anchor all of us. My words: *“Remember, God is still in charge NOT some virus. The Lord didn’t go for coffee and return to find this pandemic and say, “Oh my goodness – what happened while I was gone? Look at this mess - oh my – what am I going to do?”* No! This whole virus thing is all within God’s scope of understanding and is being allowed by Him for a reason. I need to keep God in the middle of the crisis knowing He didn’t quit loving me, hasn’t left me, is still in charge of all things and I need to fully trust and surrender to Him. So do you.

That truth anchors me – it’s the truth I seek to base my life on. I go to His Word, understand clearly what His Word says and I work hard to believe it. The key is to take the Word to the problem and the problem to the Word. Let God call the shots not the problem. The enemy of our soul’s biggest weapon is fear because as fear takes hold of me, I am less likely and sometimes even unable to trust God. This LIE that God isn’t for me, doesn’t care for me and somehow has lost control of things or is disengaged – this LIE – can become a stronghold in my life where God isn’t free to work in me and through me. Don’t let the problem consume your mind, stir up negative emotions and get your actions going into the stupid zone. You see, anchoring truth is designed to stabilize our mind – the mental domain – where all the worry and fear problem starts in the first place.

This battle rages in our minds over and over again when we face trouble, trials or temptations. Do I trust God or not? Do I give in to fear or not? This war – and it is a war – is best evidenced in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 where it says... *“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”*

We are reminded firstly; we have God’s divine power to demolish the strongholds of worry and fear. Worry and fear don’t have to grip us and take us down. Secondly, we have God’s truth so we can demolish arguments that cause us to doubt and diminish our faith. Don’t let the enemy cause you to question God. Use God and His Word to put the enemy in his place! Finally, we really need to take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ. This means that we have to measure the threat or worry against our unchanging, anchoring truth – what God says in His Word - and capture those wild and rogue thoughts of worry and doubt and tie them firmly to His truth.

The point of *“capturing every wild thought”* could not be more clearly portrayed than when I worked as a teen one summer at Circle C Ranch, a Christian Camp in upstate New York. As one of the 6 wranglers, we had to run herd on 70 horses – care for and feed them – as well use them to instruct riding to nearly 400 kids each week. Six mornings each week we would have to round up the herd from the 40 acres of pasture and bring them in for the day of riding. In the mix of horses were 3 or 4 unbroken steeds that were not yet suitable for children to ride. Morning after morning, as we got the whole bunch within a short distance of the corral, these strong-minded, wild ones would take it upon

themselves to suddenly veer away from the gate and gallop off with most of the herd stampeding after them. Frustrating. Aggravating. Time consuming. Missing Breakfast because of it. NOT happy. These stupid, stubborn, unbroken ponies would do this every chance they could. Solution rendered. Each morning, a few of us would find, corner and lasso these rogue mustangs. We knew who they were. We'd have a brief fight with them once roped but then tie them to our saddle horn. Our horse being fully in our control could easily pull them with us into the corral without incident. They had to surrender. Why? They were captive. We took those wild ones and made them obedient.

Why not start lassoing every wild thought of worry and every rogue doubt or lie and tie them directly to Jesus and His anchoring truth. He'll make them obedient.

As we face the battle to overcome the Downward Spiral of Worry, let's battle hard keeping our minds on track with our anchoring truth. In so doing, we will more apt to prevent our emotions and our actions to go astray compounding our life even further. Let's finish strong with Jesus' own words from John 16:33, *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* There will be more trouble and challenges ahead for all of us. Remember: God's got this. Let Him anchor your worry. I would love to hear from you on how you are allowing the Lord to anchor you in this challenging season.

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