

Obsessing

© Rev. Stephen D. Shields

September 1, 2002

Have you ever had a tiny piece of dust floating on your eye — a floater?

You know — you sometimes can blink and it goes away.

Or you rub your eye and it's gone.

Well, recently, I had one of those that would not go away.

I called my eye doctor and he told me to come in right away.

He diagnosed it as a vitreous floater.

He said, "Steve — you're in your forties now — you'll get these."

I asked if it was anything to worry about, and he said, "No — but you should come in if you get one, because it could be a sign of something else."

Then he said something interesting:

"In most cases, the worse thing about them is that people *obsess* about them, and feel like they have to get them out."

I can imagine why one would obsess about such a thing.

It's there all the time.

You can't just blink it away.

So rather than to let it bother me — rather than to obsess about this thing in my vision — I named it.

"Bob."

Have you ever seen someone obsess about something?

Now, there is a neurotic disorder that known as "*obsessive compulsive disorder*" which can include behaviors as small as making sure your doors are locked at night three times to something as severe as pulling out your hair.

I am not talking about that.

I am talking about the common tendency of people to believe that *if something has the potential to harm them or cause them loss, they must obsess about it.*

Do you ever do that?

Do you ever obsess about something?

By “obsess” I mean...

To let something preoccupy your mind excessively.

To have your mind excessively preoccupied with a single emotion or topic.

People can obsess about a lot of things.

You can obsess about your health...

—and run in and out of the doctor’s office without any real ailment.

You can obsess about your weight...

—and develop an eating disorder.

You can obsess about your home...

—and run the vacuum several times a day.

You can obsess about a person...

—and pursue them until you find yourself with a restraining order because you have been “stalking” him or her.

You can obsess about the past...

—and insist that what’s done has locked you into who you are.

You can obsess about the future...

—and worry endlessly about preparing for the unexpected while the present passes you by.

You can obsess about grades, money, your job, your children, any number of things.

Generally, the reason people obsess about things is because...

They believe they must since this thing has potential to cause them harm or loss.

Everyone has a tendency toward this kind of obsession, but sometimes people find themselves doing it and not able to stop.

They feel trapped in obsession.
That's what I want to talk about today.

The Pitfall of Obsession.

As usual, I want to give you some characteristics, tell you why it's a problem, and give you truth from the Bible to overcome it.

When we come to the end —and go to the Lord's Supper —I want you to give the things about which you might obsess to God.

I. Characteristics

A. Inability to focus.

People who are obsessed with one thing often find it difficult to focus on another.

It's because of how closely related obsession is to worry.

In fact, I would have say that often obsession is worry taken to the next level.

Things happen when obsession is center stage in one's life:

People who are obsessing about something do things like...

Burn dinner.

Forget to feed the dog.

Lock their keys in the car.

Why?

Because they are not focusing on the task at hand, rather they are obsessing about something different.

One of the characteristics of this pitfall of obsession is inability to focus.

B. Continual dread of impending doom.

As I thought about obsession this past week, I realized that in many cases, obsession is worry, magnified.

Worry is that feeling of anxiety that everyone has from time to time.

We worry when a loved one is on icy roads.

We worry when someone is sick.

But in the midst of that worry, we still function.

When you move beyond worry to obsession, your mind has this continual sense of impending doom.

Have you ever raised your hand to a dog who has been beat?

You know —they duck, like something bad is going to happen.

When a person is obsessing about something they behave like a dog who has been hit too many times.

Because they continually feel that something bad is going to happen.

A continual fear of impending doom is a sign you might be in this pitfall of obsession.

C. Decreased ability to interact with others.

It takes a lot of energy to obsess about something.

It takes intellectual energy, because the “obsessor” is constantly trying to think his or her way out of the problem.

It takes emotional energy, because the obsession is beyond worry —it is emotionally exhausting.

It takes physical energy, because it ties you up in knots.

When you have spent all that energy on the thing you’re obsessed with, there is very little for others.

Little time for children.

Little time for friends.

Little time for coworkers.

Little time for parents.

People who are in the pitfall of obsession are less able to interact with others.

As we move toward the Lord’s Supper, let’s give these things to God.

II. Why It’s a Problem

Those characteristics are reason enough, to avoid obsession.

But here are some other reasons.

A. Obsessions often leads to failure in other areas of life.

Because obsession makes it hard to focus, often it distracts from other areas in life.

You have no doubt heard of people whose job performance was degraded because they were going through a divorce.

That's natural —when something big like that happens in our life, it makes it hard to focus.

But when that kind of focus —obsession — becomes THE PATTERN of your life, you may be dismissed from your job.

Obsession can cause failures in other areas of your life.

B. Obsession often causes health problems.

We have talked before about how anxiety and stresses can bring health problems.

Obsession does the same.

The continual dread of impending doom can bring about changes in heart rate, blood pressure.

Obsession can destroy your health.

C. Loneliness.

Sometimes the thing that someone in this pitfall needs most is a friend.

But the energy spent in obsessing lessens their ability to interact with others.

Sometimes obsessive people are among the loneliest.

It's clear that this pitfall of obsession is something we want to avoid.

Let's see what truth God's word gives us to stand on.

III. Truth

A. God is good. (Nahum 1:7)

When I was a child, I said the memorized bedtime prayers.

Did you?

God is great.

God it good.

Let us thank him for this food.

Did you say that?

When we're obsessing, we need to remember it.

God is great.

God it good.

Let us thank him for this food.

Nahum the prophet was predicting bad things to happen in Nineveh.

But in the midst of that, he wrote:

} *Nahum 1:7 (NIV)*

⁷The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him,

God is great.

God it good.

Let us thank him for this food.

When I obsess, it is often because I fear that God will not do the good thing.

I feel like he will leave me barren.

Or he will leave me lonely.

Or sick

Or without purpose

Or without meaning in my life

God will not do that.

You may experience barrenness, loneliness, sickness, or seasons of struggle for meaning and purpose, but **GOD WILL NOT LEAVE YOU.**

Jesus himself said that he came that we might have life and have it more abundantly.

He said, "I am with you always."

We all need to grasp the truth that God is Good.

There are many authors today who speak clearly and in inspiring ways concerning God's goodness.

Max Lucado

Gene Edwards

Philip Yancey

Elizabeth Elliot

C. S. Lewis

Fill your pitfall of obsession with the reality that God is good.

B. God is powerful. (Genesis 17:1)

When Abraham was an old man, God promised him that he would have descendants that numbered like the stars in the sky.

When he turned 99, that promise hadn't been fulfilled.

I have talked to people who wanted children, and were not receiving them.

It's an easy thing to obsess about.

Maybe that's why, when God shows up after Abraham's ninety-ninth birthday, he introduced himself as *El-Shaddai*—the Lord God Almighty.

} ***Genesis 17:1 through Genesis 17:2 (NIV)***

¹When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. ²I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."

When we are in the pitfall of obsession, it's important for us to stand on the rock that says "God can do ANYTHING!"

That's why I encouraged you to memorize Philippians 4:19

} ***Philippians 4:19 (NIV)***

¹⁹And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

The truth is that there is nothing God can not do.

Grab these truths:

God is good.

God is powerful.

C. God is trustworthy. (Numbers 23:19)

Years ago, I heard bit of a shocking story.

It was a story about a father who put his small child on a tree limb.

He held out his arms and instructed this toddler to jump, and when the child did, the father stepped aside, letting the little guy fall to the ground.

The father said to the boy, as he picked him up, “There —let that be a lesson to you never to trust anyone.”

I can only imagine the scars that little boy grew up with.

God would never do anything like that.

He is completely trustworthy.

His word says...

} *Numbers 23:19 (NIV)*

¹⁹God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

You can trust him.

Remember early on I noted that obsession is just one step beyond worry?

If we are completely honest, we will probably admit that if we would just trust God, we could stop obsessing.

We can trust God —not necessarily to bring about what we want —but to bring about what is best.

Conclusion

So —is obsession your pitfall?

As you come to the Lord's Supper today, let's stand on these truths:

God is good.

God is powerful.

God is trustworthy.

Let's let go of the things about which we obsess — give them to him —and move forward in healthy dependence on him.